



STOP NEIGHBOURS USING YOUR WI-FI

Find and block their devices

page 38

HOW WE FREED UP 2.9GB ON OUR PC

Clever trick that's new to us p74

TIME TO DITCH ROKU?

Accounts hacked!
More adverts!
Stock shortages!

Switch now – p60

Computer

active

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That's a rap, Microsoft – page 49

Learn something new in every issue

SECRET FREE SOFTWARE

You Must Use To Stay 100% Private Online

- Block hidden trackers
- Delete all your data
- Wipe your web history
- Fake your identity
- Use the best free VPN
- Stay anonymous
- +** Check your ad-blocker is working

p50



PLUS

WHICH OF YOUR DEVICES WERE MADE IN CHINA?

How to find out p62





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WELCOME



From the Editor

Here's my rule of thumb about online privacy: the bigger the company, the less they really care. That doesn't mean the likes of Amazon, Google or Microsoft are flogging your credit cards at car boot sales. But they're all astronomically rich companies whose success (especially Google's) relies on knowing as much about you as possible.

That's not necessarily true of smaller companies. They still want to make money (obviously), but rely more on donations or offer paid-for versions for professionals. Some privacy tools are simply labours of love driven by a passionate dislike of what

the tech giants stand for.

Robert Irvine recommends the best of these in his superb Cover Feature. Follow his advice and you'll learn how to block hidden trackers, fake your identity, delete your data and much more.

These tools are also upfront about what they can and can't do. Contrast that with Google, which took over 15 years to finally admit the limitations of Chrome's Incognito mode. I've seen blocks of black concrete that are more transparent.

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The image shows the cover of Computeractive magazine with several callouts pointing to specific articles:

- p38**: STOP NEIGHBOURS USING YOUR WI-FI
- p74**: HOW WE FREED UP 2.9GB ON OUR PC
- p60**: TIME TO DITCH Roku?
- p50**: SECRET FREE SOFTWARE You Must Use To Stay 100% Private Online
- p62**: WHICH OF YOUR DEVICES WERE MADE IN CHINA?

The main advertisement on the cover lists the following features:

- Block hidden trackers
- Delete all your data
- Wipe your web history
- Fake your identity
- Use the best free VPN
- Stay anonymous
- Check your ad-blocker is working

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£9.76

New amount firms must pay per day to compensate for broadband failures -p9

49%

Proportion of holiday scams that originate on Facebook -p11



£899

Price of our new favourite laptop - the Dell Inspiron 14 Plus -p22

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLS

We use snipcass to turn long URLs that are hard to type into ones that are short and simple. They aren't websites themselves, which means they won't be recognised if you type them into Google. Instead, you need to type them into your browser address bar, then press Enter. Doing this will take you to the correct website.

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Burden of proof

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Use the arrows to rotate the object to face in the direction of the hand. (1 of 1)



Submit

Use the arrows to find the distance between the two cars that matches the left image (1 of 6)



Dell Inspiron 14 Plus

p22



Kobo Libra Colour

p29



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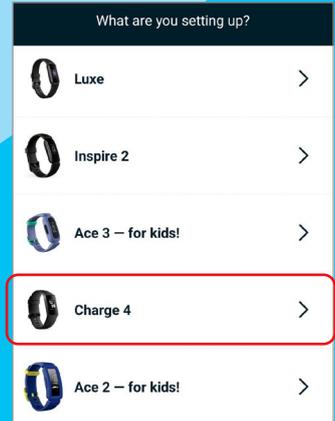
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SECRET FREE SOFTWARE

You Must Use To Stay 100% Private Online

COVER
FEATURE
P50

- Block hidden trackers
- Wipe your web history
- Use the best free VPN
- Delete all your data
- Fake your identity
- Stay anonymous
- + Check your ad-blocker is working



Should you stop using

ROKU?

p60



Neighbourhood Watch members' data exposed

A website that lets people post crime updates has fixed a flaw that could have exposed the details of 500,000 users to scammers.

Neighbourhood Alert (www.neighbourhoodalert.co.uk), run by Nottingham firm Visav, lets members of local Neighbourhood Watch

schemes send messages to each other and post crime information.

Its website and app are endorsed by local authorities across the UK. Fire and rescue departments, police forces and councils all use it.

But until mid-April it used a flawed security system that allowed anyone with an email address to sign up and see the phone numbers and addresses of members. In some cases they could even see photos of members.

Anyone could register as a Neighbourhood Watch coordinator on the site and create a 'scheme' by drawing an area on a map (pictured). Once done, they could access the data of Neighbourhood Watch members within the area.

The only limit on the size of the map was that it had to be inside the UK region that the coordinator registered with.

Neighbourhood Alert didn't approve or verify



WHAT WE THINK

This is a horrendous blunder from a site that should've had user privacy as a non-negotiable priority. We also question whether those running it have learnt their lesson. Calling the flaw a mere "anomaly" suggests it's reluctant to admit full responsibility. There's no evidence that scammers accessed any data, but then how would we know? They could've signed up, created a scheme, grabbed the data, then scarpred without having to hack anything.

people who registered as coordinators, nor the schemes they created.

The flaw was investigated by website The Register, which managed to sign up using a fake name, email address and postcode.

They found that searching on the site revealed members of the public, including those who required a higher level of privacy, such as civil servants, police officers and MPs.

Neighbourhood Alert has

now fixed what product director Mike Douglas called a "security anomaly", and has "voluntarily notified every member to inform them and provide guidance, even the vast majority of members who were not potentially affected by it".

It also apologised to users and reported itself to the Information Commissioner's Office, which is the UK's data-protection watchdog.

Ads appear in Start menu – but you can block them

Microsoft is showing adverts in Windows 11's Start menu, but you can block them in Settings.

They were introduced as part of the KB5036980 optional update, released on 22 April. Adverts will appear in the 'Recommend' section of the Start menu and promote apps available in the Microsoft Store – such as 1Password (see screenshot).

Microsoft said the apps will come from



"a small set" of developers it has selected, in order to "help you to discover some of

the great apps that are available" (www.snipca.com/50223).

However, it does explain how to turn off adverts. First open Settings (press Windows key+I), then click Personalisation on the left. Now click Start on the right and turn off the slider for 'Show recommendations for tips, app promotions, and more'.

• **Disable Microsoft's 'switch from local account' nags – p46**

You'll like this...
Apple might finally add a calculator to the iPad (www.snipca.com/50221)

but not this...
Russian hackers are exploiting an old printer security flaw (www.snipca.com/50200)

YouTube cracks down on apps and software that block ads

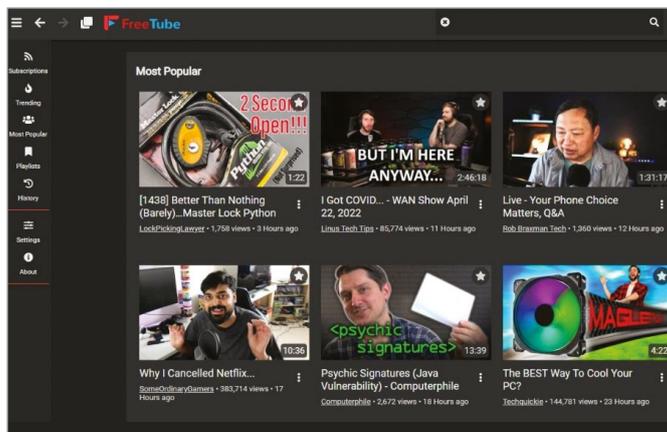
YouTube is cracking down on software and apps that block adverts when you watch videos.

It said that viewers using these tools “may experience buffering issues or see the error ‘The following content is not available on this app’ when trying to watch a video” (www.snipca.com/50178).

YouTube said these apps break its rules because they prevent video creators from being paid. Adverts let the site be watched by “billions of people around the world”, it added.

It’s part of a “global effort” by YouTube to discourage viewers from using ad blockers. This included a crackdown last year on extensions that block adverts when you watch videos on a browser.

YouTube started pausing videos and showing messages telling the viewer that they



would only be allowed to continue watching if they disabled the ad blocker.

YouTube’s latest actions are aimed at Android apps like NewPipe (<https://newpipe.net>) and PC programs like FreeTube (<https://freetubeapp.io>), both of which give you an alternative interface to watch YouTube videos and don’t connect to its advertising servers.

“When we find an app

that violates these terms, we will take appropriate action to protect our platform, creators, and viewers,” it said.

It’s not known whether YouTube will try to prevent these apps from working.

You can watch videos without adverts on YouTube Premium (www.youtube.com/premium), but this costs £12.99 a month.

 Do you block adverts on YouTube? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Beware ‘press 2’ LastPass phone scam

LastPass is warning users about scammers phoning customers to claim that their account has been accessed from a new device.

The fraudsters tell you to press 1 to allow access, or 2 to block it. Pressing 2 shows a message saying that someone from LastPass will call you back shortly.

When they call you, they also send an email containing a link to a fake login page. The email looks convincing because it contains the company’s logo (1 in our screenshot) and appears to come from ‘support@lastpass’ 2, but it’s been sent from the fake domain ‘help-lastpass[.]com’.

When you log in, the

scammer locks you out of your account by changing the phone number associated with it, as well as the email address and the master password.

LastPass said that the scammers must have obtained the phone numbers of its customers “from the plethora of data breaches that occur regularly”.

The company worked with security partners to shut down the ‘help-lastpass[.]com’ domain, but the scammers are continuing their attacks using a new IP address.

They call from an 888 phone number, which North American companies use so customers can call them for



free. It’s not known how prevalent the scam is outside North America, but experts have warned that it could spread worldwide.

LastPass advised users to ignore any “unsolicited or unprompted” incoming phone calls claiming to be from the company related to recent attempts to change your password. Read its full warning at www.snipca.com/50185.

IN BRIEF

ONEPLUS LAUNCHES BUDGET 11.3IN TABLET

Chinese firm OnePlus has launched a budget tablet with an 11.3in screen, 2408x1720-pixel resolution, 8GB RAM and 128GB storage. Called the Pad Go (pictured), it costs £299, though is currently discounted to £269. It runs Android 13, which launched in 2022. Buy it from www.snipca.com/50206.



LISTEN TO EXPERT CYBER-SECURITY PODCASTS

The UK’s National Cyber Security Centre has released five podcasts dealing with some of the most pressing security topics, including the threat posed by AI and how to move on from passwords. Visit the NCSC’s site (www.snipca.com/50198) for links to the podcasts on Apple Music and Spotify.

TOMORROW’S WORLD



Atlas is dead, long like Atlas! Boston Dynamics has unveiled a new version of its humanoid robot (pictured), having retired the original model after 10 years. Watch this compilation video of its many successes and failures (www.snipca.com/50183), and the introduction of its swivel-necked successor: www.snipca.com/50184.



IN BRIEF

USE GOOGLE DRIVE IN DARK MODE

You can now use the online version of Google Drive in **dark mode**. To switch it on, open Drive then click the cog icon followed by Settings. Now scroll down to the Appearance section and select Dark (see screenshot). As well as Light, there's a 'Device default' option that makes Google Drive use the same mode as what you've set on your computer.



SKY SPORTS CUTS DELAY 'BY OVER 20 SECS'

Sky Sports is cutting the delay between events happening live and being shown on its Glass and Stream TV services. Both currently run about 30 seconds behind, but this will be "reduced by over 20 seconds" from May. It's part of a big update to Entertainment OS, the system that runs on Glass and Stream. To see what else is new visit www.snipca.com/50146.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!



Nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of UK children aged 5 to 7 now own a smartphone, while almost a third (32 per cent) use social media unsupervised. The startling figures come from Ofcom's annual study into the "online worlds" of children (www.snipca.com/50157). Clearly more children need to discover worlds that are offline and outside.



Police take down site that scammed thousands of Brits

Police from across 19 countries have disrupted a UK-founded site that allowed scammers to create **phishing** sites and trick thousands of people.

The operation also led to the arrests of 37 people around the world, including some at Manchester and Luton airports, as well as in Essex and London.

The site, called LabHost, allowed more than 2,000 users to make sites designed to steal personal information such as email addresses, passwords and bank details.

It even provided tutorials so criminals with limited IT skills could still run successful scams. Its home page now shows a message that it has been seized (pictured).

Metropolitan Police said that since the site launched in 2021 scammers have used it to steal 480,000 payment-card numbers and 64,000 PINs worldwide. As many as 70,000



victims were from the UK.

Criminals paid between £200 and £300 a month to impersonate over 170 brands worldwide, including 47 in the UK. Trusted brands like banks, healthcare agencies and postal services featured among the 40,000 scam sites created.

Just after the site was seized and disrupted, police sent a message to 800 LabHost subscribers saying they knew who they were and what they were doing. These people

will remain "the focus of investigation over the coming weeks and months", police said.

Detectives have told UK-based victims to warn them their data has been compromised and advise them on what to do next.

LabHost's removal is the second major international operation against scammers this year. In February, UK police led a move to take down the website used by Russian **ransomware** gang Lockbit.

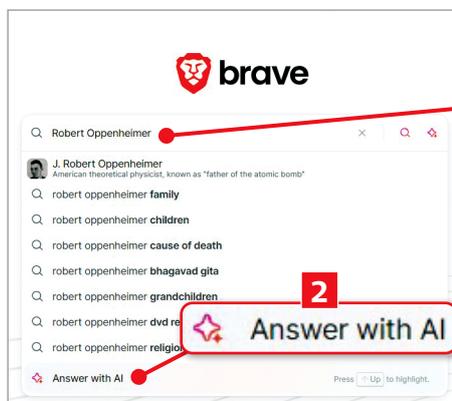
Brave uses AI for instant search results

You can now get more detailed results in Brave's search engine by using its new 'Answer with AI' option.

Brave claims it's the first "answer engine" in a privacy-focused search engine that's widely available.

It works by default if Brave thinks you are seeking information. For example, type 'Robert Oppenheimer biography' into <https://search.brave.com> and it will produce a five-paragraph account of his life, above links to relevant websites.

However, if you just type



'Robert Oppenheimer' (1 in our screenshot) you need to select the 'Answer with AI' option at the bottom of the options that appear 2.

Brave gives other examples on its blog (www.snipca.com).

www.snipca.com/50171), including 'People who walked on the moon' – which lists all 12 men who have done so – and 'Road bike vs mountain bike', which compares the pros and cons of each.

It also gives summaries of news events, step-by-step instructions if you ask 'how to' questions, and details of restaurants, pubs and places of interest like museums and galleries.

Full-screen Microsoft ads ‘thank you’ for using Windows 10

Microsoft is showing full-screen ‘thank you’ messages to Windows 10 users whose computers aren’t able to upgrade to Windows 11.

The message, titled ‘A new journey with Windows’, thanks you for your “loyalty as a Windows 10 customer”.

“As end of support for Windows 10 approaches, we’re here to support you on your PC journey,” it continues.

It confirms that support for the operating system will end on 14 October, 2025 and that you’ll receive security updates and support until then.

It adds that you can “learn more about preparing to make the transition to Windows 11”, and has buttons offering more information about the latest operating system, and about why support is ending for Windows 10 (1 in

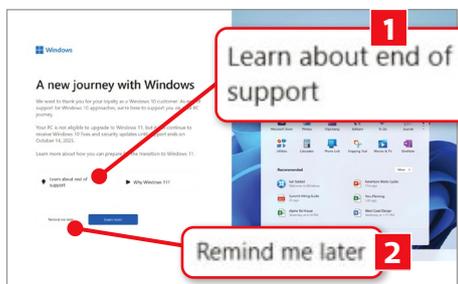
our screenshot).

However, there’s no ‘X’ at the top right to close the message. Instead you have to click ‘Remind me later’

(2), which just means the message will appear again at some point.

When you click the buttons for more information, you’re told that the only way to continue using Windows 10 safely after support ends is to buy a new PC that runs Windows 11.

The message doesn’t mention that Microsoft is planning to offer extended paid-for support for home users after 14 October 2025. It’s the first time Microsoft is letting home users pay for



extended support.

In April, Microsoft announced that businesses will have to pay \$61 (about £49) per device for extended security updates for the first year after support ends. This price doubles to \$122 for the second year, then doubles again to \$244 for the third. Microsoft hasn’t said how much home users will be charged.

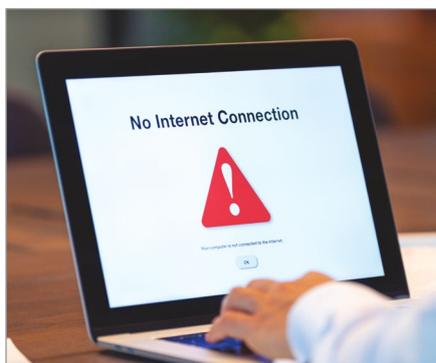
Will you pay for extended support? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Ofcom increases compensation for broadband failures and delays

Ofcom has increased the amount that broadband and landline companies must pay in compensation for service failures and installation delays.

It means that providers that have signed up to Ofcom’s voluntary compensation scheme will now pay £9.76 per day for delayed repairs, £6.10 per day for delays to the start of a new service, and £30.49 for a missed appointment.

Previously, the amounts were £9.33, £5.83 and £29.15 respectively. Ofcom increases amounts in April every year based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate of inflation on



31 October the previous year. This was 4.6 per cent in 2023.

If you’re due compensation your provider will pay it automatically, without you having to ask for it. All you have to do is report the fault or delay to your provider.

Ofcom launched the scheme in 2019, with BT, Sky,

TalkTalk, Virgin and Zen Internet joining straight away. EE and Vodafone joined in 2021, followed by Plusnet in 2022.

Compensation should be paid no later than 30 calendar days after the loss of service is resolved or the service is terminated.

Likewise, it must be paid within 30 days of the delayed start of a new service being resolved or cancelled, and within 30 days of a missed appointment. Visit Ofcom’s site for full details: www.snipca.com/50109.

Have you received compensation from a provider? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

NEW LOGITECH MOUSE HAS CHATGPT

Logitech has released a mouse that lets you open AI tool ChatGPT by pressing a button. The Signature AI Edition of the M750 wireless mouse comes with Logitech’s new Prompt Builder software, which uses ChatGPT to summarise documents, rewrite paragraphs and write emails (pictured). Buy it for £54.99 from www.snipca.com/50112.



WATCH ITVX ON PLAYSTATIONS

You can now watch the TV-streaming service ITVX on Sony PlayStation 4 and 5 gaming consoles. It had previously been available on Xbox consoles and the Nvidia Shield, but not PlayStations. Search for ITVX to install it on your PlayStation. You don’t need to sign up for an account.

UPDATE LG TV TO FIX SECURITY FLAW

Anyone who has bought an LG TV since 2019 should install a software update to stop hackers taking control of the set. Security firm Bitdefender found a flaw with LG’s operating system (webOS versions 4 to 7), forcing the manufacturer to release an emergency fix. You can either download the update directly from the TV, or via a USB stick. Visit LG’s site for instructions: www.snipca.com/50114.

Question of the Fortnight

Why have Captchas become so difficult to solve?

They're more like IQ tests than a simple check to prove you're human

You know you're not a robot. We know you're not a robot. But the website you're trying to log into doesn't know. It has good reason to suspect you might be one of the new breed of automated programs – called bots – that can easily solve Captcha tests.

Captchas have never been straightforward. Deciphering the wriggly text of the first tests (pictured below right) often meant squinting and turning your head 90 degrees. This was beyond bots at the time, preventing them from logging in and spamming sites.

But they've evolved rapidly since then, driven by advances in AI. A study at the University of California last year found that bots solved distorted text with almost 100-per-cent accuracy. And as they've become smarter, so the tests have become trickier in response. It's a classic arms race that's left people bemused by Captchas they can't figure out.

The problem was highlighted in April by Kevin Gosschalk, head of Arkose Labs, a global security firm that designs the “strongest Captchas ever made”. He told *The Wall Street Journal* that tests will have to get “even stranger” to combat the rise of large multimodal models. These are advanced AI systems that can understand information from many different types of data, including text, images and audio.

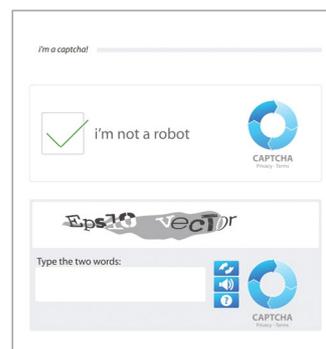
Crucially, they can decode



wriggly and distorted text, recognise images and understand the context of a question. For example, it would know which boxes to select if it's asked to identify a fruit and is shown images of apples.

This is why the tests added images of items like buses and traffic lights that have become increasingly hard for us humans to recognise.

The Captchas created by Arkose are more like IQ tests than a quick check to see whether you're human. One asks you to move an object so it's facing in the same



Captchas are now even harder than when you had to decipher distorted text

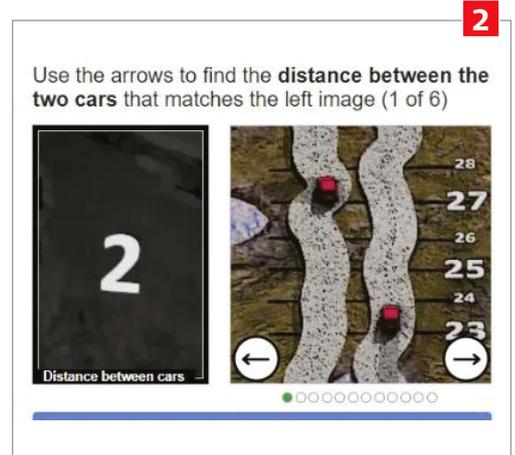
direction as the hand (see screenshot **1**). Another asks you to find the distance between cars that matches a number **2**.

Other tests ask you to click arrows to change the number of objects until it matches a number; select objects that are the same shape; and identify all non-aquatic animals.

Gosschalk says these Captchas can defeat bots because they have so many possible answers – over 1,250 in the toughest tests. The sheer variety makes it hard for bots to answer. But he also claims that they're understood by people across all languages and cultures. They use “aesthetically pleasing images” that are large and easy to see, not blurry photos of traffic lights you have to zoom into.

Eventually bots might figure out how to answer even these. When this happens, Gosschalk says, Captchas will only be able to block bots by asking humans to do something “nonsensical”.

If so, it's worth reminding



THE FACTS

- Captchas are tests that attempt to tell computers and humans apart in order to prevent automated software (bots) from attacking websites
- They've become harder for humans to solve in recent years in order to thwart more advanced bots
- The boss of a firm that makes Captchas say they'll have to get “even stranger” in future to work effectively

ourselves that Captcha stands for ‘Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart’.

Humans can be silly, irrational and inconsistent. Computers can't. Will we have to behave in this manner – or maybe even get questions intentionally wrong – to prove we're flesh and blood?

Only humans are intelligent enough to know when it's smart to act stupid.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Fake caravans and flights on Facebook

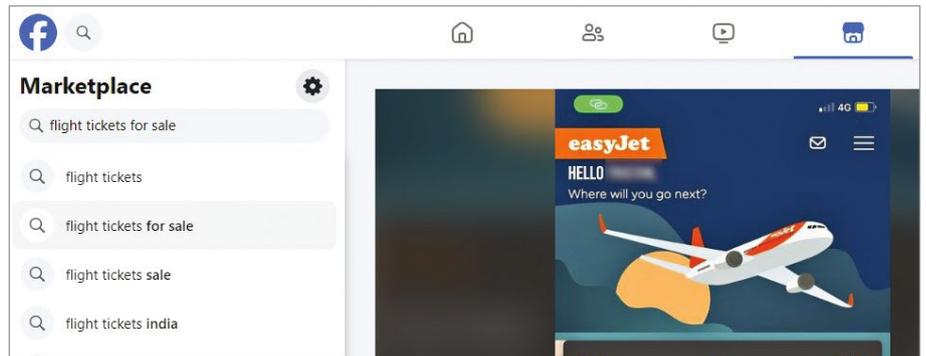
What's the threat?

Scammers are increasingly using Facebook Marketplace to promote fake caravans and flights, Lloyds Bank has warned. It said that nearly half (49 per cent) of all holiday scams it saw in 2023 began on Facebook. Flight tickets are the most common fake item advertised. Experts say this is down to shoppers turning to social media for bargains as prices of flights rose following the Covid lockdowns.

Sometimes scammers pretend to sell tickets they claim they're unable to use. They'll offer a low price and ask for a fee to change the name on the ticket. The scammer then disappears with the money, leaving the victim without a ticket.

Fake caravans was the second most common holiday-related scam, Lloyds said. Scammers simply take photos of caravans from Google Images and list them for sale on Facebook.

Fraudsters are also advertising accommodation on Airbnb with details



and photos taken from real listings. They take a deposit through the site, but then ask for further payments through PayPal or by bank transfer, allowing them to take the money and vanish.

How can you stay safe?

Be aware that holiday scams are rising sharply. Lloyds saw a seven-per-cent increase in the 12 months to February 2024, with victims losing an average of £765 (up four per cent). Travellers aged 35

to 44 made up more than a quarter of victims (27 per cent).

Treat Facebook Marketplace with caution. It's much safer to buy rooms and flights directly from the hotel or airline. Always use your debit or credit card because it gives you extra protection if something goes wrong. When shopping on Airbnb, never accept a seller's request to send money through PayPal. Visit Lloyds' site for more information and victims' stories: www.snipca.com/50140.

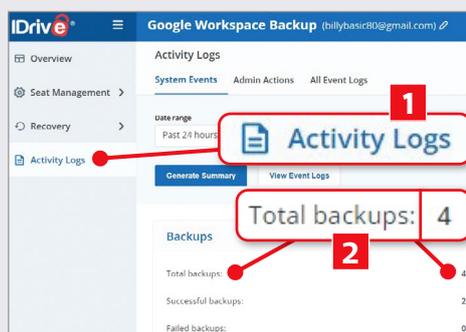
New tools

Back up Google files in IDrive
www.snipca.com/50132

The 3-2-1 backup strategy has nothing to do with keeping Dusty Bin safely locked in your garage. Instead it means having three copies of your data stored on two different types of media (online and hard drive), with one copy saved off-site (ie, not in your home).

One way to follow this method is to save files you've backed up online on *another* backup service. It's something you can do with IDrive, one of our favourite backup tools, which now lets you save all files stored in your Google personal account.

It automatically backs up three times a day, and you can search for individual files and folders to recover. You'll need to pay for it, but at \$20 a year (about £16) for a whopping 10TB it's tremendous value.



To use it, visit the link above then click '7 days free trial' and follow the instructions to create an account. Make sure you choose the Personal backup, not Workspace, when given the choice. Once complete, click Activity Logs (1 in our screenshot) to see how many backups it's made (2). Read more at www.snipca.com/50130.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers



Five emails from myself

I've had five emails in the past week supposedly from me to myself, all enticing me to click a link. The first told me that I had been "nominated" to win an Oral B electric toothbrush. It claimed to be from Boots and said I just needed to answer "a few questions" to join its "Loyalty Program". Another email I received promoted a Bitcoin investment scheme that's a "lucrative money-making secret big banks don't want you to know". It used a photo of Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton, and quoted him recommending the scheme. Both had prominent buttons you're meant to click.

Don Christian



Warn your fellow readers about scams at letters@computeractive.co.uk

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Pros and cons to telegraph poles

 In response to Ted Blackwell's letter ('In support of telegraph poles', Letters, Issue 681), most BT cables are run through ducts in pathways or grass verges from the street cabinets to feed-distribution poles, or run all the way underground into homes. Any maintenance is usually carried out in an underground joint box. If a large cable is damaged, a new cable is drawn through the duct and re-jointed. No digging would be required.

Main distribution poles are fed underground from cabinets, while secondary (or 'carrier') poles are fed via the main distribution pole or an underground joint. They may also be fed by an aerial cable from the distribution pole. Underground feeds to houses are usually fed by a duct from the street pathway, or an armoured cable is dug in. Repairing these might involve digging.

There are pros and cons to both poles and cables. Overhead cables can be run directly from pole to a house, but they're susceptible to the elements. However, the wires normally have to be run down a wall, which can be an eyesore. Most underground feeds have hidden cables, but problems might occur when it's time to upgrade to fibre, such as having to dig on a property to lay a small duct.

Generally, overhead wires are faster to install, but underground cables are less unsightly. Potential house buyers could be put off by a large pole stuck outside their property.



Paul Croft

 I suggest that some of the people protesting about broadband telegraph poles being erected in their community should actually be more grateful. They're living in an area that's

getting fast and cheap broadband, rather than being forgotten about in the deep, dark countryside. I've given up all hope of our Cumbrian hamlet getting full-fibre. All my neighbours would happily have a pole erected in our back garden if it meant having speeds that would get above 10Mbps.

Mark Teale

Zen's FTTP and VoIP cheaper than BT's

 Three years ago, I saw Openreach preparing to fit fibre cables alongside the copper telephone wires on the poles that serve our road.

Guessing that BT would be the first to use these cables, I moved back to them as my broadband and landline supplier. Two years ago, BT moved me to Digital Voice and I upgraded to FTTP. The installation was quick and easy, the speeds are faster than I need and, much to my surprise, the phone is crystal clear.

However, BT increased the cost by over 25 per cent during the contract, so I tried to find a cheaper alternative. There was no point looking at EE because they're now owned by BT, while neither Plusnet nor TalkTalk offer a VoIP line. The only company that I could find on comparison websites that did VoIP was Vodafone, but they refused my business because I didn't meet the "minimum criteria" – and they didn't tell me what these are.

Eventually, I found Zen Internet who can supply both FTTP and a VoIP contract for less than BT and without mid-term price increases. Others who want to keep

a landline and have FTTP might find this useful.

Bruce Hunt

£480 to leave my Virgin contract

 The recent mid-contract price hikes by broadband companies resulted in me telling Virgin that if they could arbitrarily increase their prices, I could therefore reduce the services I receive from them. I also quoted their price of £60 for new customers, which gives them stacks of TV channels.

The helpful lady on the phone went through all the tippy-tapping on her computer and announced that I could indeed remove the sports channels and other TV channels, but it would cost me a £480 termination fee, and my broadband alone would go up to £60.

Just how do they get away with this? I now have a year's contract left with Virgin after which I can leave. But given the much-publicised difficulties that Virgin put in the way of people trying to exit, I expect another battle.

Gordon Jackson

Beware PDFgear's Microsoft Store app

 Thank you for the article about PDFgear in Issue 681 (page 60). It's the kind of software I've been seeking for some time. However, I feel that readers need to be made aware that they should download the software using the provided link (www.pdfgear.com/download). As I read the feature and typed 'PDFgear' into my browser's search

What's the Issue...?

 I recall a feature on fixing the 10 worst changes Microsoft has made to Windows. In which issue was that?

William Mandelson

 **CA SAYS** In Issue 663's Cover Feature, 'Make Windows Great Again'.

 I'm watching more and more TV shows on Freevee. When was your feature revealing tips for it?

Ian Banks

 **CA SAYS** In Issue 670, page 62. Read it and the above feature on our Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/48860.

 When did you last give advice on checking the health of your phone battery?

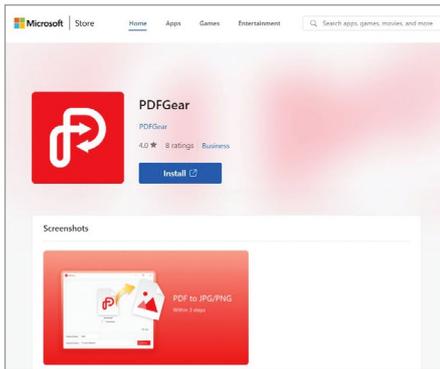
Pete Flitney

 **CA SAYS** In Issue 676, page 60. Buy it from www.snipca.com/50177.

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If you think that we have not met those standards and want to make a complaint please contact editor@computeractive.co.uk. If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk.



engine, I was directed to a version on the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/50172, pictured above). It's nothing like the software you recommend, and merely lets you convert the PDF to an image format (PNG and JPEG). It could be quite confusing.

Tony Huby

CA SAYS Tony's right to avoid the version of PDFgear on the Microsoft Store. We actually spotted it a few months ago and wondered if it was a rogue app impersonating PDFgear. We asked PDFgear's developers about it, and they said the Microsoft Store app is "an initial release that we have not maintained" and that their focus "has shifted entirely to the version available through our website". They added that they're considering removing the app to prevent any further confusion. It remains live though, so we'll chase the developers for an update.

This case stresses the risks of using search engines to find software. As well as wrong and incomplete versions of programs, you could easily come across malware in the fake adverts that increasingly plague Google. To stay safe when downloading software, type the links we publish directly into your browser's address bar.

Satellite phones would help remote texting

In Issue 681's 'Do I really need...?' (page 29) you discussed the preview version of Android 15, which can link directly to satellites. You rightly stated that this would not be for everyone. But as someone who enjoys going to remote areas, such as northern Norway, this would be a huge benefit.

I currently use a Garmin inReach Mini (pictured right),



which lets me use GPS to contact people wherever I am. This works well, and it gives me daily weather updates from home. But I pay an annual fee of £34.99 for it, and I also pay the same amount for a monthly plan whenever I go away, giving me 40 texts, SOS functions, and three short pre-programmed messages. So for three trips in a year I end up paying £139.96!

Also, the texts are short (160 characters) and can take 10-15 minutes to send or receive.

Even in the UK, recreational climbers and walkers often end up in dead phone areas, and are unlikely to have bought Garmin devices. When an accident happens, speed is critical and

STAR LETTER

Internet providers find 'most people like poles'? Well, I never!

You've got to chuckle at the revelatory news that the industry body representing internet providers discovers that "most people are in favour of telegraph poles" (Issue 682, page 9).

In other developments, the airline industry finds that most fliers don't mind being ripped off by hidden fees; Amazon finds that shoppers enjoy being tricked into signing up for Prime; and couriers discover that customers positively love their packages being left on the doorstep below signs saying 'Burglars welcome here!'.

I'm not sure how helpful this kind of survey is because the question would have been deliberately phrased to get the desired result. The survey wouldn't have been published had it been negative towards poles. Also, of all the people they asked, how many actually have poles blighting their



communities?

I know a little about the controversy surrounding telegraph poles, having recently moved into an area in East Yorkshire rife with protests about them being erected.

I don't share the antipathy toward poles that some of my neighbours have expressed. From my

discussions with them, it seems that they're more upset about not being consulted before the poles were put up. But if they had been consulted, would they have accepted the poles or still objected?

My own view, if pushed, is that fast broadband benefits society as a whole, and – generally – this should come ahead of community objections. But then I don't have a pole directly outside my house, so I would say that, wouldn't I?

James Whiteman



The **Star Letter** writer wins a **Computeractive** mug!

having the option to send texts by satellite would be a huge benefit.

Bill Thomson

Get the ball rolling...

Following on from Malcolm Plant's letter in Issue 681 complaining about the use of the term 'rolling out', versions of it have been used since the late 1950s. Apparently, early usage related to rolling aircraft out of hangers. There's an interesting graph on Etymonline.com (www.snipca.com/50147) that shows how usage grew since then.

The interesting thing is the rapid increase since the late 1980s corresponded with the growth of computers in businesses and homes. Strangely, usage peaked in the 2000s and has fallen since, so obviously younger generations are finding different terms to describe the process of introducing or deploying new products.

Ian Thow



We stand up for your legal rights

Can Dell refuse to repair if warranty has ended?

Q In January 2023, I bought an £850 Dell Inspiron 14 7420 2-in-1 Touch laptop (pictured) from John Lewis. Within a month the touchpad became faulty, which Dell did repair. But in October the fault reappeared, and the touchpad became unusable. Dell said the laptop couldn't be repaired, so decided to replace it instead. Then Dell changed its mind again and said it would only repair the laptop. However, one month later it refused to even do this, claiming the laptop was out of warranty. Can Dell walk away from its responsibility like this?

Graham Bell

A No it can't. Dell has given Graham terrible customer service and it must still help him. It's clear that Dell's repair of the touchpad wasn't good enough, so it should have tried again or replaced the laptop straight away – assuming this was stated in the warranty. But to mess Graham around with broken promises and then claim the warranty has expired in the meantime is unacceptable.

We'll tell Dell that it must carry out at



least another repair because it hadn't fulfilled its legal obligations during the warranty period when asked to. But initially Graham should have contacted John Lewis about the fault. The touchpad stopped working within 30 days of purchase, meaning he was entitled to an immediate refund.

He could still have contacted John Lewis when the touchpad failed in October 2023, but because more than six months had passed since purchase he would have had to prove the fault was inherent. Most people in this situation have to pay for an examination, but instead he could have used Dell's first repair as evidence. Graham has been let down by Dell. But if it can't – or won't – help we'll ask John Lewis to take action instead.

CASE ONGOING

LEAD CASE



Can O2 refuse to close my late husband's account?

Q My husband had been very ill for a month and died two weeks ago. We had separate bank accounts and probate needs to be granted before I can handle his debts. Despite being informed of his death, O2 is refusing to cancel his contract because I can't provide them with his passwords. I'm even getting debt-collection letters. What can I do?

Casey Barnes

A Casey just needs to send O2 her husband's death certificate. This should be sufficient to persuade O2 to either cancel his account or put it on hold while his probate is being dealt with. It should certainly put an end to letters from debt-collection agencies.

Casey is the executor of her husband's will, which means she's responsible for settling debts from his estate. If there isn't enough money to do this, then any debts will go unpaid. The only way she'd have to pay a debt is if she was a guarantor, or she held them jointly with her husband. Visit National Debtline for more advice on dealing with debts when loved ones die: www.snipca.com/50145.

CASE CLOSED

CASE UPDATE

Pay for tracking if you're unsure about returning items



If you don't trust a company you're returning products to, you should pay Royal Mail for parcel tracking and insurance so you'll be covered if the item goes missing. That's the advice we've given reader Daniel Barnes, who wants to get his money back from Versik for two faulty ITB SSDs.

We featured his case in Issue 682, when Versik was ignoring his requests for help. We weren't hopeful because the company has some terrible reviews on Trustpilot

(www.snipca.com/49854), with 90 per cent giving it one star out of five. However, the company finally responded and asked him to return the SSDs for inspection, promising a full refund of £35 if they turned out to be inherently faulty. Versik can do this because more than a month has passed since purchase.

But there are discrepancies in Versik's contact information. It wants Daniel to return the SSDs to a residential address in Great Torrington, Devon, despite having a customer service phone listed in Doncaster

and a website (www.versik.co.uk) registered to an Icelandic address. This all seems rather odd, though at least the Devon address means Trading Standards would now be able to investigate the company.

Versik hasn't replied to our calls or emails, so we've been unable to help directly. We've also contacted Iceland's Consumer Agency watchdog for information on the company. Daniel is now considering whether to risk returning the SSDs or asking his bank for a chargeback.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

✉ **Email:** consumeractive@computeractive.co.uk
Please include your name, phone number and address.

Must I pay for damage by Asus repair shop?

Q I run a small computer shop and a client's Asus TUF Gaming laptop (pictured) required a new motherboard due to a failed GPU. I was unable to locate a replacement, and Asus wouldn't sell one to me, so the only option was to send it to Asus's repair centre LetMeRepair. They then charged me for not only the motherboard, but also a replacement for a smashed LCD panel and bezel – £45 in total.

LetMeRepair refuses to answer me and Asus says it's not responsible. Will I have to pay this?

Gavin Smith

A Probably not. Gavin says he has proof the only problem was the motherboard, and that all further damage was done by LetMeRepair, or en route to the company. If so, the cost of repair must be paid by Asus. Gavin's contract is with Asus, not with LetMeRepair or the courier that delivered the laptop. Only Asus can sue the courier or LetMeRepair for damage. We'll stress this to Asus when we talk to the company.

Gavin's case is just one of many we investigate where a retailer or manufacturer tries to pass the buck to a third party, such as a courier or repair service. You



must never let them fob you off like this. It's their responsibility to chase deliveries and repairs, not yours. Legally, Asus doesn't have to sell Gavin a replacement motherboard, so he doesn't have a case on that point.

CASE ONGOING

Why won't CCL refund me for lost monitor?

Q I returned a faulty five-month-old ViewSonic Elite XG320u monitor (pictured) to CCL (www.cclonline.com) on 1 February. Initially, I was told to return it to ViewSonic, and it would be handled under warranty. I wasn't happy about this, so CCL agreed to take the monitor and accessories back. CCL received it, then admitted it had been lost. I was

promised a refund but despite numerous emails I've heard nothing. Can you help?

David Parsons

A Yes, we'll ask CCL to chase this up. Retailers are allowed a "reasonable time" to search for lost items, but 30 days is typically considered long enough.

The monitor and accessories were CCL's legal responsibility to keep safe before being handed over to ViewSonic for repair.



Even then, if ViewSonic had lost the devices, David's contract remains with CCL because of the Consumer Rights Act (CRA). CCL, not David, was using the manufacturer for a repair.

CCL was wrong to tell David to contact the manufacturer. Under the CRA, retailers must accept that it's their responsibility to fix problems, not the manufacturer. It's fair for a retailer to suggest that using the manufacturer's warranty might resolve the problem quicker, but it can't insist on it. This remains the customer's choice.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Stinkyink replaced faulty cartridge for free

 I decided to cancel my subscription to HP Instant Ink and replace it with Stinkyink

(www.stinkyinkshop.co.uk). My printer – an HP Envy Inspire 7200e – worked perfectly for a couple of months using Stinkyink's cartridges until, without warning, a message appeared saying I was not using HP Instant Ink.

This was despite having already cancelled my subscription and paid my instalment to



HP. The message said that to continue using the printer I should use a new HP cartridge.

I then spoke to Stinkyink, who were most helpful. They confirmed that under their one-year guarantee they would replace the faulty ink carriage for free. It was sent to me that day by 24-hour post. Thanks to their excellent service I had my printer up and running again as soon as the new cartridge arrived the next day. With your help I would like to be able to draw fellow

readers' attention to their excellent service.

John G Francis

✉ Has a company impressed you with its customer service? Please let us know: editor@computeractive.co.uk

Contact
Stinkyink

- Email sales@stinkyink.com
- Phone 01746 781 020

Grow Your Family Tree



If you think your ancestors left money for relatives, follow **Judith Batchelor's** advice to...

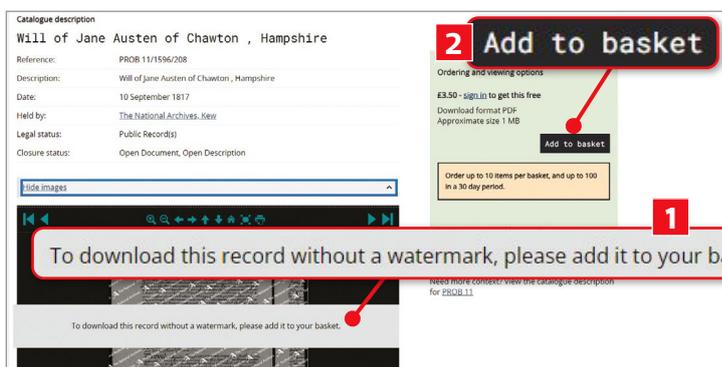
Download free PCC wills

Wills are some of the most useful documents for tracing your family tree. From reading the actual words of your ancestor, you can discover their occupation, where they lived, and the property and land they owned, as well as family relationships. Although your wealthier ancestors are more likely to have left wills, plenty of ordinary people made them too.

Until 1858, numerous ecclesiastical courts had the right to prove wills. The most senior court was the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC), which covered the south of England and Wales. It was also the only court that could prove the wills of those who died abroad, so it covered many soldiers and sailors.

Even if a more minor court could be used, some people still chose to have their will proved by the PCC because it offered a superior and more discreet service.

It was particularly popular after 1812 because if the deceased held stocks or shares it was the only court recognised by the Bank of England. By the 1850s, around 40 per cent of wills were proved by the PCC.



It looks like you have to pay to download wills, but you don't – just click 'Add to basket' anyway

Create a National Archives account

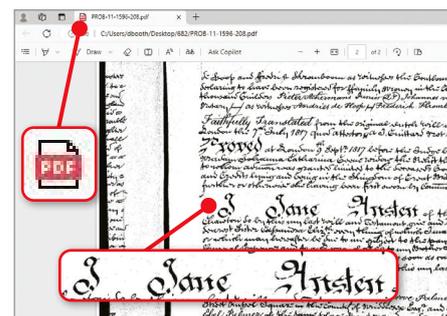
Over one million copies of original wills (1384–1858) are available to download from The National Archives' site. To get them for free, create an account at www.snipca.com/50060. Once done, visit www.snipca.com/50059 and search using the name of the person giving the will (testator), their location, the year, and other keywords such as people who might be beneficiaries in the will. Note that the date of probate was usually several months after a person's date of death, though sometimes it could be many years.

Add to basket and download as PDF

We knew that the author Jane Austen wrote her will in 1817 in the Hampshire village of Chawton, so searched for her and found the correct result.

We clicked it, followed by 'Preview an image of this record'. This brings up a grey bar across the will saying you need to add it to your basket to download it without a watermark (1 in our screenshot above). This sounds like you have to pay, but it's free if you've registered.

Click 'Add to basket' on the right (2), then 'Go to basket', and you'll see that the amount is £0.00. Click 'Checkout' at the bottom, tick the box accepting terms and conditions, then click 'Submit order'. Finally, click 'Download now' – you have 30 days to do so. It will be downloaded to your computer as a PDF (see screenshot below).



We downloaded Jane Austen's will as a PDF

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

When choosing file names, I use year, surname and first name. This works fine because I put births, marriages and deaths in separate folders. But is there a better method?

Dave Fisher

The most important thing is to keep your file-naming system consistent and logical, so files are easy to find whatever system you use. My preference is surname, forename, date and then a document description, which should be standardised.

I have created folders for each of my 16 great-great-grandparents and placed connected families in sub-folders so I can quickly locate files.

If I have transcribed a gravestone inscription, for example, I create my own Word document, which I then file in the appropriate folder. I also use a symbol in the title to denote incomplete or uncertain information.

Have a genealogy question for Judith? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk with 'Grow Your Family Tree' in the subject line.

Now's the time to tackle your smartphone

Are you missing out on everything you could do with it? With these helpful books, there's nothing to fear about using smartphones.

Find out more...

Modern mobile phones (smartphones as they're called) can do so much more than just make phone calls – from browsing the web wherever you are, to checking train times, to acting as a sat-nav...

And best of all they can make it so easy to keep in touch with family and friends – in so many ways, from sharing photos to making video calls.

But using them isn't always as easy as you'd want – and that's putting it mildly!

Do the manufacturers do it on purpose?

Sometimes it can seem like the manufacturers deliberately make them complicated. It can drive you absolutely bonkers.

Whether you have problems with the basics or you're trying to do something slightly more advanced, it can be easy to use them... once you know how. But until you've been shown, it can be like talking a different language.

That's why we've published these books: *iPhones One Step at a Time*, *Android Phones One Step at a Time* and *Doro Smartphones One Step at a Time*.

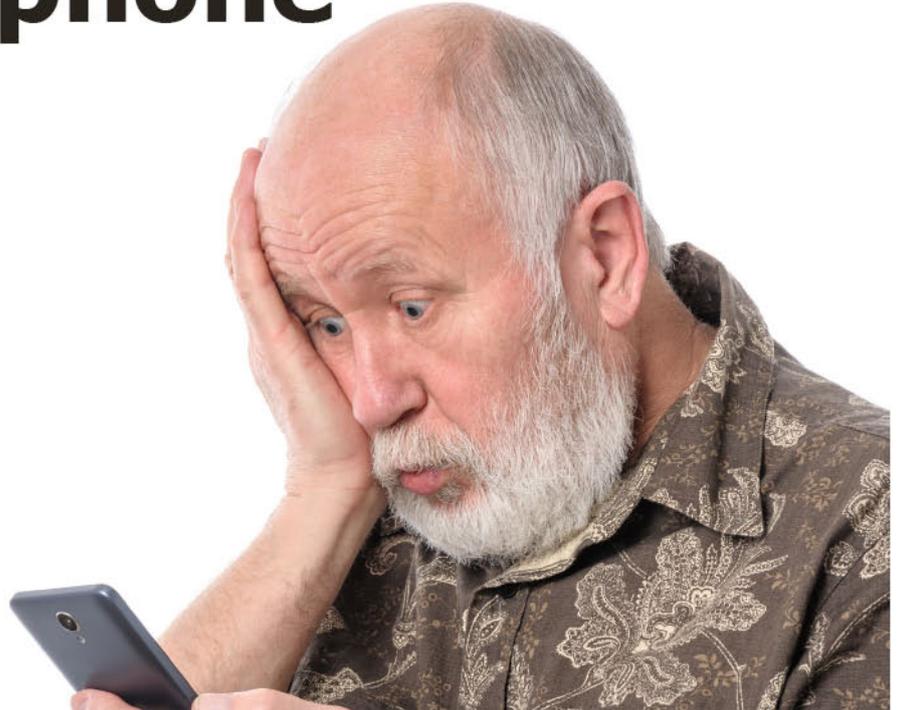
Plain English... and that's not all

They explain how to use the phone, in plain simple language with pictures of the screen showing you exactly where to tap or slide your fingers. No jargon!

What's covered?

I can't list it all here. But amongst other things, you'll discover:

- The basics of controlling it – swiping, tapping, opening apps & so on.
- How to use it as a sat-nav... in the car or even on foot.
- Send emails from your phone.
- Instant messaging and how to use it.
- Most phones have a good camera built in – here's how to use it properly.
- Share photos with friends around the world – quickly and easily.



Modern phones can be baffling, but there's a solution...

- Video phone calls – a great way to keep up with family who live a long way away.
- And obviously, you can make phone calls and send and receive text messages. ("Voicemail" is covered, too). All explained nice and simply. (Find out more in the free infopack – read on...)

What one reader had to say:
"Thanks for a fantastic smart phone book. Very pleasant staff as usual. I think this book should be sold with every smart phone. I have learnt so much from it, the info you get with the phone is non-existent. Smart phones are quite complex, and your books speak in plain English."

Don't buy now, do this instead

The books aren't available in the shops or on Amazon. Instead, send off now to get a

no-obligation information pack, completely free. It'll explain what the books cover, how much they cost, who they're suitable for and so on – showing you just how the books could help you with your phone.

Just email your name and postal address to PC0524@helpfulbooks.co.uk today – we'll post your full infopack to you straight away (and we'll keep your details private – we won't share them).

Or if you prefer, give us a ring on **01229 777606** and speak to Jade, Shanice, Shannon or Emma – lines are open Monday to Friday, 8.30am-5.30pm.

Or you can post the coupon to:
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Best order your info pack now and soon you could be getting so much more from your phone – with much less hassle.

Yes, please send me a free infopack about the smartphone books. It's free & there's no obligation. **Or call: 01229 777606**
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Post to **The Helpful Book Co, 13B Devonshire Rd Est, Millom, Cumbria, LA18 4JS** or call **01229 777606**
 We use the details you give us to send you information on the products mentioned. We store the details securely and only share them with the Royal Mail for posting the information. Full privacy notice at www.helpfulbooks.co.uk/privacynotice

Best Free Software

Robert Irvine recommends new programs that won't cost you a thing

AUDIO EDITOR

Audacity 3.5

www.snipca.com/50208

What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux



It's nearly 22 years since the first stable version of Audacity was released, and it's still the best free audio editor around. Version 3.5 further expands the program's capabilities without cluttering its distinctive waveform interface.

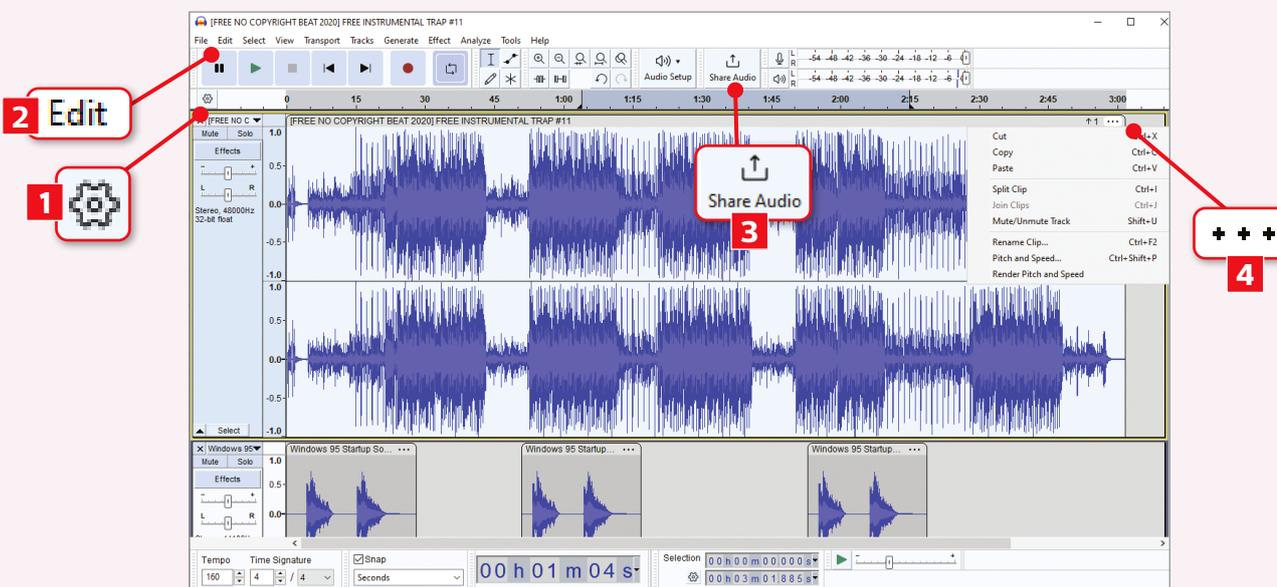
The most notable addition is the ability to save your Audacity projects online using its free hosting service Audio.com. Introduced in version 3.2 (see Issue 642, page 18), Audio.com originally just let you share files with other people by uploading them to your account, then sending a private link to your intended listeners. It now works more like a cloud-storage service, letting you access your audio files from any computer and collaborate on projects with fellow Audacity users.

Sign up for a free account at <https://audio.com>, then when you're ready to save your work in Audacity, either click the File menu and choose Save To Cloud or press Ctrl+S and select that option in the box that opens. Click 'Link Account', tick the box to 'Always allow audio.com to open links of this

type' and click 'Open Audacity Cross Platform Sound Editor'. This will link the program to your Audio.com account, so you can upload files instantly in future.

Another handy new feature automatically detects the tempo of audio loops you import, and adjusts it to match the tempo of the current project. You can also now change the pitch of an audio clip by holding down the Alt key on your keyboard, and pressing the up and down arrow keys. Audacity has added an 'overflow' (three-dot) menu to its waveform area, which gives you quicker access to frequently used options.

When you download Audacity, you can now either get just the program with no extras (recommended) or choose 'Audacity+free effects and samples'. The second option installs Muse Hub, which includes other tools from Audacity's parent company Muse Group, such as music-notation software MuseScore.



1 The Timeline Options button in the top-left corner has been changed from a green triangle to a settings cog. This button lets you switch from 'Beats and measures' view (which aligns audio to 'beats') to a traditional 'Minutes and seconds' view.

2 Whenever you open Audacity, it scans for plug-ins you've installed, which can slow its loading time. To disable this scan, click the Edit menu and choose Preferences. Select 'Effects' and untick the 'Skip effects scan on startup' option.

3 To upload your audio projects to Audacity's free Audio.com service, click the File menu and choose Save To Cloud. You can also share tracks with other people by clicking the Share Audio button and sending them a link to the uploaded file.

4 The new three-dot overflow menu in the top-right corner of each waveform panel provides easier access to Audacity's most frequently used options. These include Split Clip, Rename Clip, Mute/Unmute Track and Cut, Copy and Paste.



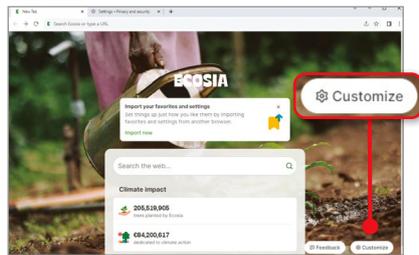
WEB BROWSER

Ecosia Browser

www.snipca.com/50212

What you need: Windows 10 or 11, or macOS

Ecosia, the search engine that donates money it makes from advertising to tree-planting and other climate-action projects, has launched what it describes as “the



greenest browser on Earth”. It’s based on Chromium code, so looks very similar to Chrome, and protects your privacy by blocking ads, trackers and cookie-consent pop-ups – “fewer ads also means you’re consuming less data and energy”. You can customise the background of your homepage/New Tab page using photos inspired by Ecosia’s projects (see screenshot), and monitor how many trees it’s planted (over 205 million at the time of writing) and how much money it’s donated to climate action. Unsurprisingly, Ecosia is the default search engine – this highlights ‘planet-friendly’ companies with a green-leaf icon and rates their climate pledges. It also now has an AI chatbot.

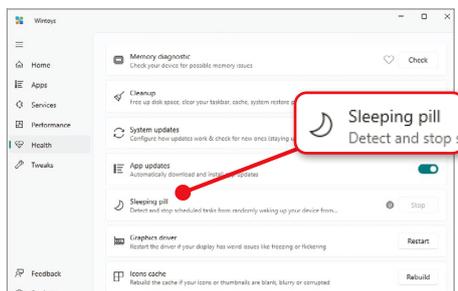
SYSTEM TOOL

Wintoys 1.3

www.snipca.com/50209

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

Available from the Microsoft Store, this excellent free app offers lots of ways to customise and optimise Windows, and this update adds



even more. A new option on the Health tab called ‘Sleeping pill’ (see screenshot) prevents scheduled tasks such as background scans from waking your PC from sleep mode. Also on the Health tab, a new ‘Memory diagnostics’ tool checks your system for memory problems – you can either set this to run when your PC next starts or restart and check immediately. Wintoys has improved its Junk cleaner, which you’ll find in the Cleanup section of the Health tab, to include error reports and dump files in its list of items to remove, and added the ability to clear the caches of individual browsers. It will now install updates automatically so you always have the latest version of the app.

£ SHOULD I PAY FOR...? Choose the right version of software

O&O SafeErase

www.snipca.com/50215

Price £15.99 a year **Free trial:** 30 days

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

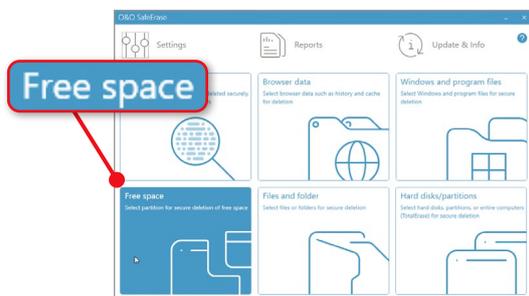
There are lots of tools for deleting private data, but they usually focus on specific tasks – such as wiping traces of your activities, shredding sensitive files or erasing drives. O&O SafeErase combines all these options and more, in a simple, speedy interface.

At its most basic level, it deletes temporary Windows and program files, and browsing data such as your cookies, cache and passwords. The latter is actually its weakest aspect, as it only covers Chrome, Firefox and Edge – see page 56 in our Cover Feature for a better alternative.

Where O&O SafeErase excels is in its secure and permanent deletion of files, folders, partitions and hard drives, to prevent any confidential data from being recovered. Choose your preferred deletion method in the program’s settings, from lowest to highest security – no confusing terminology about ‘Gutmann algorithms’ here – and select the item you want to erase. By default, SSDs use O&O’s SolidErase method, to ensure thorough erasure without damaging the drive.

Click ‘Securely delete now’ to blitz the data and save a report (without revealing file names). You can set your PC to shut down automatically afterwards. The software also lets you wipe ‘free space’ (see screenshot), which may contain traces of deleted files.

Although we don’t usually approve of annual software subscriptions, O&O SafeErase has a generous trial period and a 30-day money-back guarantee if you decide it’s not right for you.



OUR VERDICT: Pay for it

O&O SafeErase Professional proves that wiping files and drives needn’t be an intimidating experience. Its friendly interface and fast performance help you protect your private data, by making it unrecoverable, with just a couple of clicks.



What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

Which free driver updater won't nag me?

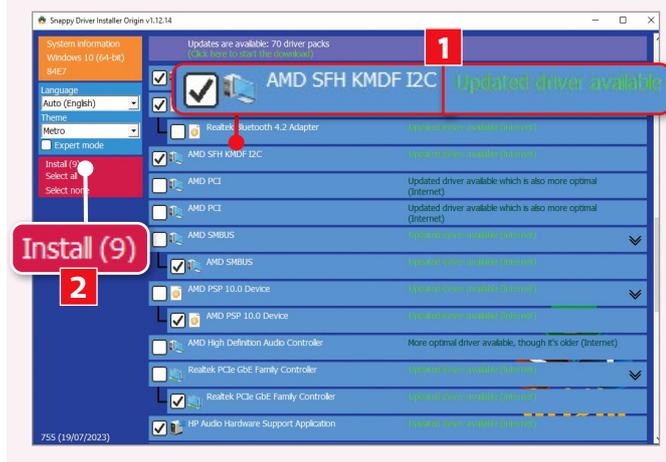
Q I've used the free version of IObit Driver Booster (www.snipca.com/49824) for some time, but lately it's started nagging me to upgrade – and often refuses to update drivers unless I do. In short, this program has become almost useless. Are there any other free driver updaters I could use? And are they really free? I've tried Driver Genius (www.driver-soft.com), but it has similar limitations to Driver Booster, and just as many nags.

Rod Theobald

A Try Snappy Driver Installer Origin (SDIO), which you can download by clicking the 'Snappy Driver Installer Origin Version 1.12.22' link at www.snipca.com/49901. When it's downloaded, open the file and save its contents somewhere that's easy to find. As there's no installer, you could just leave them in the subfolder, inside your Downloads folder, to which Windows automatically unpacks the download.

Launch the 'SIDO_x64X_R762' file and when it asks what you want to download, click Download Indexes Only. This retrieves a list of the latest available drivers, which it can use to check whether your drivers need updating. When it's finished downloading, it will scan your system and identify which drivers are out of date. These are shown in the blue rows (1 in our screenshot). Tick the ones you want, then click Install (2).

If SDIO shows any red rows, it means some devices need drivers that aren't included in its index. You'll need to search for them on the manufacturer's website, or run Windows Update to see whether anything is available for download.

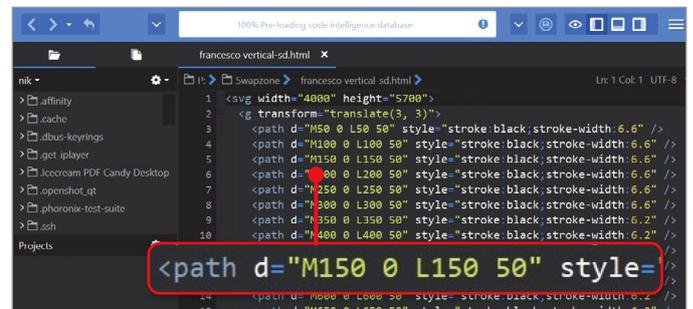


How can I build websites in Windows 11?

Q I retired a few years ago after a long career working in IT, and now build websites as a hobby. I use Adobe Dreamweaver CS5 running on an old Windows 10 PC, but soon I'll need to buy a Windows 11 machine. Will Dreamweaver CS5 work on this?

Geoff Newland

A CS5 programs haven't been updated for over a decade, so you should switch to a new program. If you've spent a lot of time using Dreamweaver, you're probably quite comfortable editing code directly. The free program Komodo Edit lets you do this. You can open multiple files at once, and applies colour to your code so you can distinguish tags, variables and content (see screenshot). Visit www.snipca.com/49900 and click 'Komodo-Edit-12.0.1-18441.msi'.

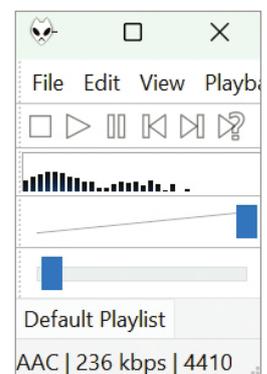


Is there a free music player that comes with a mini player?

Q I like the look of Spotify's moveable mini player (Issue 681, page 8), but it's not enough to make me pay £10.99 for Premium. Is there another music player that has a similar tool?

Keith Seaman

A The free Foobar2000 player, which you can download from the Microsoft Store at www.snipca.com/49899, has one of the most flexible interfaces of any software. What starts as a large window with space to list your tracks neatly rearranges itself as you make it smaller. Eventually, as our screenshot shows, you can shrink it until it just shows the control buttons, volume slider and progress indicator.



Named & Shamed



Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and misbehaving software

SOFTWARE WARNING!

Microsoft gatecrashes Chrome with ads for Bing AI

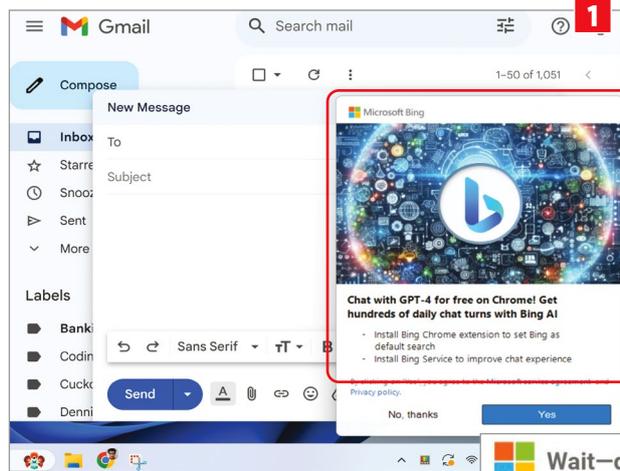
Call me eccentric, but when I launch Chrome and sign into Gmail it's because I want to send an email. Yet for some reason Microsoft thinks it means I want to waste hours of my life talking to its Bing AI chatbot.



It showed me this hideous advert (see screenshot 1) before I'd even had time to type an email subject line. It promised me the chance to "Chat with GPT-4 for free on Chrome". That sounded interesting enough. GPT-4 is the latest version of the AI technology that powers the excellent ChatGPT. It would give me more accurate answers than previous builds.

But I'll decide how and when to use it, and it certainly won't be because Microsoft has gatecrashed my browsing with an advert that could easily be mistaken for a scam. Nor do I have much confidence that the mediocre Bing is the search engine best suited to exploit AI's amazing potential.

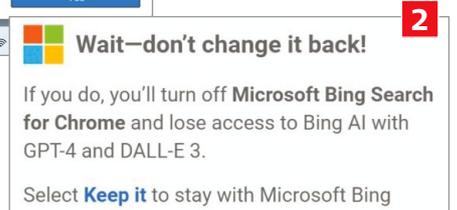
So I wasn't tempted to click the advert's



Chrome and Bing fight for your affections like divorcing parents

blue 'Yes' button, but if I had Microsoft would have installed the Bing Search extension on Chrome, and switched my default search engine to Bing.

Chrome would have responded by asking whether I really wanted to switch search engine, and let me change back. That in turn would've prompted Microsoft to show another pop-up pleading "Wait-don't change it back!" (see screenshot 2).



Such behaviour makes these tech giants seem like divorcing parents squabbling over their kids' affection. It's pathetic and desperate, but sadly not surprising. I'd rather give custody to Brave and DuckDuckGo.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?



WHAT THEY SAY

Brad Calder, Google Cloud
www.snipca.com/50108

"Gemini in BigQuery also includes AI augmented data preparation that assists users with cleansing and wrangling of data along with the ability to build low-code visual data pipelines. It also offers query recommendations, semantic search, low-code visual data pipeline development tools, and intelligent recommendations for query performance improvement, error minimization, and cost optimization."

WHAT THEY MEAN

I need AI to cleanse my own jargon pipelines.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Khan Gorgulu

I'm not normally a fan of pointless selfies, but I approve of this one, taken by Khan Gorgulu in a dentist's chair. He sent it to his crime partner Giovanni Spada, among other messages about illegal drugs, helping Cheshire Police to arrest them both for dealing cocaine and cannabis.



The 23-year-old from Manchester made more than £33,000 between

2020 and 2021, gambling much of it and investing in cryptocurrency.

We'd understand Gorgulu's desire for a selfie had he been overlooking the Grand Canyon or 'pushing' the

Leaning Tower of Pisa. But he was just posing in protective glasses before having a filling. Hardly worth the six years and six months he's now serving behind bars.



Credit: Cheshire Police

LAPTOP | £899 from Dell www.snipca.com/50079

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus

Bargain chip

If you're looking for a solid, reliable laptop to get you through everyday Windows tasks, the Dell Inspiron 14 Plus is a perfect fit. It's so good in fact that it's become our new favourite laptop

There are several configuration options – our review unit came equipped with the Intel Core Ultra 7 155H, which we've also seen in our previous favourite, the Acer Swift Go 14 (£1,099 from www.snipca.com/49733, reviewed in Issue 677); the Samsung Galaxy Book4 Pro (£1,449 from www.snipca.com/49549, reviewed in Issue 680); and the HP Spectre x360 14 (£1,669 from www.snipca.com/49751, reviewed in Issue 681). Our review model also came with 16GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD.

“Dell makes some sensible compromises to ensure this laptop is great value for money”

The performance was pretty much what we'd expect, having tested similar configurations from Dell's rivals. However, the Inspiron 14 Plus appears to squeeze a little more out of its chip than the Swift Go managed. In processor-speed benchmark tests it was three-per-cent faster than the Swift Go, while graphics tests revealed it was around 17-per-cent faster.

Some of the increased graphics performance is likely due to its lower-resolution screen. Our test model came with a 2240x1400-pixel display, higher than the Swift Go's 2880x1800 pixels.



The Inspiron's screen lags behind in other ways too. Its VA display is inferior to the Swift Go's OLED panel. That said, it's still fairly impressive and covers 70 per cent of the DCI-P3 colour standard. You might not want to use it if you're a serious photo editor, but everyday users are unlikely to see any difference. It also has a maximum brightness level of 367cd/m², which is only slightly lower than Acer's 374cd/m².

The benefit of not having an OLED screen is longer battery life. The Inspiron kept going for more than 15 hours in our Windows test, which comfortably outlasts the Swift Go's nine hours.

The build isn't going to win any design awards, but it's as robust as it needs to be. The outer shell is cast from aluminium and is therefore strong and hard wearing. It's a couple of millimetres thicker than the Swift Go, and – at 1.6kg – about

300g heavier.

It also lacks the range of connections of the Swift Go, with only a single USB-C, two USB 3.0 and one HDMI port (most of these are on the left edge – pictured below left). Likewise, the keyboard is fine but not outstanding, with a slightly mushy feel that doesn't provide the crisp typing experience you find on the best laptops. The trackpad, however, has a smooth feel and a satisfying click when pressed.

The main thing in the Inspiron's favour is its price. While it more or less matches the Acer Swift Go 14 in most areas, Dell has cut a few corners to knock a hefty £200 off the price. If we saw the Swift Go on sale with a large discount we'd probably snap it up without a second thought, but for such a significant saving we think the Inspiron is terrific value for money and makes this a better buy.

SPECIFICATIONS

16-core Intel Core Ultra 7 155H processor • 16GB of memory • Intel Arc graphics • 14in 2240x1400-pixel WVA screen • 256GB SSD • 1080p webcam • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth • 1x USB-C port • 2x USB 3.0 ports • 1x HDMI port • MicroSD card reader • Windows 11 Home • 17.9x359x236mm (HxWxD) • 1.6kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50079

VERDICT A great laptop for everyday Windows use, which makes compromises with its screen but offers excellent value for money



ALTERNATIVE Acer Swift Go 14

£1,099 A better OLED screen, which is worth the extra £200 if you're likely to use it for movies and games



LAPTOP | £430 from John Lewis www.snipca.com/50092

Asus Chromebook Plus CX34

Matching Windows

With the Chromebook Plus CX34 Asus has joined Google's Chromebook Plus initiative, which pits basic Chrome-based laptops up against their equivalent Windows counterparts by guaranteeing a bare-minimum specification of 12th-generation Intel Core processors or AMD equivalent, 8GB of RAM, 128GB of storage and a Full HD screen. The first such model we reviewed was the Acer Chromebook Plus 515 (reviewed in Issue 673), which launched at £429 but has dropped to £399 since (www.snipca.com/48421).

“Good specifications for a low price, but its screen is average”

The CX34 is clearly pitched at a similar market. It has the same Intel Core i3-1215U processor and 8GB RAM, but a smaller 14in 1080p screen. It outflanks the 515's 128GB of storage with 256GB of its own.

Asus's model was, however, slightly disappointing in our benchmark tests. The 515 was able to eke out better performance levels from its processor, leaving the CX34 running 12-per-cent slower in tests that push the chip to its limits. It's not the kind of difference that you'd notice in everyday ChromeOS work, but you might if you set it more demanding tasks.



Its battery isn't the biggest we've ever seen, but given Chromebooks are less demanding than Windows laptops that isn't a problem. In our video-playback test it lasted over 10 hours, which is fairly impressive for a laptop at this price.

The 14in screen offers a decent amount of working space thanks to its 1080p resolution. Peak brightness levels are fine at 250cd/m², and the colours are reasonably vibrant. But compared with, say, a typical tablet, it's nothing special in terms of image quality or pixel density.

It beats the 515 with its port selection, though, with two USB-C, two USB 3.0 sockets and one HDMI port, as well as a 3.5mm audio jack. Its 1080p webcam provides better image quality than most laptops, including significantly more expensive models. It benefits from Google's operating-system level processing, including background blur and noise cancellation, which can be applied to any video calls.

The CX34's all-plastic chassis feels fairly sturdy barring a slightly bouncy keyboard bed. The trackpad is big enough and there's nothing wrong with the overall design. The styling is bland, though, and the screen bezels are larger than you might expect on a 14in laptop, which means the whole thing is larger than we'd like.

SPECIFICATIONS

Six-core Intel Core i3-1215U processor • 8GB RAM • Intel Iris Xe graphics • 14in 1920x1080-pixel screen • 256GB SSD • 2x USB-C ports • 2x USB 3.0 ports • 1x HDMI port • Wi-Fi 6 • ChromeOS • 18.7x326x214mm (HxWxD) • 1.44kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50092

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *Maximum PC*, *PC Pro* and *T3*, and the websites *Laptop Mag* (www.laptopmag.com), *TechRadar* (www.techradar.com) and *Windows Central* (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS

We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.

Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT A reasonably good Chromebook for everyday use, but Acer's slightly cheaper 515 model remains a better buy



ALTERNATIVE

Acer Chromebook Plus 515
£399 Superior performance and a larger screen at a more affordable price, but it sacrifices half the storage



PORTABLE ROUTER | £90 from Amazon www.snipca.com/50107

Asus RT-AX57 Go

De-stress signal

We don't generally think of routers as portable devices, but if you're going on a family holiday or often enjoy breaks in a caravan or campsite, having a router you can take with you makes a lot of sense. The trouble is, portable routers tend to produce a weak signal or be over-priced, so it's impressive that Asus has overcome both those problems with the RT-AX57 Go.

“A versatile device that turns mobile data into a Wi-Fi network while on holiday”

For such a low price it comes as a pleasant surprise to get a decent **dual-band Wi-Fi 6** router. It has most of the core features we've seen in standard routers from Asus, including a **VPN**, parental controls and the option of connecting it to a **mesh Wi-Fi** network with other Asus devices.

It's smaller than regular routers, measuring 21.5x120x120mm, which is about the same size and shape as a double CD case (if you can remember those). This makes it easy to slip into a bag or suitcase.

Being small and square, the router has plenty of orientation options with no specific way up. It can sit on the four

rubber feet on the underside (pictured below left), be mounted to a wall, or you can stand it in a supplied plastic foot for vertical orientation (pictured right).

One curiosity about the design is the triangular hole in one corner, similar to those we've seen on portable storage devices. It's purely decorative though, and isn't suitable for hanging off a keyring or similar.

When stood vertically, the router's top edge has a small blue power **LED** and a sliding switch. On the rear there's a **USB 3.0** port, a reset button, a **USB-C** power port and two Gigabit Ethernet sockets (all pictured below). One of these is intended to connect to the incoming network device, such as an Ethernet modem, so the RT-AX57 Go isn't suitable if you want to connect more than one wired device.

Otherwise, the router is very versatile. As well as the Ethernet option, the USB port lets you connect to a mobile device, such as a smartphone, so you can use its internet connection without having to set up a **hotspot**. It can also be used as a mesh device with other compatible Asus routers, which means you might be able to use it at home to boost your existing network. All its tools can be configured using either the web interface or the smartphone app.

The one thing it can't do is create its own internet connection, as there's no place to insert a mobile **SIM** card. For that you'll need to opt for a device such as the Netgear Nighthawk M6 (www.snipca.com/50115) – but this is incredibly expensive at £700.

SPECIFICATIONS

Dual-band Wi-Fi 6 • Supports Wi-Fi speeds up to 2.4Gbps (5GHz network) • 2x Gigabit Ethernet ports • 1x USB-C port • 1x USB 3.0 port • 21.5x120x120mm • 200g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50107



For a small device that's intended to operate in a confined space, it works really well, achieving speeds of more than 850Mbps in our tests using its Wi-Fi 6 connection. But our devices got a lot slower when we used older Wi-Fi 4 and 5, and it doesn't have the hardware to stretch the signal far.

It's not battery powered, although you can connect its 9V 2A USB-C port to a portable power pack. Being USB-C powered also means you can use the same power adapter you use to charge other devices (as long as you don't need them to charge at the same time as you're using the router). The one supplied with this device handily comes with international adapters, which might come in useful if you plan to travel abroad.

VERDICT A low-cost travel router that will connect to an existing network and share its **bandwidth** across your internet-linked devices

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Netgear Nighthawk M6 **£670** A more expensive travel router that can accommodate a SIM card to provide a standalone internet connection



KEYBOARD & MOUSE SET | £110 from Logitech www.snipca.com/50174

Logitech Signature Slim Combo MK950

Take a shortcut

Like many keyboard-and-mouse sets, the Signature Slim MK950 is basically two existing standalone products bundled into a single box. However, it comes with software that gives it something of an edge over many similar products.

Logitech's software (called Options+) has all the usual settings for reconfiguring keys and buttons, but it also adds Smart Actions. These are commands that can be set to run when a particular event occurs – such as on startup, at shutdown or when you press a particular combination of keys. It lets you create time-saving shortcuts – for example, automatically opening the software you tend to use when you first switch on your PC.

“A nice design, quiet keys and built-in options to make life easier”

While this technology is nothing new, and you may already be using similar **IFTTT** services, the Logitech option is free to use (once you've bought the mouse and keyboard), easy to set up and integrates well with the hardware – letting you use the keyboard's function buttons to launch actions.

The MK950 uses the same **scissor switches** that are present on Logitech's pricier MX keyboards. These make everything quiet enough that you won't bother anyone sitting nearby while you type, but they're by no means silent. The keys are comfortable and pleasant to type on, thanks to Logitech's attention to detail, including contoured key tops, a sensible layout and full-size number pad.

SPECIFICATIONS

Bluetooth or USB dongle connection • 10m range • 4,000dpi mouse resolution • Requires 1xAA battery (mouse) and 2xAAA batteries (keyboard), all included • 21x296x132mm (keyboard), 48x83x124mm (mouse) • 506g (keyboard), 142g (mouse) • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/50174



There are a few extra keys that make life easier. We particularly appreciate the dedicated screenshot key next to the calculator above the number pad. There's even a button for emptying your recycling bin.

The keyboard uses two standard AAA batteries rather than a rechargeable cell. These should last several months, but it's one of the few signs of compromise compared with Logitech's pricier models. Another trade-off is that the symbols on top of the keys are stickers rather than being etched on, but we suspect they'll still last a good few years.

As with the MX range you can connect the mouse and keyboard to three different devices – switching between them using shortcut buttons on the keyboard or a tiny button on the bottom of the mouse. It's a great option for people who need to flit between different computers on a single desk, and with Logitech's Flow software you can even move your mouse from one device to another seamlessly, as if working on a giant extended desktop.

There's nothing particularly special about the mouse, but it's large enough to be comfortable for most people's hands, yet small enough to travel with. It also has an excellent scroll wheel.

VERDICT A sleek and stylish combo for controlling your PC, with additional software to sweeten the deal



ALTERNATIVE Logitech Pebble 2 Combo **£55** A more affordable set that's ideal for travelling and has some of the same features



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Intel Evo



What is it?

Introduced in 2020, Intel Evo is a minimum specification for laptops designed to provide a high level



of performance and portability.

It means you can buy a laptop with an Intel Evo badge (pictured) and know they have been certified to align with certain standards.

How does it work?

When a manufacturer makes a new laptop with an Intel processor, it can decide whether it wants to certify it as Intel Evo. This is essentially a marketing badge of honour, but it also guarantees that the manufacturer hasn't made specific compromises that contravene the guidelines of certification.

What are the specs?

To qualify as Evo a laptop has to have an 11th-generation (2020) or later Intel Core processor. However, because the Evo standard has been around for over three years, we'd always recommend looking out for superior 13th-generation or Ultra processors when buying an Intel Evo PC.

Evo laptops will also have at least **8GB of RAM**, **256GB of storage**, **Wi-Fi 6** and at least one **USB-C** port. They should also wake from sleep within one second and have a battery life of at least eight hours (assuming it has a Full HD **1080p** resolution screen – there's some leeway that allows higher-resolution screens to have a reduced battery life and still qualify).

It's worth bearing in mind that these are baseline specifications. An Evo-certified laptop may have even better components.

Can I change it later?

No. Intel approves Evo laptops when they're made. They can't gain this status later just because you've added more RAM, for example.

PORTABLE SSD | From **£109** for 1TB from Amazon www.snipca.com/50154

Lexar SL500

Drive in the fast lane

This ultra-slim portable SSD is intended for anyone who wants to significantly boost their PC or laptop's storage capacity with a fast and lightweight external drive. And it represents one of the most portable options we've come across.

“Lightning transfer speeds and a slick, robust design”

At 7.8mm thick, the main body has a solid aluminium casing, giving it a smooth, minimalist look while ensuring it can survive the odd knock while on the move.

It has a single USB-C port and comes with a short cable. Annoyingly, when we first connected it the SL500 didn't initially sit flat on our desktop. Because of its small size (50x65x10mm) and flimsy weight (43g), it was pushed up at one end by the twists in the attached cord. However,

SPECIFICATIONS

512GB, 1TB, 2TB and 4TB capacities • 1x USB-C Gen 2x2 port • USB-C to USB-C cable • 50x65x10mm (HxWxD) • 38g • Five-year warranty www.snipca.com/50154

straightening out the cable allowed us to lay it flush. It comes in four capacities: 512GB, 1TB, 2TB and 4TB.

Its transfer speeds were impressive when connected to our test laptop, settling at around the 1,000MB/s mark across a range of benchmark tests. Even with larger file sizes, we managed to move 140GB in just three minutes. When we edited a 4K video on it the SL500 maintained that pace without overheating. For a drive of this size these are impressive outcomes.

Its USB-C port means it can easily connect to any of the latest laptops. If you have an older machine with a USB 3.0 connection, you can still attach it with an adapter, but you aren't going to get the same speeds.

Once you do connect it to your PC, you can access Lexar's DataShield software to encrypt it with a password, so your data is secure should the device ever be lost or stolen.

For all-around portable storage, the SL500's slight dimensions and choice of capacities make it an appealing option. When on the move it takes up very little room in a bag and may even slip into



larger jacket pockets. Beyond that, it offers sustained performance, making it an ideal choice for fast transfer speeds and reliable access to data at home and further afield.

VERDICT A tiny external SSD that's lightning fast (particularly when paired with a compatible USB-C port) and secure, but it's pricey compared with some rivals

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Crucial X9 **£71** Neither as portable nor as fast, but this Crucial alternative is significantly cheaper



WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

How can I control my laptop's volume remotely?

Q I'm thinking of buying a 32in monitor to use as a second screen alongside my Dell laptop. Because my laptop has stereo speakers, I'd like to control its audio levels remotely from my armchair when using it to watch online lectures and talks. The monitor would be four metres from my armchair and the laptop is three metres away – both too far away to keep getting up. Is there a device that can do this?

Colin Culpitt-Smith

A While researching your requirements we came across many devices that are close to what you need, but don't quite fit the bill. Devices that only control volume tend to be wired but have a cable that's too short for your situation, or are designed to remotely control phones and tablets, but don't work with Windows.

Remote controls for managing presentations mostly lack volume controls, while universal remotes for TVs come with many more

functions than you'll need and quickly start getting expensive.

After an extensive process of elimination we recommend the WeChip Mini Air Fly Mouse Remote (pictured), which does more than you need but works with Windows, has a dedicated volume control and costs just £20 from Amazon at www.snipca.com/50186.

We haven't had a chance to test it but it's received a 4 out of 5 star rating from over 4,700 customer reviews.

✉ Do you need advice on what you should buy? Email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk





USB-C DOCK



DESKTOP MONITORS

SIMPLIFY YOUR WORKSPACE WITH THE INTEGRATED USB-C DOCK

The USB-C dock on the iiyama XUB2797QSN-B1 simplifies your workspace by using a single cable to display content and charge your laptop. With additional USB-ports, your wireless mouse and keyboard or webcam can also be connected to the monitor for seamless plug and display solution. The added benefit of the high resolution 2560x1440 IPS LCD display makes all the difference for image clarity and productivity, boosted further with the ability to connect to a secondary display for a power multi-display workspace.

- IPS
- 2560
x
1440
- DOCK
- SPEAKER
- HDMI
- DISPLAY
PORT
- FLICKER
FREE
LED
- MULTI-MONITOR



FITNESS TRACKER | £55 from Xiaomi www.snipca.com/50136

Xiaomi Smart Band 8 Pro

Exercising authority

It's not often you come across a device like the Smart Band 8 Pro from Chinese company Xiaomi. This low-cost fitness tracker is surprisingly effective thanks to its long battery life and array of sensors that many more expensive alternatives lack, including built-in **GPS** tracking.

It has a 1.74in **AMOLED** screen that's small enough to sit comfortably on your wrist without feeling chunky but large enough to display all the essential information you need at a glance. There are no buttons on its edges, so you'll be controlling everything via the touchscreen.

SPECIFICATIONS

1.74in AMOLED screen • 336x480-pixel resolution
• Built-in **GPS** • Water resistant to **5ATM** •
48x22.5x11mm (HxWxD) • 22.5g • One-year warranty
www.snipca.com/50136

As a comparison test we strapped it on one wrist while wearing a significantly more expensive Apple Watch Ultra on the other, then put them through their paces – first heading out for a brisk walk, then back indoors for a treadmill run and a gym session.

Analysing the respective data, we were very impressed by how accurate the Smart Band 8 Pro was, consistently aligning with the results from Apple's watch. Step counting is precise and heart-rate data was consistent both while awake and asleep.

It's worth remembering that this is a fitness tracker and not a smartwatch, though. It won't pay for your shopping, download music for offline playback or install third-party apps. Battery life is great, however, lasting up to 14 days of use on a single charge.



VERDICT A decent fitness-tracking watch that looks smart and successfully matches more expensive models from the likes of Fitbit

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Fitbit Charge 6 £120
Our favourite Fitbit is more than twice the price, but it's a great way to track health data



HEADPHONES | £80 from Amazon www.snipca.com/50137

EarFun Wave Pro

Hear for a good time

While we've previously tested EarFun's ear buds (the Air 2, £50 from www.snipca.com/49426, reviewed in Issue 679), this is the company's first set of over-ear headphones. The good news is that, despite their low price, they're just as impressive. They may not satisfy serious audiophiles, but they represent great value for money for the rest of us.

Both bass and treble are pronounced, and while some mid-range frequencies are lost between the two, the overall result is a lot more balanced than on many similarly priced headphones we've tested.

SPECIFICATIONS

40mm drivers • Active noise cancellation • 80-hour battery life (with noise-cancelling off) • Bluetooth 5.3
• 173x159x52mm • 266g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50137

They're light and the soft cup padding makes them extremely comfortable to wear. They can also be folded, making them easy to carry around when not on your head.

What we like most though is the incredible battery life (80 hours; 55 if you have noise-cancelling switched on), which means you won't need to charge them if you're away for a few days. What's more, charging is rapid via the **USB-C** port – EarFun states that 10 minutes of charging gets you 10 hours of listening with noise-cancellation switched off.

Our gripes are minor: they take a long time to turn off, the five different noise-cancelling modes are a bit confusing and there's only one colour option (black). We don't, however, consider any of those concerns deal-breakers.



VERDICT Affordable noise-cancelling headphones that are good enough to give more expensive rivals a run for their money

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Sony WH-CH520 £41 Those who don't need noise-cancelling will love these headphones, which cost half the price



EBOOK READER | £200 from Kobo www.snipca.com/50192

Kobo Libra Colour

Has it got hues for you!

At first glance, the Libra Colour looks identical to the Libra 2 (£170 from www.snipca.com/40645, reviewed in Issue 624), which is a good start because that turned out to be one of the best ebook readers ever made. The page-turn buttons, curved edges and thicker bezels make this e-reader just as comfortable to hold and use in one hand.

What is a departure, however, is its screen. As its name suggests, the Libra Colour is fitted with an **E-Ink Kaleido 3** screen that supports no less than 4,096 tones, and is currently the best colour e-paper display. Colour illustrations and photos leap out at you, and while it isn't as vibrant as a tablet screen, it makes browsing your library of book covers much more impactful.

“Colour e-reader with note-taking option is our new favourite”

Kobo has also added another new feature – the ability to write on it. It inherits most of the writing elements present in the Kobo Elipsa 2E (£350 from www.snipca.com/45970, reviewed in Issue 658), but with added colour.

Unlike the Elipsa, it doesn't come with a stylus, which goes some way to explaining its lower price. If you do want to make notes, the Kobo Stylus 2 will cost an additional £70 (www.snipca.com/50199). We think it's worth it, though, if you like to jot things down or highlight text as you read.

You can choose the ink/highlight colours, the type of pen, the thickness of nib and more. We found the handwriting recognition to be excellent, but that might depend on how legible your

SPECIFICATIONS

7in 300ppi E Ink Carta Kaleido 3 touchscreen • 1264x1680-pixel resolution • 32GB storage • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth • USB-C charging port • 2050mAh Li-ion rechargeable battery • 161x145x8.3mm (HxWxD) • 200g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50192



scribbles are. If anything, writing on screen feels a little too smooth compared with the slightly textured Elipsa 2E display, which gives you more of a sense that you're writing on paper. It's our only complaint with the Libra Colour.

Reading and writing in colour takes a little extra power, so Kobo has updated the processor to a 2GHz model from the 1GHz chip in the Libra 2. And given the resource-hungry features, Kobo has decided to increase the battery capacity from 1,500mAh to 2,050mAh. You still get 32GB of (non-expandable) storage, Bluetooth support so you can listen to audiobooks, and relatively quick **USB-C** charging. All this makes the Libra Colour our new favourite ebook reader – see page 32.

VERDICT A significant upgrade for Kobo's already excellent Libra with added colour and writing capabilities



ALTERNATIVE

Kobo Clara Colour £140 A cheaper and smaller (6in screen) colour ebook reader, though it lacks the note-taking option



DO I REALLY NEED...

A monitor with a Wi-Fi antenna?

What is it?

Taiwanese company ASRock has launched a new monitor with a Wi-Fi antenna built into its base.

What does it do?

By linking the antenna terminals on the back of the monitor to your PC's **Wi-Fi card**, it can improve your Wi-Fi connection by catching the signal above your desktop. Wi-Fi antennas on desktop PCs are often at the back of the unit and hidden away under a desk.

What's the catch?

The price hasn't been confirmed yet, nor whether it'll be available in the UK. However, we do know that the **PG27QFT2A** (www.snipca.com/50196, pictured) has a 27in **IPS** screen with many features that will appeal to gamers, including a 2560x1440-pixel resolution, a 180MHz **refresh rate** and a 1-millisecond **response time**. That's likely to make it expensive.



So can I do without it?

Yes. We like the idea of a Wi-Fi antenna in our monitor, but it's not worth buying a new one to get it.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 22 May

Acer Vero B7
A decent 27in monitor at an exceptional price



Asus Vivobook S16 OLED

A sleek laptop with powerful components and a high-quality screen

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Our pick of products that have won the **Buy It** award

LAPTOP

NEW
ENTRY

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus
£899 from www.snipca.com/50079
Tested Issue 683



Has the same processor (Intel Core Ultra 7 155H) as our previous favourite (Acer Swift Go 4), but manages to squeeze more speed out of it. Has 16GB RAM, 256GB SSD and a 14in 2240x1400-pixel screen. Excellent value overall.

ALTERNATIVE Acer Swift Go 4 Still a fast and powerful laptop, with a great 14in screen. £899 from www.snipca.com/49733

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp AMD Cobra
£400 from www.snipca.com/43515
Tested Issue 643



This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 1TB SSD and a six-core processor – though it lacks USB-C ports and built-in Wi-Fi.

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire Ultima WS Home Office Workstation Blisteringly fast PC, powered by an overclocked eight-core processor and 1TB SSD. £656 from www.snipca.com/41500

APPLE IPAD

Apple iPad 10.2in
£319 from www.snipca.com/48634
Tested Issue 623



The 9th-generation of the basic iPad, released in 2021, is now the best-value Apple tablet. The 2022 version looks better and has a faster processor, but it's not worth paying £130 extra for.

ALTERNATIVE iPad Mini With an even better, but smaller, screen than the 10.2in iPad, the Mini also supports the Pencil and has 64GB of storage. £569 from www.snipca.com/33050

ANDROID TABLET

Samsung Galaxy Tab S9
£679 from www.snipca.com/50039
Tested Issue 667



With a much brighter screen than our previous favourite – the Galaxy Tab S8 – this is perfect for watching TV. It also has a faster processor, so tasks feel smoother, even with several windows open. £679 will get you the 128GB version. If you want 256GB you'll need to spend around £50–£100 more.

ALTERNATIVE Lenovo Tab P11 Pro It's slower than the Tab S9 and the screen is duller, but has a detachable keyboard so you can use it as a laptop. £430 from www.snipca.com/45244

APPLE IPHONE

Apple iPhone 13
£599 from www.snipca.com/43498
Tested Issue 627



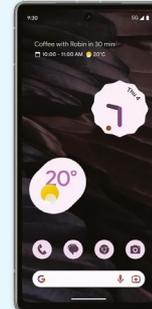
Now £200 cheaper than its 2021 launch price, the iPhone 13 has a superb screen, long battery life and an excellent camera – particularly for taking quick snaps without blurring. You could pay £799 for the newer iPhone 15, but we're not convinced it's worth the extra money.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone SE With a single camera and smaller screen but the same powerful A15 processor and 64GB storage as the iPhone 14, it's great value. £429 from www.snipca.com/34773

ANDROID PHONE

PRICE
DROP

Google Pixel 7a
£329 from www.snipca.com/46332
Tested Issue 660

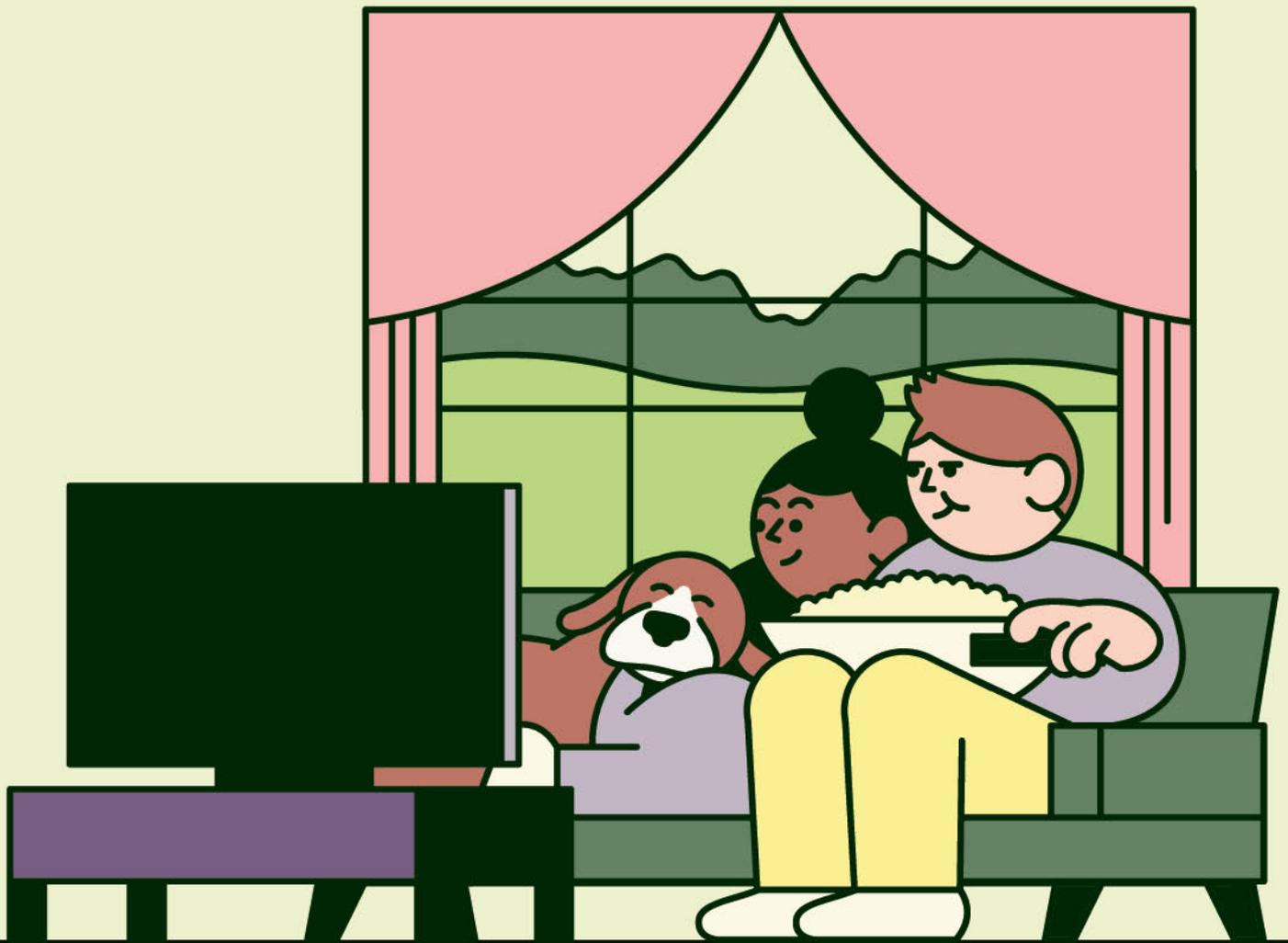


A cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, this uses AI to add clarity to photos, and lasts an impressive 10 hours. Has a fast processor and 8GB RAM to supercharge performance.

ALTERNATIVE Xiaomi Poco F3 This remains an excellent phone, with 6GB RAM and 128GB storage. The only phone under £450 that's faster is the iPhone SE. £259 from www.snipca.com/44553

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Buy It

Our pick of products that have won the **Buy It** award

MINI PC

Minisforum UM780XTX
£709 from www.snipca.com/48917
Tested Issue 676



This powerful machine costs only £80 more than the Beelink SER6 Pro, but has twice the memory, twice the storage and a superior processor. These help it run PC tasks faster and handle graphics more smoothly. Ports include USB-C, USB 3.0, HDMI, DisplayPort and Gigabit Ethernet.

ALTERNATIVE Beelink SER6 Pro 7753HS Has 32GB RAM and a 500GB SSD for slick Windows performance. £659 from www.snipca.com/46416

EBOOK READER

NEW ENTRY

Kobo Libra Colour
£200 from www.snipca.com/50192
Tested Issue 683



Kobo's first colour e-reader, with an E-Ink Kaleido 3 screen that supports 4,096 tones, making illustrations and photos leap out at you. You can also make notes using a stylus, though that costs £70 extra. Has 32GB storage and Bluetooth for playing audiobooks.

ALTERNATIVE Amazon Kindle This low-cost option is a good choice, especially now it has 16GB of storage. £85 from www.snipca.com/44221

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Premium
£19.99 from www.snipca.com/33247
Tested Issue 629



Norton has always performed strongly in our antivirus tests, regularly making the top three. Owned by US firm NortonLifeLock, it's available at a discount on our Software Store. Use the link above for a 10-device, two-year licence. Other versions are available, including Norton 360 for Gamers.

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £29.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£71 from www.snipca.com/41104
Tested Issue 608



Despite the name, this webcam is also great for home users. Its standout feature is automatically adjusting itself to keep your picture looking sharp. It offers a 78-degree field of view, which is fine for everyday video chats with one person in front of the camera.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video and captures voice from a distance. £55 from www.snipca.com/48944

PC MONITOR

Iiyama ProLite XU2492HSU-B2
£120 from www.snipca.com/49491
Tested Issue 618



This 23.8in screen is superb value, with a resolution of 1920x1080 pixels. Colour is good, covering 88 per cent of the sRGB colour range. Connect your computer via HDMI, DisplayPort or VGA, and there's a USB hub to plug in your mouse and keyboard.

ALTERNATIVE AOC 27P2C This also has a 1920x1080 resolution. It's 27 inches, so pixel density is lower, but you'll only notice if you look really closely. £265 from www.snipca.com/41609

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 500GB
£67 from www.snipca.com/41547
Tested Issue 630



In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £87; 2TB costs £170.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £56 from www.snipca.com/37304

COMPETITION

PURE

Win 1 of 2 Pure Woodland outdoor radio/speakers



Winner of a Recommended award in Issue 678 (page 29), the Pure Woodland is the perfect device for the long summer days outdoors. It's got a 14-hour battery and is resistant to water and dust, making it ideal for any outdoor activity you have in mind – whether that's a beach barbecue, pool party or camping trip – or just for taking into the garden.

It has a soft carry handle, so you can simply grab it and take it anywhere. The reinforced bumpers at the top and

bottom protect it from falls, while the 10-watt dual acoustic speaker delivers a rich, warm and joyful sound.

It uses Bluetooth 5.1, so you could listen to a relaxing playlist over your phone, and six presets for DAB+/FM radio stations – just pull up the antennas and you're ready to go. An LCD screen tells you which station is playing, while a selection of buttons on top make it easy to control.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/50175

and submit your details. It runs until midnight Tuesday 21 May. Good luck!

You can buy the **Pure Woodland** for £139 from www.snipca.com/49294. For more details on Pure's products, including speakers, radios, CD players and complete music systems, visit www.pure-audio.com.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830
£228 from www.snipca.com/50202
Tested Issue 676



This replaces the ET-1810 as our favourite printer because it adds copying and scanning to its functions for only £80 more. Print quality is great, especially for photos, which have crisp details, vivid colours and realistic skin tones.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £170 from www.snipca.com/49863

SMART TV

Samsung Q60B
£405 from www.snipca.com/45083
Tested Issue 652



With our former favourite – the TCL 55RP620K – out of stock, Samsung's 43in set is our new pick. It has excellent colour reproduction in well-lit scenes, and the picture is wonderfully sharp, especially in 4K.

ALTERNATIVE LG OLED42C3
LG's 42in TV is more than double the price, but unlike TCL's model it has an OLED screen, boosting picture quality considerably. £879 from www.snipca.com/47271

ROUTER

Asus RT-AXE7800
£230 from www.snipca.com/47586
Tested Issue 665



This router has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest possible speeds on the 6GHz network over the next few years. It has five Ethernet ports and also a USB 3.0 port to connect a hard drive or NAS drive.

ALTERNATIVE Synology WRX560
Our previous favourite remains an excellent choice, delivering speeds of up to 791.5Mbps. Add more units to set up mesh Wi-Fi. £243 from www.snipca.com/49161

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HOW TO...

Monitor older relatives using a Fitbit

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Fitbit; Fitbit app on Android phone or iPhone **Time required:** Two hours

This issue's How To was inspired by a tip from reader Brian Gibbs, who uses smart plugs to let his daughters monitor his daily actions so they know he's healthy (Issue 681, page 41). He uses smart plugs as an alternative to CCTV, but another option is to wear a fitness tracker that your vulnerable relatives can monitor.

Even older trackers, such as the Fitbit device we're going to set up here, can count steps and monitor heart rate, then send that data wirelessly to a paired smartphone, from where it's synced to online storage ('the cloud'). Once set up, it works without much involvement from the wearer - as long as you remember to charge the tracker every few days.

New fitness trackers can be expensive and many have far more features than we need, so we're using the Fitbit Charge 4, which launched in 2020. We picked one up second-hand for just £40 from CeX. The store had given the Charge 4 a 'B'

grade, which is the second of CeX's three 'working' grades. CeX explains its grades at www.snipca.com/50091.

Although we'd have been happy with the B-grade Fitbit coming with a few small scratches and scuffs, we were very pleasantly surprised when we received what looked like an extremely well looked-after (and scratch-free) watch. It arrived in its original box, with the charging cable and spare straps - as



pictured below left.

If you can't find a Fitbit at your nearest CeX, try eBay, Facebook Marketplace or Gumtree. You'll also need an Android phone or iPhone for each person being monitored, or doing the monitoring.

Before you unbox your tracker, download and install its app on both phones. For Fitbit, you'll find the Android version at www.snipca.com/49838 and iOS at www.snipca.com/49839.

Our feature is written from the perspective of the person who's going to be keeping an eye on their relative. We'll also focus on using a Fitbit, though the process is similar for other fitness trackers.

The screenshots in the initial setup process in the following pages were taken on an Android device. The process is similar on an iPhone. The screenshot in the final section ('Use Fitbit to monitor your relative') is taken on an iPhone.

1

Set up the Fitbit app

Once you've installed the app, launch it and log in with a Google account. This will be used to synchronise information from the tracker to the cloud. The app will recognise that you've not used Fitbit before and give you

the option to sign in with a Fitbit account or 'Continue as a new user'. Unless you already have a Fitbit account, tap the button to continue as a new user.

Read through the privacy notices and, if you agree with them, tick the two boxes at the bottom of the page, then click

'Agree & continue'. Bear in mind that if you are setting this up for a relative, the data in question, which includes health and wellness data, will relate to them, not you, so you should get their permission.

Next, you need to enter your relative's height, weight and gender. These are used

when calculating things like how many calories they are burning when moving around. If you're only going to use the Fitbit to check that they're active, setting these accurately isn't so important. But if they're interested in monitoring their own movements, which may be an incentive to become more mobile, it's worth getting them right.

By default, height and weight measurements are metric (centimetres and kilograms), though you can change either or both to imperial if you find that easier to work with.

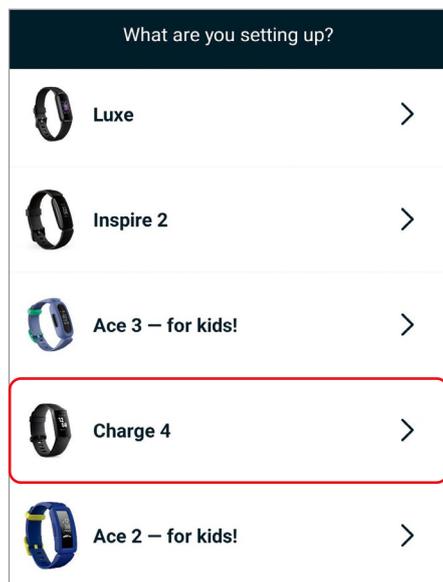
At the penultimate stage of the instructions, you'll be asked if you want to contribute data that will be used to develop new products and in health research. Read through the page and make your relative aware of what it says before making any decision about whether to take part. It is optional, and opting out won't impact the effectiveness of the Fitbit as a tool for monitoring movement.

Finally, you'll need to set your notification preferences. These relate to news and updates, and research invites, so aren't the kind of notifications you want to receive if your relative hasn't moved in a few hours. Tap the slider beside any you want to opt in to (they're off by default, so we left them that way), then tap 'Save & continue'.

2

Set up your Fitbit device

Now that you've got the app up and running, you need to set up the Fitbit itself. Tap the 'Add device' link in the 'Set up a device' box, then choose



Tell the app which Fitbit device you're setting up – ours is the Charge 4

How my family monitor each other

Members of my family use a variety of apps to make sure we're all safe, including the Life360 app (www.life360.com) and Apple's Find My technology, both of which let you see other people's locations in real time – as long as they've given you permission. This isn't right in every instance, as not everyone is happy to have their movements tracked around the clock. That's when fitness trackers are more suitable. They reassure you that a relative is at least moving, without reporting on every precise movement.



Nik Rawlinson

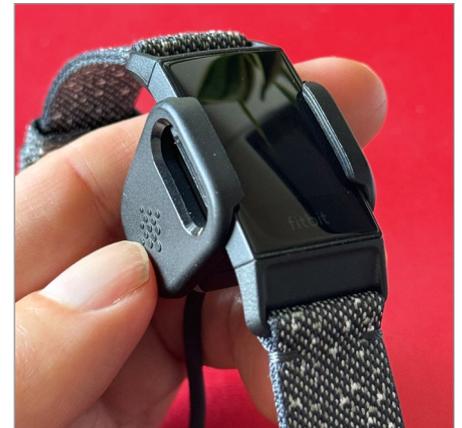


Which monitoring apps do you use?

Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk



The back of the Fitbit device has biometric sensors and charging contacts



The Charge 4's charging cable clamps on to the watch to line up with the charging connectors

your Fitbit from the list – ours is the Charge 4 (see screenshot below left).

Scroll through the list of available devices and tap yours, then tap Set Up. The app will now want to pair with the Fitbit, for which it needs permission. Tap the notification to permit the connection and read through what happens when you connect the watch to the app.

Again, as the data involved will relate to your relative rather than yourself, you should make sure they understand the implications before going any further. Scroll through the explanation and, if you're happy with its contents, tap I Agree.

You now need to charge your Fitbit, during which the app on your phone will keep an eye out for it. When the Fitbit has sufficient charge, the two will connect.

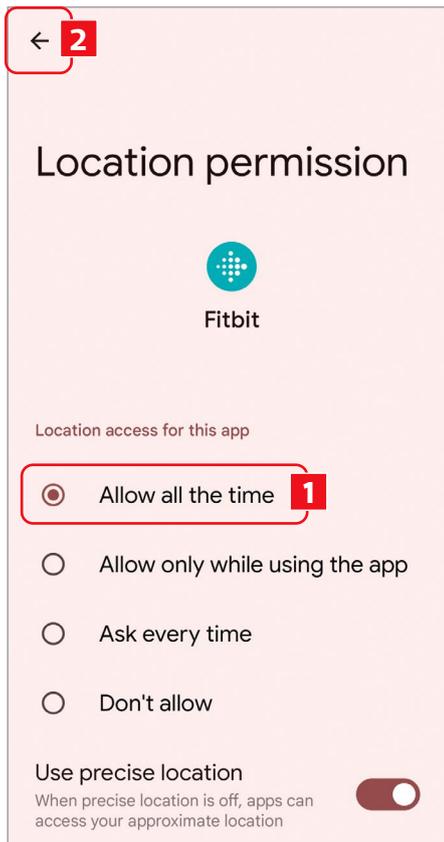
Different trackers – even within the Fitbit range – have different ways of charging, so check the specific instructions for the tracker you've bought. The Charge 4 connects via USB to a standard charging plug, with the cable clamping around the back of the watch.

Before connecting the two for the first

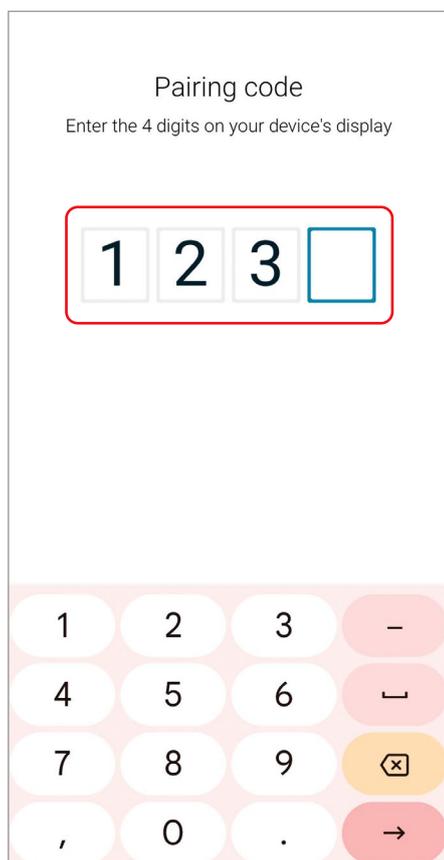
time, take a look at the back of the Fitbit and, as well as the sensors for measuring biometric activity, you'll see three copper contacts (pictured above left). Align these with the connectors on the clamp (there are only two, for the outermost connectors on the Fitbit), and snap them together (pictured above). Connect the other end of the cable to a USB charger.

Tap 'Continue' in the app, then enable location services. On an Android device, as we're using here, tap Location Permission, followed by 'While using the app'. Next, tap Background Location Permission and change the setting from 'Allow only while using the app' to 'Allow all the time' (1 in our screenshot above right). This gives the app permission to track the user's location all the time, even if the app is closed. Now tap the left-pointing arrow (2) to go back to the previous screen.

Tap 'Done' and the phone will search for the Fitbit using Bluetooth. When the two spot each other, the phone will display a four-digit code (see screenshot right). If you've ever paired your phone



Allow the app to track the Fitbit device to monitor its wearer's movements



Type the code displayed on the Fitbit into the app to pair the two

with an in-car entertainment system, you may have seen something similar, where the code is used as a simple security mechanism to make sure you're connecting the correct two devices. Type the code into the app and your phone will complete the pairing process.

You'll now be offered the chance to be notified if the Fitbit spots signs of atrial fibrillation (Afib) – also known as irregular heartbeat. These notifications have, it says, been validated in a clinical study with nearly half a million participants, and have a '98.2% positive predictive value'. You'll have to decide for yourself whether you want to enable this, but as it may indicate future strokes, heart failure or other complications it's something we consider worthwhile.

We've therefore opted to enable it by tapping 'Get started' and entering the date of birth of the person wearing the Fitbit, and whether or not they've been diagnosed with Afib. You'll need to read through another short screen about how the associated data is used. If you're happy with what it says, tap Allow, then tap through the rest of the instructions.

Tap the 'x' to close the Afib section, then tap Next to bypass the page advertising new features. You'll now be given the option to monitor your Oxygen saturation level (SpO2). You may remember the importance of a healthy blood-oxygen level from the Covid pandemic, when some people bought a finger sensor to take their own readings. As it has direct contact with the skin while being worn, Fitbit can do this for you.

Once you've tapped Next to disconnect the Fitbit from the charging cable, put it on your relative's wrist. Now keep tapping Next until you reach the end of the instructions, at which point you'll be offered the chance to sign up for Fitbit Premium. You get 90 days free, after which it costs £95.88 a year or £7.99 a month. This buys you guided workouts, meditation and mindfulness content, recipes, and wellness reports. If you prefer not to take up the offer, tap the 'x' at the top of the screen. You

don't need Fitbit Premium for what we're doing here.

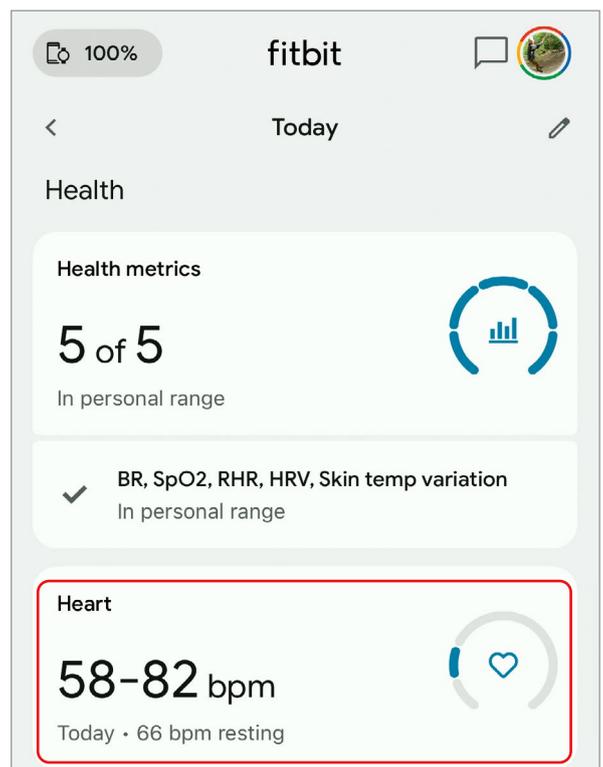
3 Download the app and monitor your relative's dashboard

Now that the Fitbit is connected to your relative's phone, it will count their steps and monitor their heart rate, automatically synchronising its data at regular intervals whenever the two are in range. This data will be uploaded to the cloud, where you can monitor it through a browser by logging into the same account at www.fitbit.com.

However, monitoring is far more convenient if you set up another phone with the Fitbit app, and log into the same account as your relative.

Download the app to your own phone using the links mentioned earlier and log in using the address you set up for your relative. This will take you to the dashboard that's already linked to their Fitbit. Your phone will download data from the Fitbit on roughly the same schedule as it's uploaded from your relative.

This way, you can check that they are still moving around at regular intervals. Scroll down and you'll see their average heart rate for the day (see screenshot below), plus other information such as how long they slept for – assuming they wore the Fitbit to bed – and how many steps they took.



The app's dashboard shows your relative's average heart rate

Workshop

Stop your neighbours using your Wi-Fi

What you need: Broadband router

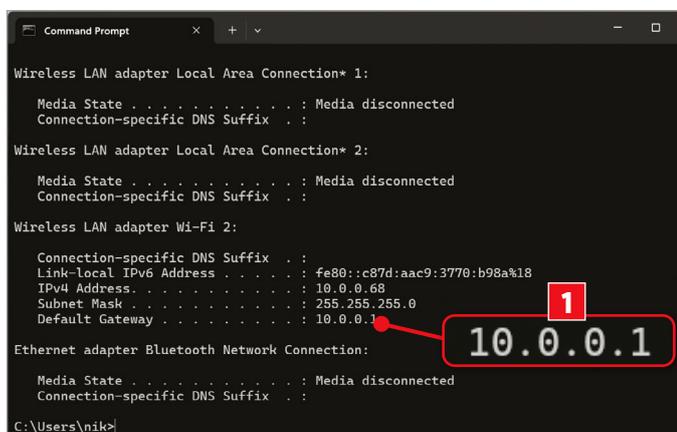
Time required: 60 minutes

Unless you live in a remote area, your Wi-Fi signal will almost certainly stray into your neighbour's home. As long as you've set a strong password, it shouldn't be easy for neighbours to 'piggyback' on to your broadband network – but it may still be possible. So it's worth checking which devices are connected to your router on a regular basis so you

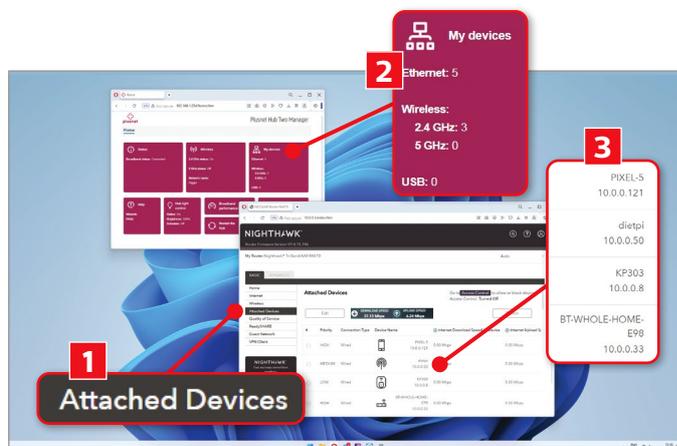
familiarise yourself with what devices should (and shouldn't) be connected. Here we'll explain how to do that and block any unauthorised devices to stop them downloading content or accessing dubious websites over your connection. We're using a Netgear router so the options on your router may vary slightly but should be broadly similar.



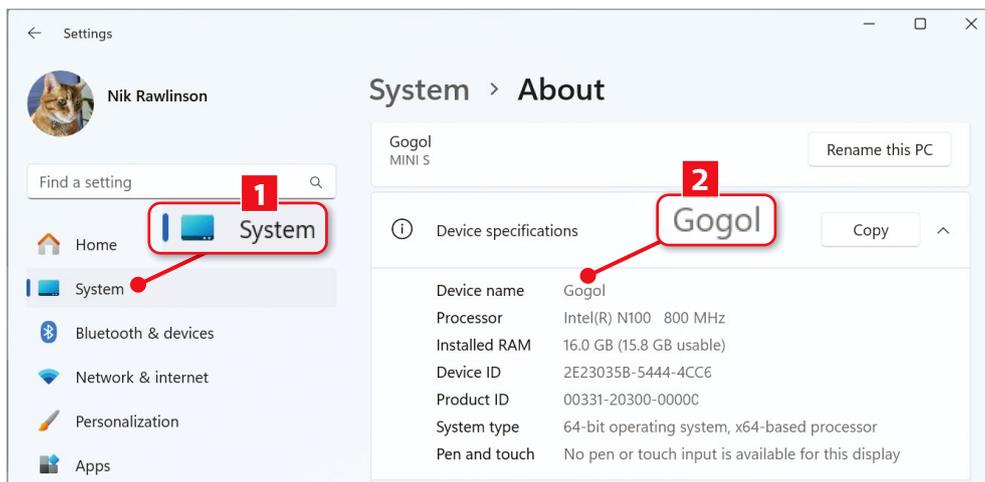
STEP 1 Open a browser and log into your router. If you don't know its IP address and you use a Netgear router, visit <https://routerlogin.net>. Alternatively, press the Windows key and type `cmd`, then press Enter. In Command Prompt, type `ipconfig` and press Enter again, then look for the four sets of digits beside Default Gateway **1**. These will typically be 192.168.1.1, 192.168.1.254 or 10.0.0.1. Type the correct IP address into your browser's address bar, then use the admin password from the label on your router to log in.

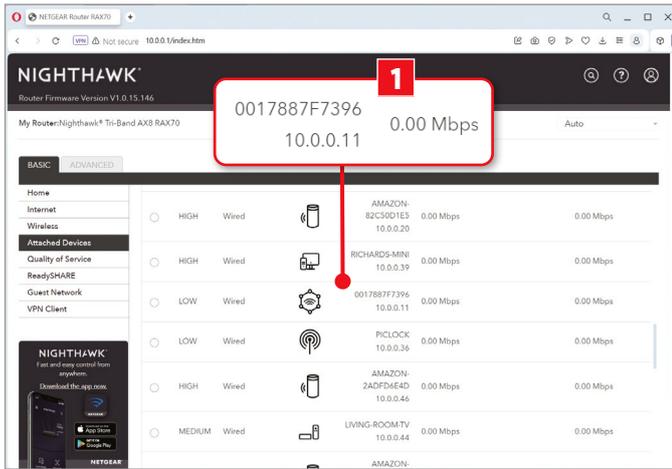


STEP 2 On the router's dashboard look for 'DHCP table', 'Client list', 'Attached devices' or similar. On the Netgear router we're using, the list of devices connected to our network is found via Attached Devices **1**. We've also got a Plusnet router, where we can see the devices by clicking 'My devices' **2**. Check through the list for anything that looks suspicious. In our Netgear router, the fourth column is most useful because it shows the names of our attached devices **3**.

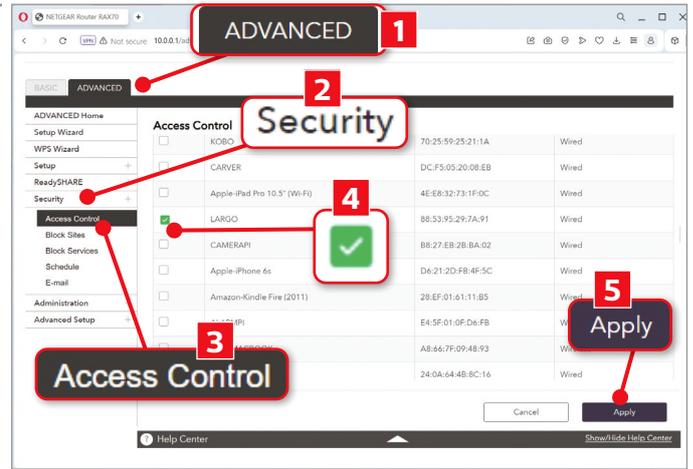


STEP 3 Check the names of each of the computers on your network so you can match them to device names on the list. To find a computer's name, open Settings by pressing Windows key+I, then click System **1** followed by About. Our computer is called Gogol **2** (nothing to do with Google: every PC on our network is named after a James Bond adversary – Drax, Elektra, Largo, Stromberg, Carver, Silva and several others appear elsewhere on my network).

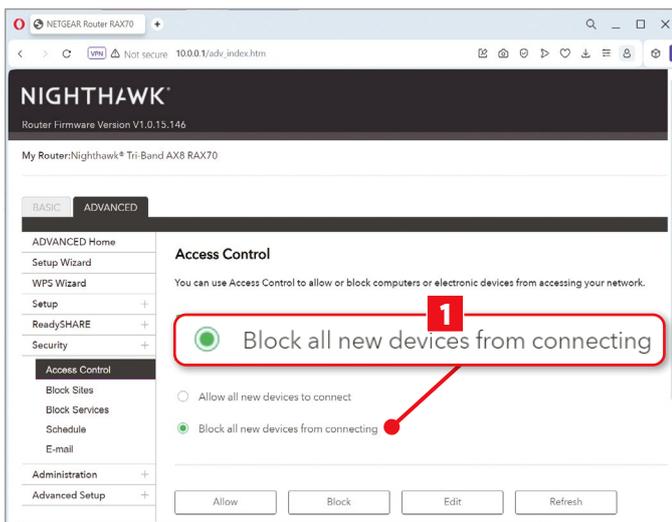




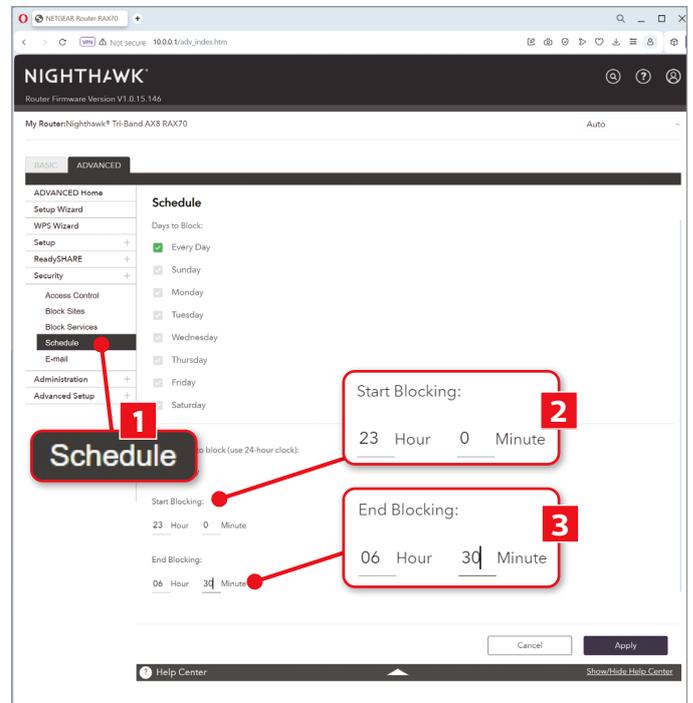
STEP 4 Sometimes it's impossible to identify a device from its name. Try typing its address into a browser tab. On our network, we have a device called 0017887F7396 located at the address 10.0.0.11 **1**. Typing this IP address into our browser's address bar brings up an **open-source** information page for Philips' hue lighting. As we have three hue bulbs on the network, we know that this is unlikely to be an intruder.



STEP 5 If your investigations fail to identify a device on your network, make a note of its IP address and temporarily add it to your router's block list. The location of your block list depends on the make and model of your router. On our Netgear router, we reach it by clicking the Advanced tab **1**, expanding the Security section **2** (by clicking the plus sign next to it) and clicking Access Control **3**. We then tick the box beside any device that we think shouldn't be on the network **4**, followed by Block, then Apply **5**.



STEP 6 If you recognise every device on your network and have no plans to add anything new in the near future, you can save yourself from having to return and check the list of attached devices at regular intervals by blocking all new devices (if your router allows this). On our Netgear router, we found this option in the same Access Control section used in Step 5. Click 'Block all new devices from connecting' **1** (or similar, assuming your router has this option) followed by Apply.



STEP 7 As it's unlikely you'll be monitoring for rogue devices after bedtime, a malicious user might try connecting only late at night (particularly if they're using your broadband to download films or other large files unattended). Use your router's parental controls or schedule option **1** to turn off your Wi-Fi automatically just before bedtime **2**, and back on shortly before you typically wake up **3**.

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Use 'Toilet Finder' app in satellite view

Thanks for telling us about the Toilet Finder app (Issue 680, page 55), which has already proved useful several times during various trips in our campervan.

One tip that might help others is to view the app's map in a satellite view, rather than the flat map graphic. Satellite view depicts roads and buildings as they really are, albeit from a bird's-eye view. I've always found this view an easier navigational tool on Google Maps.

Install the app (Android www.snipca.com/49596; iOS www.snipca.com/49597), then make a note on the map of where your nearest toilet is. Now click Add at the bottom. This is the option for adding a toilet to the app's list, but you don't need to do this. Instead tap the icon at the top left (1 in our screenshot) and you'll



open satellite view 2.

The icon on the screen 3 is for adding a new toilet, rather than showing an existing one. So ignore that icon, remember where the toilet is on the map when you viewed it earlier, and find it by moving the screen around with your finger.

Paul Sallis

Paul wins a copy of our 2023 Back Issue CD

Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/48860



WEBSITE

Create and edit vector graphics online

✓ You're right to recommend InkScape (www.snipca.com/49836) as an excellent beginner's tool for learning about vector graphics (Issue 682, page 20). But another option is to choose an online tool so you don't need to download any software.

I use the site Vectr (<https://vectr.com>), which gives you 30MB storage for free. You do have to put up with adverts on the free tier, but they're not intrusive. All the basic



features a beginner will need, such as freehand drawing tools, adding shapes (pictured below) and removing layers, are available in the free version too. Unsurprisingly, most of the advanced tools you have to pay for appear to be related to AI.

Patrick Miller

TV

Use a satellite receiver to find more channels

✓ I was interested to read in Issue 681 (page 9) about the new 'Great!' channels to watch on Freeview and Freesat. However, I've found recently that my channels have started to go missing, such as the film channels 302, 303, 304 and 305.

With this in mind, I started to look around for a viable alternative



and found there are many more channels available should you obtain a different satellite receiver connected to the same dish. I purchased an iView-HD DVB-T2 & S2 combination for £39.95 (www.snipca.com/50095, pictured above). It reveals several different satellites with hundreds of free-to-air choices, and you can record on to a memory stick. You can also connect it to a standard TV aerial. It's very good value for money.

Stephen Preston

Why I stopped using...

Ring video doorbells

✓ I realise subscription prices have to rise occasionally, but no way was I going to put up with the scandalous 43-per-cent increase Ring imposed on us earlier this year. As soon as I read about this I started looking for replacements.

And what I use instead...

In Issue 679's feature on ditching Ring (page 60)



you recommended plenty of decent doorbells, and I was tempted by Eufy's E340 model (www.snipca.com/48984). But at £116 it was a little pricey, so I bought the EZVIZ DB2 doorbell instead for £80 (www.snipca.com/50099, pictured).

It lets you slot in a microSD card to save video footage, so I won't be caught out again by above-inflation price rises. Screwing it to

the wall is easy, and it comes with a chime so you don't need to worry about making another purchase.

I was worried that video footage would be less clear than on my old Ring, but I've found the 1920x1444-pixel resolution to be sharp enough, even in night mode. It has a wide field of view too, at 176 degrees. You get a 'ping' on the app whenever someone presses the bell.

Simon Barrow

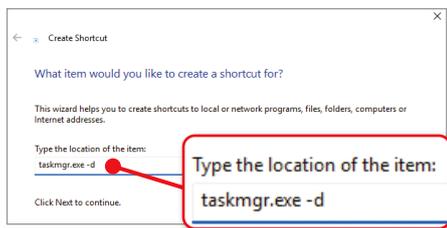
✉ Tell us why you stopped using a website, app or program: letters@computeractive.co.uk

WINDOWS

Make a right-click shortcut for old Task Manager

✓ Issue 682's Make Windows Better (page 46) explained how to add the old Task Manager to Windows 11. A follow-up tip is to create a right-click option to launch it. Right-click a blank space on your desktop, then select New followed by Shortcut. Now type **taskmgr.exe -d** in the location field of the Create Shortcut window (see screenshot below). Select Next, give this shortcut a name, then click Finish.

Jeff Steadman



Reader recommends...

Selvim phone camera lens kit

£169 from Amazon www.snipca.com/50102

✓ I bought this camera lens kit because I wanted the 25x **macro lens** to replace my existing clip, which isn't powerful enough. The adapter and four lenses come in a superb case (pictured below), with caps at both ends of each lens. There's even enough storage for the two USB sticks I usually carry. All the lenses work fine on my budget Android phone, and it's lots of fun using the kaleidoscope



lens – as you can see from the flower photo (right). It's worth reading the Amazon reviews, though, as it appears not to work with some phones.

Chris Adam

✉ Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers? Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

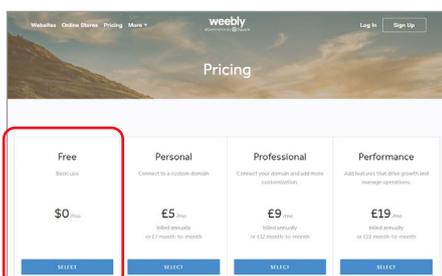
WEBSITE

Get free hosting with Weebly

✓ I'm writing in response to Rod Fielding's enquiry in Issue 678's Problems Solved, page 67, ('Can I get website domain *and* hosting services?'). Since 2015, I've been the administrator of my bowling club website (www.clockhousebowlingclub.co.uk). I purchased the **domain** name from Easily (<https://easily.uk>) and went searching for free hosting to set up the website. I chose Weebly (www.weebly.com), which means for the past nine years I've only had the domain name to pay for.

A couple of years ago, I opened a secondary site to allow our tournament secretary to run the club tournament as editor, with draws and results. The only thing lacking was members-only private access, which would have required upgrading to a monthly fee.

However, I got around this problem by using another freebie site, called Padlet (<https://padlet.com>). This is a tool for teachers and students to create and share digital content. I created a notice board



linked from our website with password access to members.

The last time I looked, Weebly's free hosting was still available – it's on the left at www.weebly.com/uk/pricing (pictured below left). I've been pleased with the results and even more so with the savings.

Bob Pudney

APPS

Use MapFactor Navigation for road maps

✓ I saw that you recommended the 'Here WeGo Maps & Navigation' app (www.snipca.com/50097) as a free alternative to Google Maps (Issue 680, page 55). I'd like to suggest MapFactor Navigator instead (www.snipca.com/50098), which I've been using for years.

The maps are from the excellent OpenStreetMap, with comprehensive worldwide coverage. You just download the maps you want, and then easily delete them once they're no longer needed.

It's easy to use, with a gentle learning curve, and clearly displays your speed and the limit of the road you're on. It can also show the time when you'll arrive at your destination, how long it'll take to get there, and how far to the next waypoint (see screenshot above right).

It's free except for live traffic updates and TomTom **sat-nav** maps, which you have to pay for. You can also buy a Pro



version with extra features, which I always see as a plus because it means there's a viable business behind it.

It can run in your car entirely offline if you don't need traffic updates and you have downloaded the maps before your journey.

One feature I particularly like is that you can simply tap to reverse a route, taking you back home.

Tom Boyd

Browser Tips

CHROME

Turn any website into a desktop app

A few years ago, progressive web apps (PWAs) were touted as the future of the web – we wrote a feature about them in Issue 619 (page 60). These effectively turn websites into apps, which you can launch from your desktop without opening your browser first.

Although Chrome, Edge and Brave support PWAs, the popularity of the technology has been limited by the lack of compatible sites. You may have noticed

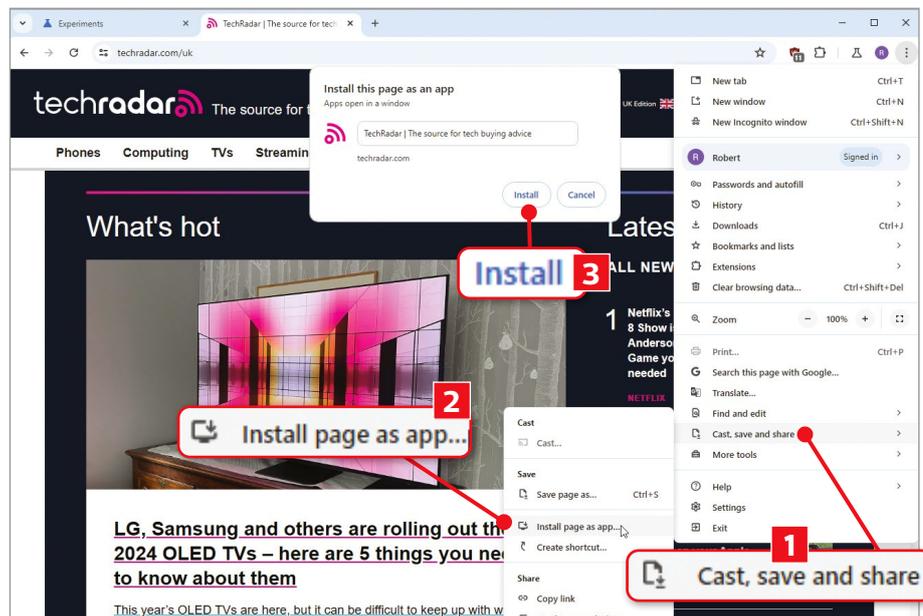
an 'Install [site name]' icon in your address bar on websites including Argos, Outlook, Google Drive, YouTube and X (formerly Twitter), to indicate PWA support, but most sites haven't yet added the option.

To remedy this, Google is testing a feature in Chrome that lets you turn *any* website into a desktop app, whether it supports PWAs or not. To try the option, type `chrome://flags` into the browser's address bar and press Enter to load the Experiments page. Find the entry **Web App Universal Install**, select Enabled in its

dropdown menu and click Relaunch.

When Chrome reopens, browse to a site you'd like to create an app for, then click the three-dot menu and choose 'Cast, save and share' (1 in our screenshot below left). Select 'Install page as app' (2) or 'Install [site name]', and click Install (3) to turn the site into a PWA. It will then open in a new app window outside the browser.

Windows will add a shortcut to the app to your desktop and Start menu, and also offer to place one on your taskbar. PWAs can be uninstalled in the same way as other Windows apps, or by clicking the three-dot icon on their toolbar and choosing 'Uninstall [site name]'.



FIREFOX

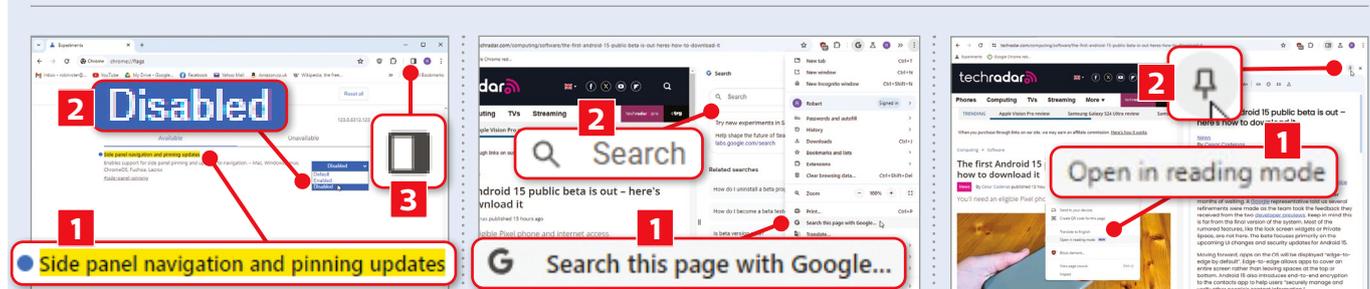
Search the web privately with Qwant

Mozilla has announced a new partnership between its Firefox browser and the privacy-focused search engine Qwant, stating that they are both "committed to protecting your privacy and preserving the decentralised nature of the web" (www.snipca.com/50058). Unlike Google and Bing, Qwant doesn't track your searches, collect your personal data or target you with adverts.

As a result of this partnership, Qwant will soon be added to Firefox's choice of default search engines, alongside Google, Bing and DuckDuckGo, as well as to the 'This time search with' options in the

WORKSHOP Restore the 'Side panel' button to Chrome

Chrome version 123, released in March, removed the 'Side panel' button from the browser. You can restore this if you miss it, or access its features individually – here's what you need to do.



1 To restore the 'Side panel' button, type `chrome://flags` in Chrome's address bar and press Enter. Find the experiment **Side panel navigation and pinning updates** (1), select Disabled in its dropdown menu (2) and click Relaunch – the button will now be back in the top-right corner (3).

2 Alternatively, you can do without the 'Side panel' button and access some of its features individually. For example, to open the Search panel, click the three-dot menu button and choose 'Search this page with Google' (1). This lets you search the current page (2) without opening a new tab.

3 To access the Side panel's 'Reading mode', which displays text-only versions of pages, either select 'More tools' then 'Reading mode' in the three-dot menu, or right-click the page and choose 'Open in reading mode' (1). Click the Pin icon (2) to add a reading-mode button to your toolbar.

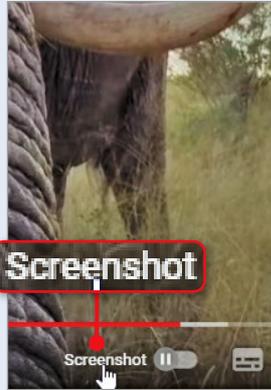
BEST EXTENSION FOR...

Taking screenshots of YouTube videos

Screenshot YouTube Chromium

www.snipca.com/50064

As we explained in Issue 678 (page 42), YouTube now has a secret option for taking screenshots. It's rather fiddly though. You need to right-click a video twice, choose 'Save video frame as', then give the image an identifiable name – so it's not just called



'videoframe[number]' – and save it as a PNG file.

Screenshot YouTube makes things much easier by adding a Screenshot button to the video player's controls (see screenshot). Click this button and the extension will instantly capture and download a PNG of the current video frame. It also names the file using the title of the video and a timestamp

of the moment the grab was captured. Go into Options to set up a keyboard shortcut for screenshots and to change the default image format.

If you don't like that, try... YouTube Screenshot Button Firefox

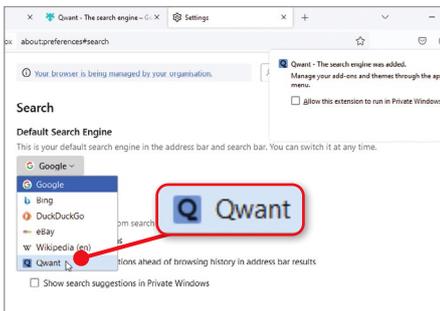
Firefox

www.snipca.com/50065

This add-on brings the same function to Firefox, adding a Screenshot button to the YouTube player that captures grabs in PNG or JPEG format.

dropdown address-bar menu. In fact, Qwant may already be listed by the time you read this – like it is in the Firefox mobile app.

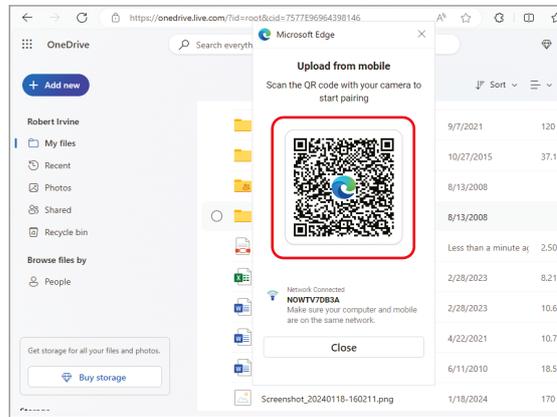
In the meantime, you can manually add the search engine by visiting www.qwant.com and clicking the 'Add Qwant to Firefox' button in the top-right corner. When the Qwant add-on page opens, click 'Add to Firefox' then Add. Qwant will now appear in the Default Search Engine list in the browser's Search settings (see screenshot below), where you can choose whether to set it as your main search provider.



EDGE

Upload photos directly from your phone

A handy new feature in Edge makes it easier to upload photos, documents and other files stored on your phone to websites you're browsing on your PC. The clever part is that you don't need to use a file-sharing app or online-storage service, and there's no restriction on file size. The only requirement is that



both devices are connected to the same Wi-Fi network.

When you click the button to upload files to a site you're viewing in Edge, whether it's labelled Upload, Attach or Add Files, you'll now see a new 'Upload from mobile' option next to the Open button. Click this and Edge will prompt you to scan a QR code with your phone's camera (see screenshot above). Tap the link that appears to open a confirmation page in your mobile browser, then click Confirm in Edge to pair your PC and phone.

Once this is done, tap the 'Upload files' button on your mobile device and select the item you want to upload. Click 'Confirm' in Edge on your desktop to upload the file to the website.

If Edge is your mobile browser, there's no limit on the number of files you can upload, but with other browsers you're limited to 10. Uploaded files are also saved to a folder on your PC, called UploadFromMobile. This is created in your Downloads folder and gives you an offline backup of all the files transferred from your phone.

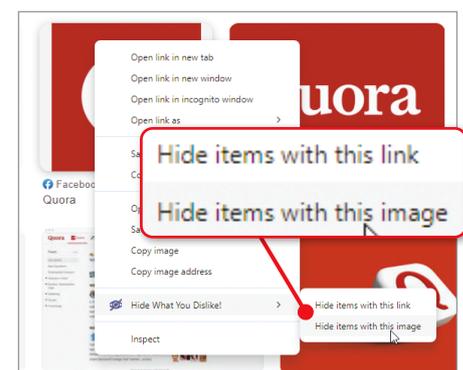
CHROMIUM

Hide websites and images you don't like

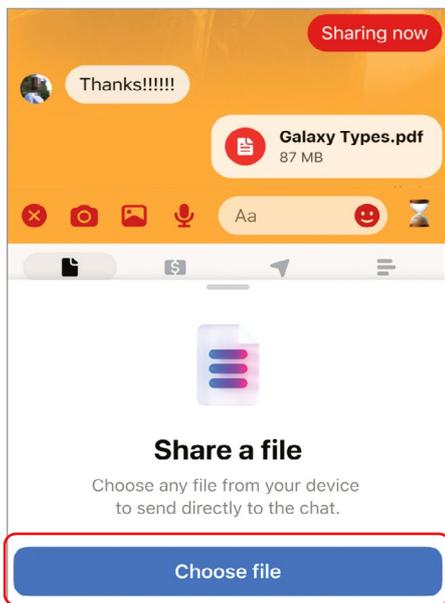
A new extension called Hide What You Dislike (www.snipca.com/50063) lets you remove unwanted elements from web pages – not ads and trackers, but items that personally annoy you. These could include useless sites that keep appearing in your search results, YouTube channels you never want to watch again or even irritating images you're tired of seeing.

Simply right-click the annoyance, select Hide What You Dislike and choose either 'Hide items with this link' or 'Hide items with this image' (see screenshot below). The unwanted item will instantly disappear without you needing to refresh the page, and all instances of it will be hidden across the web.

If you change your mind, go into the extension's Options and either remove specific items from your blocklist or click 'Delete all entries' to unhide everything. You can sync the blocklist across devices by signing into your Google account, but this isn't essential.



Brilliant things to do on your device



chats, rather than defaulting to standard definition (SD).

When you tap the picture button next to the message box and select an image you want to share, you should now see an HD button in the top-right corner of the photo grid. Tap this to send a high-quality version of the picture, along with any other images you select.

It's also now possible to create shared albums of photos in group chats, which members can contribute to. Either choose several pictures in the grid and tap 'Create album', or long-press a photo in a chat to access the option. Tap 'Add to album' to add a picture to an existing album.

Additionally, Messenger now lets you share large documents and other files directly in chats. Tap the new plus button next to the message box, then 'Choose file' (see screenshot above). The feature supports formats including Word, Excel and PDF, up to a maximum file size of 100MB. The new options are being rolled out gradually, so you may not see them all yet.

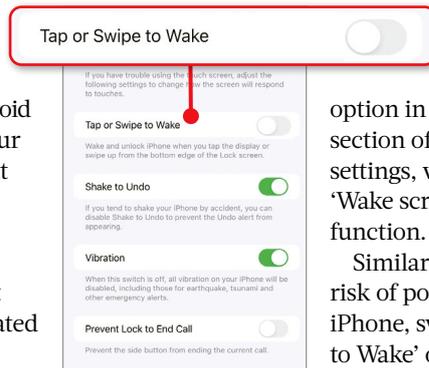
ANDROID & iOS Avoid making accidental phone calls

One of the more embarrassing tech-based mishaps you can experience is accidentally calling someone without realising when your phone is in your pocket or bag – a blunder known as 'pocket dialling' or 'butt dialling'. Samsung Galaxy devices have an option designed to prevent this. Go to Settings then Display and switch on 'Accidental touch protection'. This will "protect your phone from accidental touches when it's in a

dark place, such as a pocket or bag".

To solve the problem on other Android phones, always lock your device before you put it in your pocket or bag, preferably with a long PIN or passcode or a **biometric** method that will stop it being activated unintentionally.

You should also disable any settings that could unlock your screen and trigger a call. For example, some Android phones have a 'Lift to



check phone' or 'Double tap to check phone'

option in the 'Lock screen' section of their Display settings, while others have a 'Wake screen for notifications' function.

Similarly, to reduce the risk of pocket-dialling on an iPhone, switch off the 'Raise to Wake' option in your 'Display & Brightness' settings. Also go into your Accessibility settings, select Touch and disable 'Tap or Swipe to Wake' (see screenshot above).

BEST APPS FOR...

Amateur gardeners

Gardenize

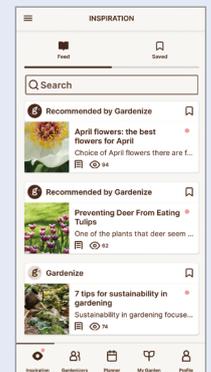
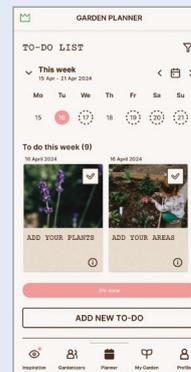
Free*

Android www.snipca.com/50103

iOS www.snipca.com/50104

Gardenize helps you keep track of everything you've planted in your garden and where. Its handy calendar lets you create to-do lists, tick off tasks as you complete them, set up reminders and save notes and photos. Specify your gardening interests, location and available space to view relevant info.

Best For Managing your garden



PictureThis

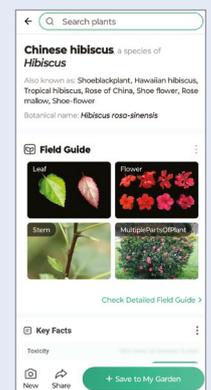
Free*

Android www.snipca.com/50105

iOS www.snipca.com/50106

Many gardening apps offer plant identifiers, but PictureThis is the most comprehensive and accurate. It doesn't just name plants, trees, flowers and vegetables from your photos and descriptions, but explains how to care for them and provides lots of interesting info. You need to pay to use all its features after a seven-day free trial.

Best For Learning more about plants



Iris

Free

Android www.snipca.com/50100

iOS www.snipca.com/50101

This community app for gardeners lets you share photos of your flowers and plants, and browse pictures shared by other users. Iris also helps you identify species you've spotted, get care tips for things you're growing and request expert advice from its plant doctors. You need to register for an account, but it's completely free to use.

Best For Gardening advice and ideas



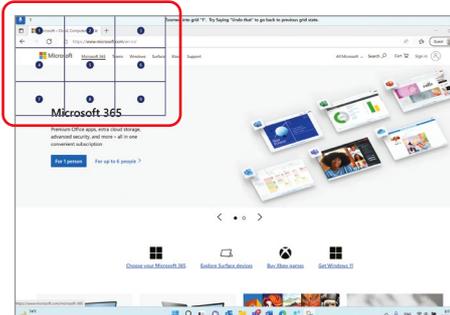
*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 11

Control your cursor using your voice

Another new feature in Moment 5 (see right) is a grid that lets you use your voice to move your mouse to a specific part of your screen. If you haven't set up 'voice access', search for it in Windows then open it. You'll then need to click Download at the top and follow the instructions to install.

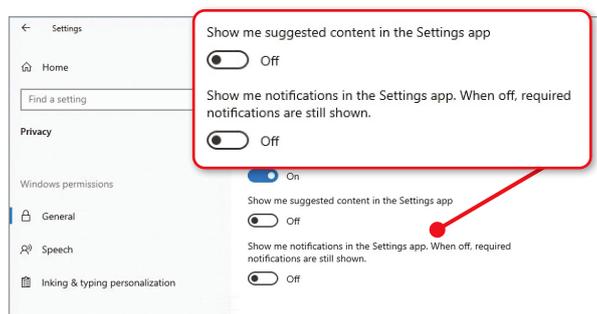
Once complete, say "voice access wake up". Say "mouse grid" and a 3x3 grid will appear on your screen, numbered 1-9. Now say which numbered box you want your cursor to move to – for example, "mouse grid one". The cursor will then move to that part of the screen, inside a smaller 3x3 grid. In our example (pictured below), we've said "mouse grid one", which moved the cursor to the top-left of the screen. If we now said "mouse grid one one" or "mouse grid eleven" our cursor would move to the top-left square on an even smaller grid. You can reverse any action by saying "Undo that".



WINDOWS 10

Disable Microsoft's 'switch from local account' nags

With the next Patch Tuesday update, released on 14 May, Microsoft will start nagging you to switch from a local account to an online one. The message appears at the top of the Settings app and Start menu, saying that an online account lets you "back up your files and photos to keep them more secure".



WINDOWS 11

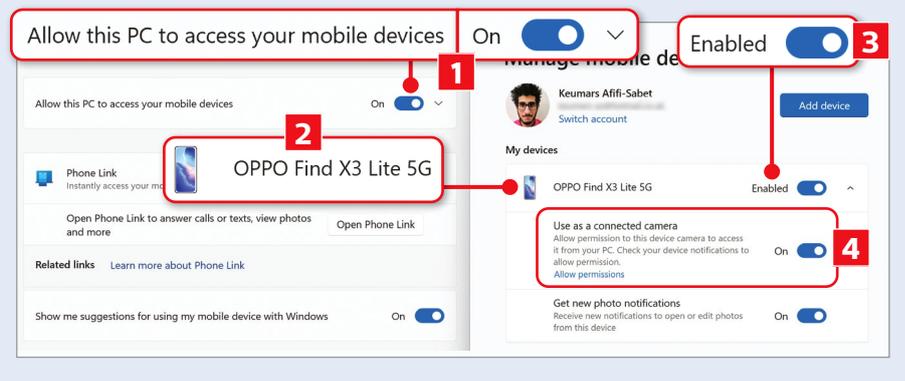
Use your Android phone/tablet as a webcam on your computer

Windows 11's Moment 5 update, which Microsoft is rolling out to all computers, lets you connect your Android phone or tablet to your Windows 11 PC. This means you can use your device as a webcam when making video calls.

First, tap Windows key+I to open Settings, then click 'Bluetooth & devices'. Now select 'Mobile devices' then switch on the slider next to 'Allow this PC to access your mobile devices' (1 in our screenshot). Now follow the instructions on screen – as described in

Issue 679's Make Windows Better.

You also need to download Microsoft's 'Link to Windows' from the Google Play Store (www.snipca.com/49431) to your phone/tablet. Once you've completed this setup process, click 'Manage mobile devices' on your computer and your phone/tablet will appear in the list (2). Make sure the top slider is set to 'Enabled' (3) and the slider next to 'Use as a connected camera' is set to On (4). Your phone/tablet needs to be running Android 9.0 (released in 2018) or later.

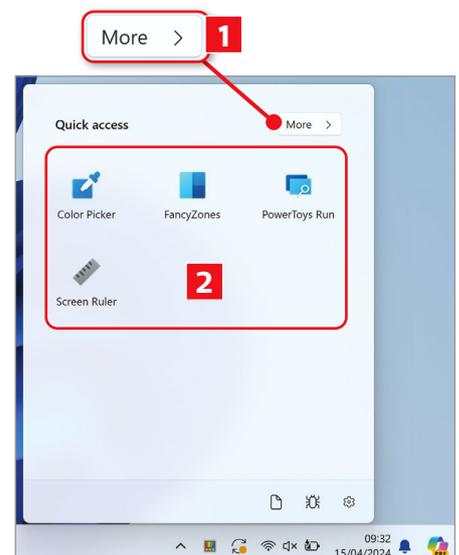


If you're happy with a local account and want to turn off this message, open Settings (press Windows key+I), then select Privacy. Now click General, then turn off both these options: 'Show me suggested content in the Settings app' and 'Show me notifications in the Settings app'. When off, required notifications are still shown (see screenshot below left). The latter option also appears in the Start, Personalisation section of Settings, so go there and turn it off. Finally, reboot your PC.

WINDOWS 10 & 11

Access favourite PowerToys tools by right-clicking

PowerToys 0.80, released in February, now lets you open the 'Quick access' box by right-clicking the icon in your system tray, bottom right of your desktop. This box contains your favourite PowerToys, making it quick and easy to open them.



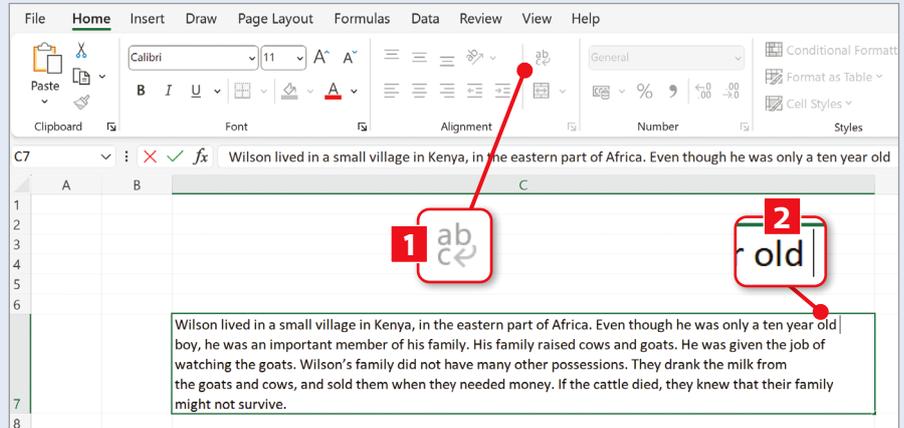
Right-click the icon, select 'Quick access' and the box will appear. You can choose which PowerToys tools are shown there by clicking More (1 in our screenshot above) and switching on the sliders next to them. We've chosen Color Picker, FancyZones, PowerToys Run and Screen Ruler (2).

MICROSOFT EXCEL

Wrap your text 'manually' in cells

X When writing in a spreadsheet, you can make sure that the text you enter into a cell fits over several lines by either clicking the Wrap Text button (1 in our screenshot), or by pressing the Alt+H+W keyboard shortcut. This way, instead of making a cell wider than you would like it to be, you can increase its height and split text over several lines.

But wrapping text in this way doesn't give you control over where the lines are split. Instead, consider using the Alt+Enter shortcut to create a new line break. To do this, left-click between two words in your passage – you will see your text-input cursor appear (2



– and press Alt+Enter. In our example, we added a break after the words 'old', 'of', 'from' and 'family', at the end of each line.

The Alt+Enter shortcut also works in OnlyOffice, while in LibreOffice Calc you need to press Ctrl+Enter.

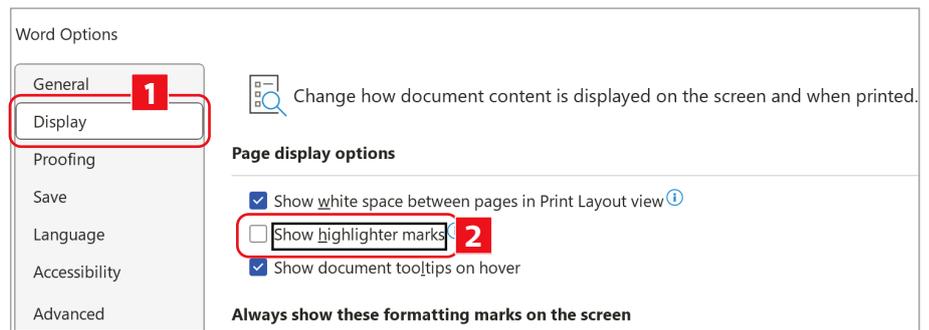
LIBREOFFICE WRITER

Embed fonts in documents to avoid problems when sharing

W If you feel the selection of available fonts in LibreOffice Writer is too limited, you can add new ones. Visit www.snipca.com/50084, select a font you like, then click Download Font. Extract the ZIP file, then highlight all the TTF files within, right-click the selection then click Install. In our example, we added the Caladea font and typed some text using it (1 in our screenshot below).



If you want to share a document using a new font with someone on a different PC, you'll have to embed the font so they'll be able to open the document without experiencing any problems. Click File at the top left, then 'Properties...'. Now click the Font tab (2 in the box that appears, then tick 'Embed fonts in the document' (3. Save your document by pressing Ctrl+S and it can now be shared with and read by others.



MICROSOFT WORD

Turn off highlighted text to make documents easier to read

W You can highlight passages in Word documents for future reference, but add too many and it can make the document hard to read. A quick solution is to temporarily hide all highlighted passages. First click File at the top, then Options at the bottom. In the box that appears click Display on the left (1 in our screenshot above) then untick 'Show highlighter marks' (2. Click OK and all the text you have highlighted will no longer be marked. Tick the box to see the highlighted text again.

ONLYOFFICE

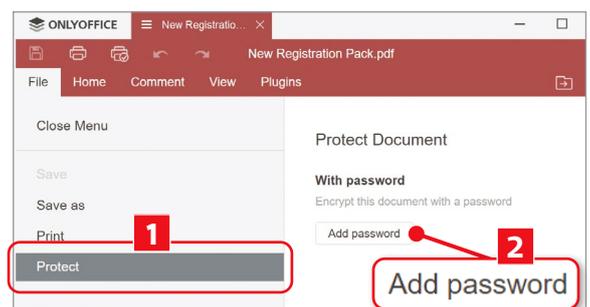
Password-protect your PDFs

Version 8.0 of OnlyOffice, released in February, adds

plenty of features to make it easier to create and use PDFs. One of the most useful is locking a PDF behind a password.

To do this, click File then Protect (1 in our screenshot below). Click the 'Add password' button on the right (2. Now type your password in the Password field, then re-type it in the 'Repeat password' field. Click OK to confirm.

Make sure to write this password down in a secure place, because it cannot be recovered if you lose it.



In The Club



Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Create a quiz in Google Slides

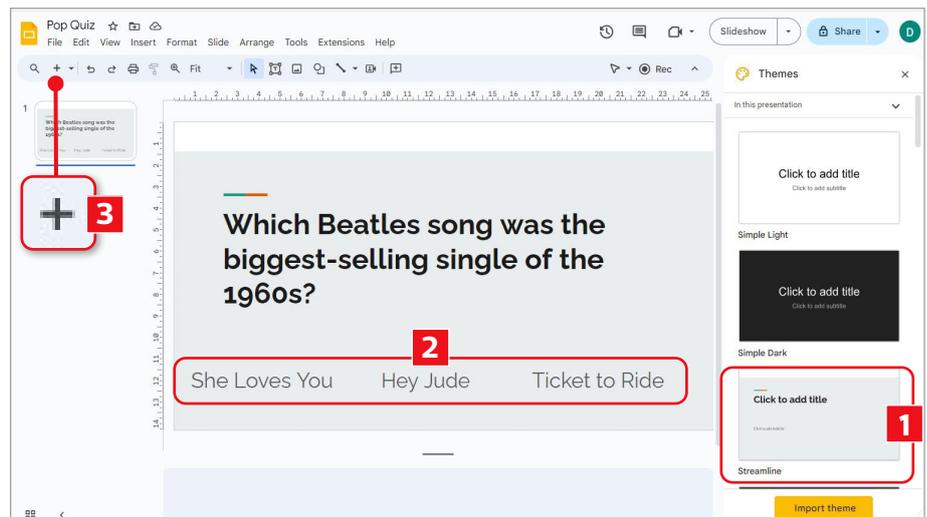
A fun way to make your virtual club meetings more enjoyable is to run an online quiz. Members can play individually or split into teams from the comfort of their own homes. There are dedicated pieces of software designed to make a quiz, but these are often costly and frankly too complicated for what most people need.

As an alternative we recommend building a quiz using Google Slides, which is free and easy to use. Also, many people these days have a Gmail address – or can easily create one – so your quiz will be widely accessible. It all works within a web browser, so contestants can either load the quiz themselves or you could present it to the whole group and act as quiz master during the meeting.

Choose your template and add questions

If you don't have a Google account, create one at www.snipca.com/50086. Now visit www.google.com/slides, or click New at the top left of Google Drive and select 'Google Slides'. It doesn't have a quiz option built in, but creating one yourself is simply a matter of typing a question followed by multiple-choice answers. You also need pages for right and wrong answers.

Start with your question page. Open Slides, then click File at the top left, followed by New, then Presentation. Now type your first question, choosing a template by scrolling down on the right. We've chosen the Streamline template,



Select a template then write your question and add multiple-choice answers below

which has a pale grey background and the Raleway font (1 in our screenshot above). We've added multiple-choice answers under the question (2). Now click the plus (+) symbol at the top left twice (3) and create a slide saying the answer is correct and another saying it's incorrect.

Link your answers to correct/incorrect slides

Now you need to link the three answers in your original slide to the relevant correct/incorrect slide. Select the correct answer (*She Loves You* in our example, 1 in our screenshot below) then click the three vertical dots icon at the top (2). Now click the Link icon (3) and type the slide number that contains the correct answer (for example, *Slide 2*) until it appears in

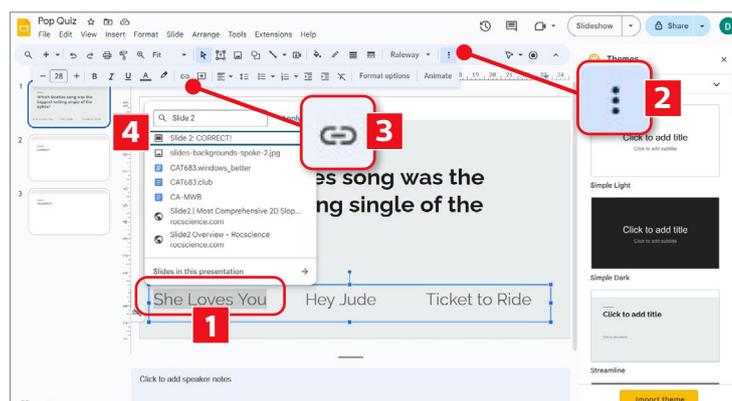
the menu below (4). Click this and the correct answer will be underlined.

Now select the two wrong answers and in the same way link them to your 'incorrect' slide. Note that you should link each wrong answer separately, not together. You can also link an answer by selecting it then pressing Ctrl+K.

You also need to add options on the correct and incorrect pages so contestants know what to do next. For example, the correct slide could have the option to 'Try the next question' – you just need to link this to the slide containing the next question. Following this logic, the incorrect slide could say 'Guess again', returning the contestant to the slide containing the original question.

You can now add more questions to your quiz, linking the answers to the same correct/incorrect slides as described above. The quickest way to do this is to right-click a slide's thumbnail on the left then select 'Duplicate slide'.

Once you've finished, give the presentation a trial run by clicking the Slideshow button at the top right. It'll run full screen, and you'll be able to check that the links go to the right slide by clicking them. Clicking the Share button to the right of Slideshow lets you email the quiz to other people, or copy a link to it which you can paste wherever you want.



Pick each answer then link them to the slide saying 'correct' or 'incorrect'

What's All the Fuss About...



Mona Lisa rapping

Microsoft has built a tool that puts words into your mouth

What is it?

It's what happens when Microsoft creates an AI tool that can add moving lips and speech to a still photo. The 16th-century lady with the enigmatic smile becomes a 21st-century rapper complaining about paparazzi attention.

What's the tool?

It's called VASA-1, and it's been developed by Microsoft Research Asia. They claim the technology can generate "hyper-realistic" talking face videos with "precise lip-audio sync, lifelike facial behaviour, and naturalistic head movements".

Can I watch the Mona Lisa video?

Yes, visit Microsoft's blog (www.snipca.com/50163) and scroll down to the 'Out-of-distribution generalization' heading. You'll also see videos of what look like real people (pictured below), though none of them actually exist. Microsoft created them all using VASA-1.

Do they look realistic?

Yes, extremely. As well as matching the lips to the words, VASA-1 captures subtle facial expressions and natural head movements. So when the talker is thinking their eyes move to the side. Eyebrows rise and heads tilt exactly as



so the talker appears (from left to right) neutral, happy, angry and surprised.

Isn't this all a bit creepy?

Undoubtedly. The videos look highly realistic, but still occupy what's known as the 'uncanny valley'. Coined by renowned Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori in 1978, it describes the unsettling feeling people experience when they see robots or videos that closely resemble humans but aren't completely convincing. However, while VASA-1's videos do start to feel a little odd the closer you study them, they still look authentic enough to be used to spread misinformation.

you'd expect. It can present the same video with left or right eye gazes, so the talker is looking in different directions. But most impressive are the "emotion offsets", which are like applying an emotional filter to a video.

What do you mean?

VASA-1 can tweak a video to express different emotions. The words and talker are the same, but changes in facial mannerisms can give off a specific mood. Look at the series of faces at the bottom of the page. They're all saying the same thing, but VASA-1 has manipulated them

Is Microsoft aware of this?

Yes. It wants VASA-1 to be used only for "positive applications" and says it isn't intended to "create content that is used to mislead or deceive". It does admit though that the tool could be "misused for impersonating humans". VASA-1 will add to worries that fake videos of politicians could be used to influence elections, or scammers could generate videos of loved ones to trick people.

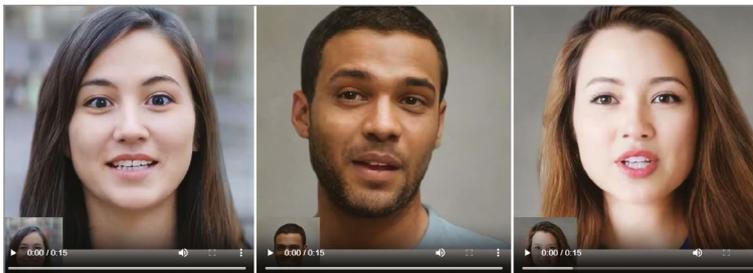
So what are the "positive" ways it could be used?

It could create more realistic lip-syncing for characters in computer games, for example, or for animated characters in films and online videos. Microsoft's ambitions are rather loftier, claiming VASA-1 can help people who find it hard to communicate with others, or offer companionship to those in need.

Will it be made available to the public?

There are no plans to do so, Microsoft says. It's not even ready to be used by software developers. But this technology is coming. Soon we'll all be able to make anyone say anything, except perhaps "Make it all stop!".

None of these people exist, but that doesn't stop them jabbering away



Four emotions in one face: neutral, happy, angry and surprised

SECRET FREE SOFTWARE

You Must Use To Stay 100% Private Online

Don't compromise your privacy by sticking to the same old tools. Robert Irvine reveals the best new ways to block web trackers, protect your data and remain anonymous

Privacy is such an important aspect of our online lives that it's often exploited to promote software that's far from private. "Keep your privacy under control", says the download page for Chrome, despite Google being court-ordered to destroy user data it collected through the browser's **Incognito mode** (www.snipca.com/50181). "Maintain

your online privacy" promises CCleaner, whose privacy policy states that it "collects personal data in order to personalise ads for you" (www.snipca.com/50182).

Popular though these programs are, they undermine your privacy rather than boost it, whereas some lesser-known tools are more trustworthy. Rather than collect and share information about your

web activities, they protect you from companies who engage in intrusive practices by blocking trackers, disguising your identity and letting you easily delete your private data.

In this feature, we reveal the best secret software for staying anonymous online, as well as highlighting new features and hidden privacy settings in programs you may already use.

Unlike Chrome's Incognito mode, which doesn't stop sites collecting your data – as Google now admits (see Issue 677, page 21) – these tools work exactly as promised, allowing you to browse the web discreetly without being spied on.

We've chosen a mix of free Windows software, browser extensions and mobile apps to keep you 100-per-cent private on every device.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Block hidden trackers in web pages, software and mobile apps
- Hide cookie consent pop-ups without accepting tracking cookies
- Conceal your real identity and location from websites
- Encrypt your emails to stop snoops reading their content
- Delete cookies and other browsing data in a single click
- Remove private data from photos you share online

BLOCK ALL TOOLS THAT TRACK YOU

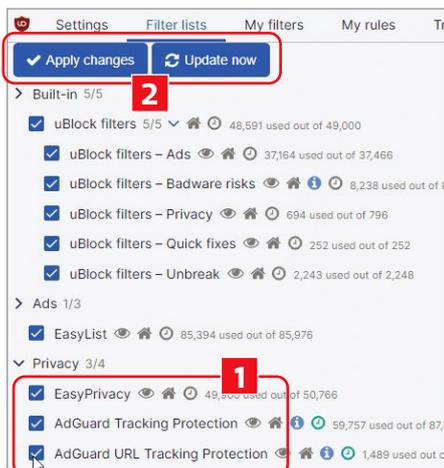
Block more trackers in web pages

 All the main web browsers now include tracking protection, though some (Brave and Firefox) do a much better job than others (Chrome and Edge) through their 'strict' or 'aggressive' settings. However, to stay completely private online by blocking every hidden tracker on every website, you need **uBlock Origin** (www.snipca.com/50113).

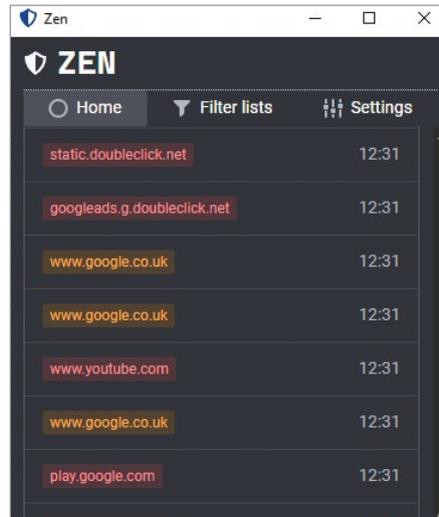
This brilliant extension now has around 55 million users worldwide, but it's still not as well known as inferior rivals such as Adblock and Adblock Plus. Even if you already use uBlock Origin to block ads, trackers and annoyances, you may not realise it has additional options for blocking further privacy risks.

Right-click the add-on's toolbar button, choose Options and click the 'Filter lists' tab. Click the arrow next to Privacy and tick the boxes AdGuard Tracking Protection and AdGuard URL Tracking Protection – as well as Easy Privacy if it isn't enabled (1 in our screenshot below). These augment uBlock Origin's own filters with rules from **freemium** service AdGuard to provide comprehensive, constantly updated protection against the latest trackers – including those hidden in web addresses. Click 'Apply changes' then 'Update now' (2).

Annoyingly, Google's new **Manifest V3** system, which it's introducing this year, will limit content blockers to using 30,000 filtering rules – uBlock Origin currently uses around 300,000 – which will make them less effective at blocking ads and trackers. To beat this restriction, uBlock Origin has created a Lite version for Manifest V3 (www.snipca.com/50116)



Boost uBlock Origin's tracking protection using additional filters from AdGuard



Zen sets up a proxy to block tracking requests in Windows software

that lets you configure its filters on a site-by-site basis, by choosing from Basic, Optimal or Complete filtering modes.

Block trackers in Windows software

 Tools such as uBlock Origin make it easy to block trackers in your browser, but it's more difficult to avoid them in other software on your PC. Many programs now include tracking elements that connect to the internet in the background to share details of your activities with developers, advertisers and data brokers – and potentially criminals.

You can block these hidden trackers using a new **open-source** tool called **Zen** (www.snipca.com/50118 – go to the Downloads section under the program description), not related to Zen Internet. This free ad-blocker and privacy guard sets up a **proxy** that intercepts tracking requests from internet servers and blocks any containing ads, tracking **scripts**, malware and other unwanted content. By working at a system level, Zen protects your PC against threats that browser extensions miss, such as trackers embedded in Windows software and system components.

Download and run either the x64 installer or portable version of Zen, clicking 'More info' then 'Run anyway' when you see the Microsoft Defender SmartScreen warning – it's completely safe to use. When you first open the program, click Start then Yes to install its root certificate, which allows it to check and modify **HTTPS** requests – this certificate is privately generated and stored on your PC.

Once this is done, Zen will start showing blocked requests on its Home tab (see screenshot left). To boost its protection, click the 'Filter lists' tab and switch on 'Peter Lowe's Ad and tracking server list' – further filters can be enabled in the dropdown menu. If you have trouble loading a particular website or program, click Stop to disconnect from the proxy.

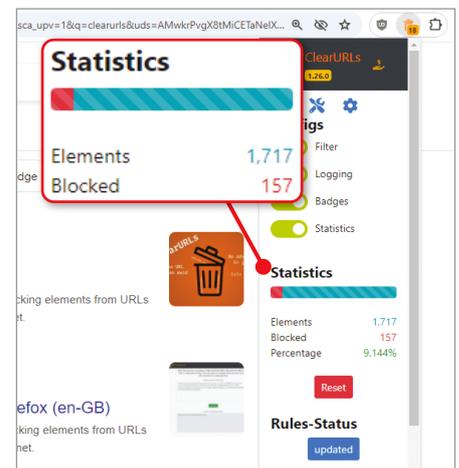
Although Zen isn't as powerful as paid-for solutions, such as AdGuard's Windows app (www.snipca.com/50119), it's easy to use and you don't need to sign up for an account.

Remove tracking elements from URLs

 Many URLs on websites – including Google search results, Amazon product pages and social-media posts – contain extra **code** after the main web address. This is usually for analytics purposes, to tell site owners when you clicked the link, the country you're browsing from and the device you're using, but the code can also be used to track you around the web.

To stop this happening, install the extension **ClearURLs** in your Chromium (www.snipca.com/50120) or Firefox browser (www.snipca.com/50121). This protects your privacy by automatically removing tracking elements from URLs, and letting you click through to pages without being redirected through a third-party service.

You can see how many elements the extension has blocked by clicking its toolbar button and checking the Statistics section in the information panel (see screenshot below). If ClearURLs prevents some sites from loading properly, click



ClearURLs removes tracking code from URLs including Google search results

the Settings cog and switch off 'Allow domain blocking'.

Incidentally, Brave and Firefox now let you remove tracking elements when you copy links from web pages. In the former, right-click the link and choose 'Copy clean link'; and in the latter, select Copy Link Without Site Tracking.

Don't get tricked by cookie consent pop-ups

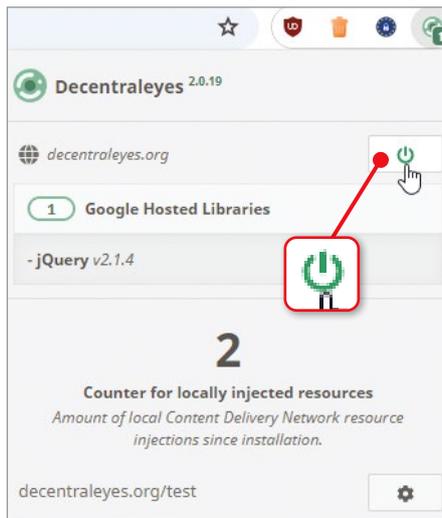
 **Cookie**-consent pop-ups are supposed to give you more control over the data websites collect about you, but are often so confusing that you end up agreeing to be tracked. The popular extension I Don't Care About Cookies solves the annoyance of these pop-ups by automatically hiding them, but it also allows sites to install cookies.

Consent-O-Matic is a lesser-known but more private alternative, which rejects all cookies by default *and* hides consent banners. Available for Chromium browsers (www.snipca.com/50122), Firefox (www.snipca.com/50123) and Safari on iOS (www.snipca.com/50125), it lets you configure its settings to permit essential cookies while blocking tracking ones.

Click its toolbar button, choose More Add-On Settings and, on the Your Choice tab, select the categories of cookies you're happy to allow. For example, 'Preferences and Functionality' **1** in our screenshot below) enables sites to store data such as your login details and personalisation settings, while 'Ad selection, delivery, and reporting' **2**



Consent-O-Matic rejects tracking cookies while allowing essential ones



Decentraleyes replaces web content that could track you with its own files

gives them permission to track you.

You can add extra rules to Consent-O-Matic to improve its detection and blocking of cookie pop-ups. Click the Rule Lists tab and copy the URL of a rule list into the Add List box – get the one used by I Don't Care About Cookies from www.snipca.com/50124.

Stop content-delivery networks tracking you

 Lots of websites now rely on third-party services to provide some of their content, including images, videos and fonts. Known as content-delivery networks (CDNs), these services help to speed up page-loading times, but they're also able to track you around the web. This is because once you've viewed their content on one site, they can follow you to the next site that uses their network.

Blocking CDNs may cause sites to break, but you can stop them tracking you by installing **Decentraleyes** in your Chromium (www.snipca.com/50126) or Firefox browser (www.snipca.com/50127). This extension cuts out the CDN middleman by tricking websites into loading its own, locally stored files to display content.

By doing so, Decentraleyes protects your privacy without affecting your browsing – you can see how many resources it's replaced on pages by clicking its toolbar button.

It works in tandem with content blockers such as uBlock Origin, and without you needing to configure its settings. If you have trouble loading a site, click the power button (see screenshot above) to disable the add-on's protection.

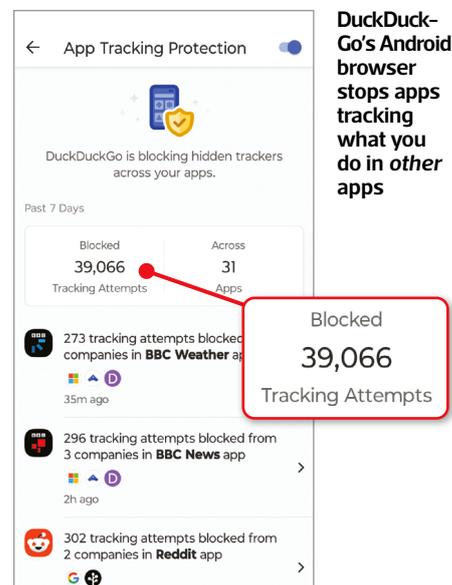
Block hidden trackers in mobile apps

 Some trackers embedded in mobile apps collect data about your activities to share with advertisers and other companies, not only within the apps themselves but in other apps installed on your phone or tablet. This is why you often see ads and sponsored content relating to things you've looked at in one app appearing in a completely different tool.

The excellent **DuckDuckGo Private Browser** for Android (www.snipca.com/50131) prevents this from happening using its App Tracking Protection feature. As well as blocking hidden trackers in sites you visit in the browser, it refuses tracking requests in other apps on your Android device. This stops them collecting data about you while still allowing the permissions they require to work.

To activate the feature, tap the three-dot menu in DuckDuckGo Private Browser, select Settings and enable App Tracking Protection. Tap 'OK' to allow DuckDuckGo to set up a **VPN** on your device – this isn't a proper VPN but allows the browser to block trackers at a network level. DuckDuckGo will tell you how many tracking attempts it's blocked in apps in the past seven days (see screenshot below), and the apps and tracking companies responsible.

DuckDuckGo's iOS browser (www.snipca.com/50133) doesn't include this feature, but your iPhone or iPad has its own setting for blocking app tracking. Select 'Privacy & Security' in the Settings app, tap Tracking and switch off the option 'Allow Apps to Request to Track'. When this is disabled, all new app tracking requests are automatically denied.



DuckDuckGo's Android browser stops apps tracking what you do in other apps

MAKE YOURSELF INVISIBLE ONLINE

Make websites forget you visited them



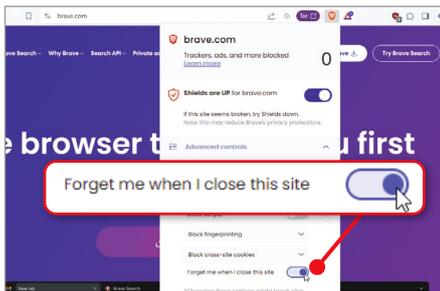
It's no secret that the incognito or private mode in your browser doesn't keep you anywhere near anonymous online – as Google was recently forced to clarify (see Issue 682, page 7). But **Brave** (www.brave.com) now has a secret feature called 'Forget by Default', which goes further than standard private-browsing modes by preventing websites from identifying you.

'Forget by Default' works by logging you out of a site and deleting all its cookies and other stored data when you close its browser tab. This means that next time you visit that site, it won't automatically recognise you and tailor its content – and ads – accordingly.

To access the feature, click the Shields (lion head) button on Brave's toolbar and switch on the option 'Forget me when I close this site' (see screenshot below). This will sign you out and delete all cookies and other data as soon as you close the current tab.

To enable 'Forget by Default' for every site you visit, click Brave's three-line menu button, choose Settings, then Shields and switch on 'Forget me when I close this site'. You can disable the option on specific sites, to stop them logging you out, by clicking the Shields button and switching it off.

Visit brave://settings/content/all to confirm that 'Forget by Default' is wiping stored data when you leave a site (some unremovable cookies may remain).

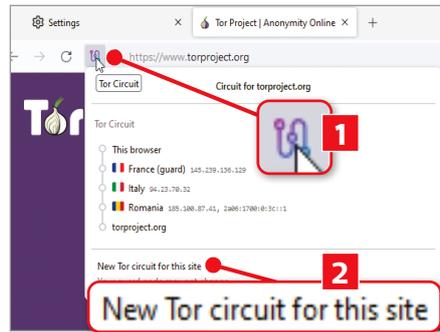


Use Brave's new 'Forget by Default' option to stop websites identifying you

Browse the web anonymously using Tor



Brave also has a private-browsing mode that uses the Tor network to stop websites tracking and identifying you. It recently improved this mode by automatically loading the **onion address** of sites when available, and by redirecting you to Tor when you try to visit an onion address in standard-browsing



Tor Browser routes your internet connection through a series of global relays

mode (see Issue 678, page 42). However, to stay completely anonymous online you should use the dedicated **Tor Browser** (www.snipca.com/50135), which works in permanent private-browsing mode.

Tor Browser redirects your internet connection through an encrypted circuit of 'relays' around the world, which prevents websites, hackers and other snoopers from seeing where you are and what you do online. It automatically deletes cookies, site data and browsing history when you close it, leaving no trace of your activities, and offers a choice of security levels to disable web features that compromise your anonymity.

Last year, Tor simplified the browser's circuit system to make it easier to check which relays (also called nodes) your connection is being diverted through to disguise your **IP address**. Click the Tor Circuit (squiggly line) icon to the left of the address bar (1 in our screenshot above) to view the locations and IP addresses of each node. If you suspect your anonymity has been compromised, perhaps because you've entered personal information on a website, click 'New Tor circuit for this site' (2) to be redirected through a new series of relays.

Tor recently introduced a powerful privacy feature called WebTunnel, which stops anyone – including your ISP – knowing that you're using its encrypted network. See our Easy When You Know How section in Issue 681 (page 74) to find out how this works.

Although Tor Browser lets you access the so-called **dark web**, you need to enter 56-character onion addresses to visit such sites, so you won't accidentally stumble across anything illegal. Besides, many reputable websites, including BBC News, the Guardian and Amnesty International, have onion versions to help visitors

beat censorship and surveillance. The main drawback is that loading standard sites can be slow – especially at the browser's Safest security level.

Tor Browser also has an Android app (www.snipca.com/50142) that lets you browse the web anonymously on your phone or tablet. Apple's restrictions prevent it from working on an iPhone or iPad, so Tor recommends you combine Onion Browser (www.snipca.com/50143), which was "developed by someone who works closely with the Tor Project", with its VPN Orbot (www.snipca.com/50144).

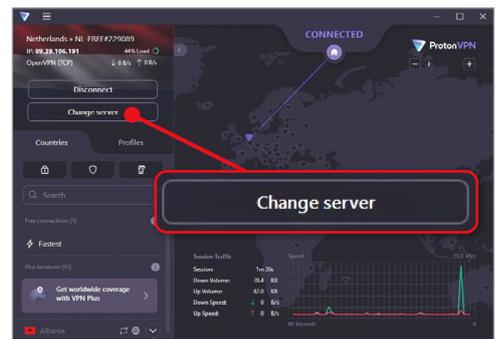
Hide your online activities with a free VPN



A virtual-private network (VPN) is the most reliable way to access the web anonymously, because it encrypts your internet connection across your entire device, not just within your browser (like Tor Browser does). But VPN subscriptions can be expensive, and free services usually have catches – from tight data limits and poor choice of servers to dubious privacy policies that let them collect and share your data.

One of the best options is the free version of **ProtonVPN** (www.snipca.com/50138), which offers unlimited monthly data, with no ads and a strict no-logs policy. It has a 'kill switch' that automatically takes you offline when you lose your encrypted connection, so your anonymity is never compromised, and a 'stealth mode' that disguises the fact you're using a VPN. However, this mode is currently only available in the mobile and macOS apps, not the Windows program.

Previously, ProtonVPN's free plan let you choose from servers in the Netherlands, Japan and the US, but it now randomly assigns one when you click its Quick Connect or 'Change server' buttons (see screenshot below).



ProtonVPN is one of the few free VPNs to offer unlimited monthly data

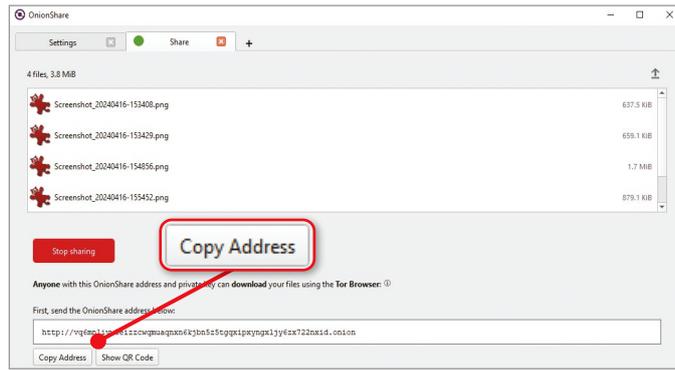
This makes it less useful for unlocking **geo-restricted** content than for disguising your online activities, though it recently added free servers in Poland and Romania. Upgrading to ProtonVPN Plus for €4.99 (£4.27) a month gives you access to over 4,500 servers in more than 90 countries and lets you use the service on up to 10 devices (the free version limits you to one).

Alternatively, Windscribe's free VPN (www.snipca.com/50139) offers 10GB of data a month (2GB until you confirm your email address) and access to servers in 10 countries, including the US, UK, Canada, France, Germany and Hong Kong. Its stealth mode is available in its desktop and mobile apps, and its 'split tunnelling' feature lets you exclude specific programs from its protection.

Share and receive files anonymously



You can use Tor Browser – or a VPN – to download files from websites without revealing your identity or location, but it's less easy to share files without compromising your privacy. For that purpose, you need the



OnionShare lets you share and receive files privately over the Tor network

free tool **OnionShare** (www.snipca.com/50141), which lets you send and receive files securely and anonymously over the Tor network.

Install the OnionShare app on your PC (it's also available for macOS, Linux, Android and iOS), click 'Connect to Tor' and select Start Sharing on the Share Files tile. Add the files or folders you want to share and click 'Start sharing'. This will generate an onion address your intended recipient can enter in Tor Browser to access the shared items – click Copy Address (see screenshot above) to paste it into an encrypted email or chat message. You also need to send the other

person the private key generated by OnionShare **2**, so they can unlock the download. Click 'Stop sharing' to remove the files once downloaded.

To allow someone to send you files through Tor Browser, click Start Receiving on the Receive Files tab, then Start Receive Mode to generate another onion address and private key. They can then enter these in the browser to upload files to you.

It may sound like a convoluted way of doing things, but OnionShare is easy to use and ensures that no third parties can intercept the files you're sharing – or detect where you and the other person are located.

Computer **active** **READER OFFER!**

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In this special offer you can buy **Windows 11 Pro** for just £79.99 – that's £140 cheaper than Microsoft's full price of £219.99.

To buy **Windows 11 Pro**, visit www.snipca.com/41588 and click the red Buy Now button on the right.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

This offer can be used by one person only, and expires at midnight on **21 May, 2024**. It's a lifetime licence for one computer.



PROTECT YOUR PRIVATE DATA

Fake your email address using an alias

There are lots of temporary email services you can use to sign up with websites, so you can avoid having to share your real name and email address. The trouble is that some don't let you return to your inbox later when you need to retrieve important account information. Free services also tend to be swamped with trackers, so aren't as private as you'd hope.

One solution is to create email aliases using **SimpleLogin** (www.snipca.com/50148), which is powered by the Swiss privacy company Proton. Use an alias to register with a site or service, and SimpleLogin will forward all messages sent to the fake email address to your real one – without revealing the latter to spammers, scammers and snoopers. You can even reply to emails using your alias, to maintain your disguise.

SimpleLogin's free plan lets you create up to 10 aliases, either using your preferred prefix and domain or by generating a random one (see screenshot below). Its browser extensions and mobile apps let you access your aliases on the fly, and disable them as required. SimpleLogin's Premium plan (to which you get a seven-day free trial) costs \$30 (£24) a year and includes unlimited aliases and mailboxes, as well as custom domains.

DuckDuckGo includes a similar feature, Email Protection (www.snipca.com/50149), in its mobile apps, desktop browser and extensions. This lets you create an unlimited number of '@duck.com' addresses, which forward messages to your real email account and remove embedded trackers. It's currently in beta but it works very well.



Keep your real email address private by creating aliases with SimpleLogin

Encrypt your private emails in Thunderbird

ProtonMail (www.snipca.com/50150) and Tuta (www.snipca.com/50151) provide free encrypted email services, but limit you to 1GB of storage. To keep your current email address, protect sensitive messages and never run out of space, use the encryption features in **Mozilla Thunderbird** (www.snipca.com/50152).

Click the three-line menu button in the top-right corner of the main Thunderbird window and choose Account Settings, then End-to-End Encryption (1 in our screenshot above right). Click 'Add Key' (2), select 'Create a new OpenPGP key' and click Continue. Choose your email address in the Identity menu, specify how many years your key should work for and click 'Generate key'. Click 'Confirm' and Thunderbird will generate your OpenPGP key – this consists of public and 'secret' parts.

To send someone an encrypted message, you first need them to send you their public encryption key. Open the email that contains this key, double-click the '.asc' attachment and click Import to save the key to Thunderbird. When you compose a new message to that person, click the Encrypt button then write and send your email. Your public encryption key will automatically be attached, so the recipient – but no one else – can decrypt and read the message.

To share your public key with people you haven't privately messaged before, click the arrow next to Attach and select My Open PGP Public Key. This sends them an email attachment containing



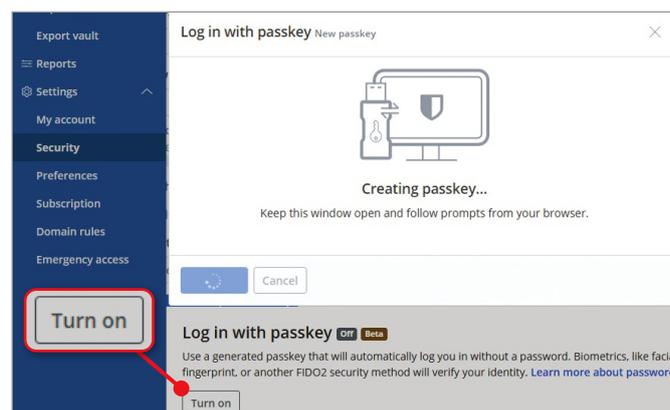
Thunderbird's built-in encryption tools keep your emails completely private

your key, so they can reply with *their* key and you can exchange encrypted messages.

Protect your online accounts using passkeys

Passkeys let you log into websites and apps using your fingerprint, face or a screen-lock PIN, in the same way you unlock your PC or phone. Because this data is stored on your device rather than with the respective services, they're both more secure and more convenient than passwords.

Our favourite free password manager, **Bitwarden** (www.snipca.com/50153), now supports passkeys, to give you a simpler way to protect your private data. Install the Bitwarden extension (www.snipca.com/50155), sign into your account and visit a site that supports passkeys (see the list at www.snipca.com/50156). Go into the Security section of your account settings, find the option to set up a passkey and choose your preferred login method – phone, tablet, Windows Hello or security key. Bitwarden will offer to save the new passkey – type **Bitwarden** when asked where. The next time you visit the site, you'll be able to log in using the passkey instead of a password.



Bitwarden now lets you sign into websites and your web vault using passkeys

Bitwarden recently introduced the option to sign into your web vault with a passkey, rather than a master password – click 'Turn on' under 'Log in with passkey' in its Security settings (see screenshot left). It has also added passkey support to the beta version of its iOS app (www.snipca.com/50158).

WIPE ALL TRACE OF YOUR WEB ACTIVITIES

Delete all your browsing data in one click



One of the most useful features in DuckDuckGo's browser is the Fire button, which closes your open tabs and deletes your browsing data in one click. This includes details of the sites you've visited; their cookies, caches and favicons; and any permissions you granted them (such as to your location). It saves you the hassle of wiping these elements manually, keeps your activities private and allows you to start your next browsing session with a clean slate.

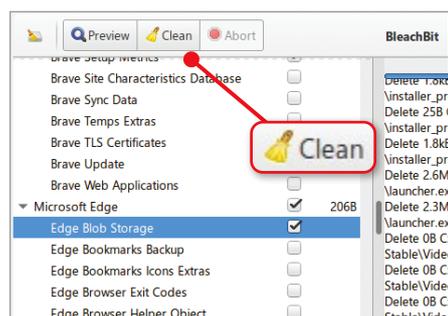
You can add a Fire-button-style function to other browsers by installing **Clear Browsing Data** for Chromium (www.snipca.com/50160) and Firefox (www.snipca.com/50161). This extension lets you delete your cookies, cache, form data, history and other elements by clicking its toolbar button and choosing the relevant option. Alternatively, wipe all browsing data in one go by selecting 'All data types' (1 in our screenshot above right).

To specify which types of data to include, go into the extension's Options and tick/untick the boxes in the left-hand menu. You can more closely replicate DuckDuckGo's Fire button by setting Clear Browsing Data to delete all data types and close all tabs (2 directly from its toolbar button (3) – switch off 'Ask before removing data' to skip the confirmation prompt.

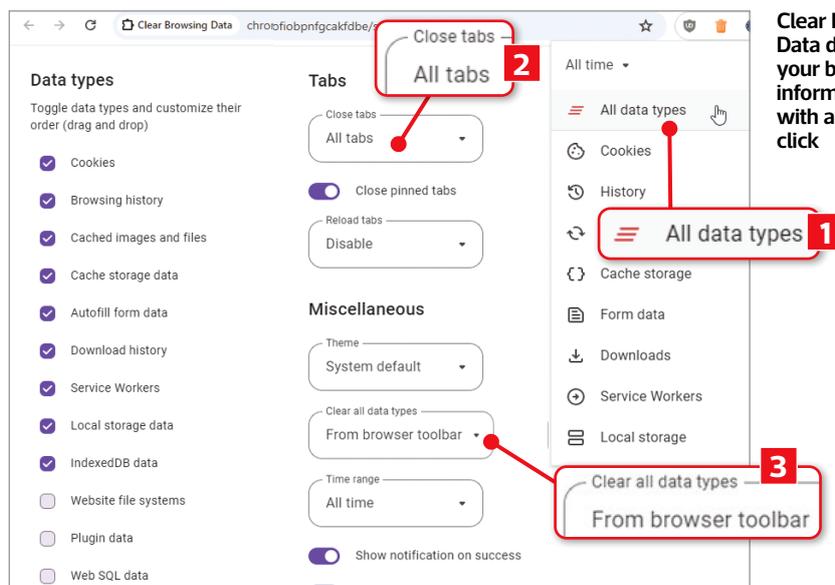
Clear data from all your browsers in one go



If you switch between multiple browsers on your PC, it's easy to forget when and where you may have compromised your privacy – such as by failing to sign out of a personal account or delete details of sensitive searches. Rather than open each browser in turn to delve into its settings and cover your tracks, wipe everything in one go using



Wipe private data from all your browsers in one go using BleachBit



Clear Browsing Data deletes all your browsing information with a single click

BleachBit (www.bleachbit.org).

This powerful free clean-up tool automatically detects which browsers you have installed and lists all the types of data you can delete, including cookies, caches, searches, browsing history and site preferences. For additional options, and to include browsers BleachBit doesn't identify by default (such as Vivaldi), click the menu button in the top-left corner, choose Preferences and tick 'Download and update cleaners from community'. Click 'Save' and you'll see an expanded list of browser settings, including the mysterious 'blob storage' (unstructured data from online services).

Tick the boxes next to all the items you want to wipe – or the box next to a browser's name to select all its data – and click the Preview button. BleachBit will then list all the elements to be removed and tell you how much drive space you'll recover – it will warn you about deleting important items such as saved passwords. Click 'Clean' (see screenshot below left) to purge all your browsers of private data and junk files.

Remove private data from photos and videos



Digital cameras and smartphones record information about the photos you take in the form of EXIF metadata. This is stored in the image file and includes details of when and where the shot was taken and the device used.

Although this metadata is useful for organising photos by date and location, it also poses a privacy risk when you share pictures online. Strangers who study the

EXIF data will be able to identify where you live and where you've been from the GPS coordinates. For this reason, it's wise to remove location data from certain images before you post them on social media and other sites.

The best free tool for this purpose is **ExifCleaner**, which you can download from www.snipca.com/50164 – click the 'ExifCleaner-3.6.0.exe' link under Assets. Simply drag and drop images into the program window, or click Open in the File menu to select them manually, and ExifCleaner will automatically remove EXIF data from the file, and show 'before' and 'after' figures (see screenshot below).

The program supports all the main image formats, including JPEG, PNG, BMP, GIF and TIFF, and can also strip metadata from videos. Although it hasn't been updated since 2021, it has a clean bill of health on VirusTotal (www.snipca.com/50165).

You can remove metadata from photos on your mobile device using free apps such as Photo Metadata Remover for Android (www.snipca.com/50166) and Exif Metadata for iOS (www.snipca.com/50167).

Selected files	# Exif Before	# Exif After
P1010059.JPG	146	0
P1010060.JPG	146	0
P1010062.JPG		
P1010063.JPG		
P1010064.JPG		

Use ExifCleaner to remove metadata from photos before sharing them

TEST YOUR PRIVACY USING ONLINE TOOLS

Test the privacy of your web browser

Don't assume that your browser's own privacy settings – especially the notoriously ineffective 'Do not track' option – will prevent websites from identifying and tracking you. Instead, visit the privacy group Electronic Frontier Foundation's free tool **Cover Your Tracks** (www.snipca.com/50173), tick the box 'Test with a real tracking company' and click Test Your Browser.

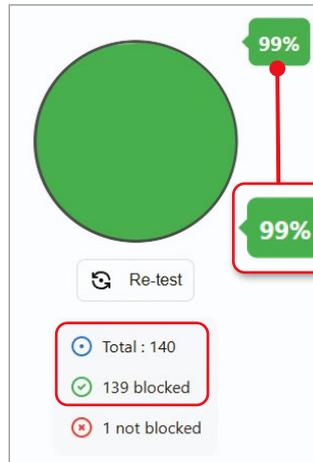
Within a few seconds, the site will tell you if your browser is blocking tracking ads, invisible trackers and **fingerprinting**, and how many bits of identifying info you're leaking – scroll down to the Detailed Results section to learn what they are. In our tests, only Tor Browser and Brave (with its 'aggressive' fingerprinting enabled) offered complete protection (see screenshot below).



Cover Your Tracks tests your browser's protection against tracking and fingerprinting

Confirm your ad blocker and VPN are working

Although we recommend uBlock Origin (see page 51) as the best way to block ads and trackers, there are lots of good alternatives – just make sure your chosen tool works as promised. **Adblock Test** (www.snipca.com/50176) tests the effectiveness of your blocker against ads, tracking scripts, analytics tools, social-media trackers and other intrusive elements and gives it a protection percentage score. Try carrying out its test with your ad blocker enabled



Test your ad blocker to make sure it's effectively blocking trackers

and disabled to compare the difference. In our test, uBlock Origin achieved 99-per cent protection, blocking 139 out of 140 elements (see screenshot above), but without it Chrome scored only three per cent, blocking just four.

Similarly, you can check that your VPN or other anonymity tool is disguising your IP address by visiting IPleak.net (<https://ipleak.net>). If your real location and ISP are shown in the 'IP address details' box, your privacy isn't being properly protected.

Check if your data has been breached

Mozilla Monitor (www.snipca.com/50168), formerly called Firefox Monitor, checks your email address against the Have I Been Pwned database to determine if it's been involved in any data breaches. If so, it displays 'Action needed' warnings, tells you what info is affected and lets you click 'Fix all exposures' (see screenshot right) to get advice on securing your accounts. Mozilla Monitor works in all browsers and is now integrated with Firefox's password manager to alert you when your details have been compromised. You need a Mozilla account to use the free tool – a new paid-for Plus plan, which removes your personal info from data-broker sites, is currently limited to the US. **ca**

Can you chat privately with AI tools?

The rise of AI chatbots such as ChatGPT and Microsoft Copilot has led to privacy concerns over the way these tools collect your data. Any queries and commands you enter are stored and shared to train the AI models and improve the accuracy of their responses, but they're also linked to your online identity – including your location, email address and phone number.

Last year, ChatGPT's owner, OpenAI, addressed privacy worries by adding the option to let users switch off 'Chat History & Training'. You'll find this in the Data Controls section of the tool's Settings on the ChatGPT website and in its mobile app, where you can also clear your chat history. But this merely stops your chats being used for training purposes – OpenAI will still store them for 30 days and link them to you.

Brave's new Leo chatbot (www.snipca.com/50180) is more trustworthy, because it doesn't require an account, collect information such as your IP address or store your chats. You could also try the Android app 'Chat with AI – Incognito' (www.snipca.com/50169), which claims to provide "complete anonymity" by not requiring an account, storing your data or allowing third parties to track you.



Mozilla Monitor alerts you when your passwords are involved in data breaches

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Roku streaming sticks and smart TVs are great quality, easy to use and good value for money. But the company seems increasingly determined to alienate loyal and prospective customers, through a series of careless blunders and poor business decisions. Here we catalogue Roku's recent mistakes, explain how to fix some of the problems it's created and suggest which streaming devices you should use instead.

Why you should stop using Roku

Roku accounts keep being hacked

In March, Roku disclosed details of a data breach that affected more than 15,000 users. Hackers logged into Roku accounts, accessed stored payment-card details and – “in a limited number of cases” – attempted to purchase subscriptions to streaming services. Stolen account details were also sold on hacking marketplaces.

Roku effectively blamed customers for the breach, for using the same usernames and passwords they use for third-party services (see www.snipca.com/50187). But the company's attempt at buck-passing was undermined when only a month later it admitted suffering a second, much bigger cyber-attack that compromised over 576,000 additional accounts (www.snipca.com/50188). This time, the hackers successfully “made unauthorised purchases of streaming service subscriptions and Roku hardware products using the payment method stored in these accounts”.

Roku responded by resetting the passwords of all impacted users, and issuing refunds for purchases made through their accounts. It has now enabled **two-factor authentication** (2FA) for *all* customers to “detect and deter” future attacks. These measures are obviously welcome, but the scale of the breaches raises concerns about the company's security policies.

Roku plans to show even more ads

Roku has announced that more adverts will be coming to the Home screens of its streaming devices and TVs in the near future. These ads won't be limited to promoting content on streaming apps – or ‘channels’ as Roku calls them – but will also be for cars, restaurants, travel agents and other products and services (www.snipca.com/50193).

This follows Roku's introduction of interactive ads in June 2023, which acted as ‘virtual showrooms’ for companies

Should you stop using

ROKU?

Roku makes excellent streaming devices, but has recently been making big mistakes too. **Robert Irvine** explains why you should consider switching to an alternative



such as Japanese car manufacturer Subaru. The Home screen on Roku devices already includes large adverts for films and TV shows, to the right of the channel selector (pictured below), while other ads frequently appear in its screensaver.

Additionally, Roku has filed a patent for a new advertising system that displays ads during periods of inactivity, such as when you pause a stream or game. This won't only apply to its own hardware, but any **HDMI** media device connected to a Roku TV – including games consoles, DVD/Blu-ray players, set-top boxes and rival streaming sticks. The patent doesn't

specify what format these ads will take, but they're certain to be intrusive. See the page opposite to find out how to make Roku's ads less irritating.

Roku is forcing users to agree to controversial new terms

Roku users in the US have been forced to agree to an update to the company's terms and conditions if they want to keep using their devices. The update relates to Roku's dispute-resolution policy, and requires all legal complaints you have about Roku products to first be handled in person or over a call with one of Roku's lawyers, before you seek arbitration through the courts (www.snipca.com/50189).

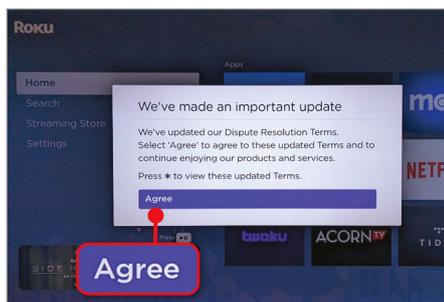
As the new policy is intended to stop disgruntled customers in the US suing the company, it may seem irrelevant in the less-litigious UK. But what's bothering the global Roku community is the heavy-handed way the new terms have been enforced.

An on-screen message on Roku TVs and streaming devices obliges users to agree to the dispute-resolution update, and can't be dismissed until they do (see



Ads already dominate your Roku home screen and more are coming soon

Credit: AICXZO



Roku rendered devices unusable unless customers agreed to updated terms

screenshot above). "My TV is essentially being held hostage and rendered useless", complained a post on the Roku subreddit (www.snipca.com/50190). If Roku employs this tyrannical tactic every time it changes its terms, it's going to annoy a lot of people.

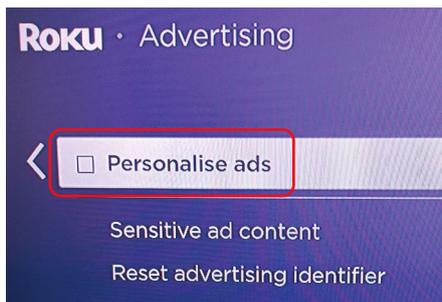
Roku suffered major stock shortages

Just before Christmas last year, many online and high-street stores started running low on Roku stock, and by February it was impossible to buy its streaming devices (other than second-hand and refurbished models) anywhere in the UK. This led to speculation that the company was abandoning its low-priced sticks to focus on more expensive Roku-powered TVs.

Thankfully, at the end of March, stocks



Roku's streaming devices disappeared from UK stores for the first three months of 2024



Turn off 'Personalise ads' to stop Roku analysing your viewing habits

of the Roku Express (HD and 4K models) and Streaming Stick 4K (pictured below left) were replenished, without any explanation or apology for their absence, other than "shipping delays". In the meantime, prospective Roku buyers may have chosen alternative brands (see box below).

Fix problems with your Roku device

Depersonalise and hide Roku ads

You can prevent Roku from analysing your viewing habits so it can show you personalised adverts from its partners. Select 'Settings' in the main menu and choose Privacy, then Advertising. Switch off the 'Personalise ads' option (see screenshot above) or 'Limit ad tracking' (on older devices), to stop Roku basing its ads on the shows, films and music you've played and searched for.

You should also select 'Reset advertising identifier' to delete information that's already been collected about your interests. On a Roku-powered TV, such as a Hisense, JVC or TCL model, look for an

additional Privacy setting called 'Smart TV experience' and disable the 'Use info from TV inputs' option.

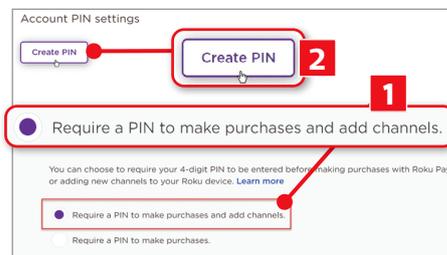
If the same annoying ad keeps appearing on your Home screen, highlight it using your remote control and press the asterisk (*) key. Choose 'Hide this ad', press OK, and you shouldn't see that advert again. To hide viewing recommendations, go to Settings then 'Home screen', select 'What to watch' and choose Hide.

Secure your Roku account with a PIN

Although – as explained earlier – Roku has enabled 2FA for all users to protect them against future data breaches, it's chosen a rather basic method. When you sign into your Roku account at www.snipca.com/50195, you're now prompted to verify your email address by clicking 'Yes, sign me in' in the message you're sent. This is very straightforward, but equally convenient for hackers who have previously gained access to your email account.

Roku doesn't support passkeys (see page 55 of our Cover Feature), but you can add an extra layer of security by setting up a PIN. This at least prevents anyone from making unauthorised purchases, such as for streaming subscriptions, even if they gain access to your account.

To do this, click the Update button under 'Pin preference' in your account settings and select 'Require a PIN to make purchases and add channels' (1 in our screenshot below). Click 'Create PIN' 2, enter the 4-digit code you want to use, then click 'Save PIN'. Now no one will be able to buy anything through your account without entering your PIN.



Set up a PIN to stop hackers making purchases through your Roku account

You can also set up a PIN through the Roku mobile app (www.snipca.com/50201). Tap 'Account' then 'Account info', press 'Pin settings' and switch on 'Making purchases and adding apps'. Tap 'Create PIN', enter your code and press 'Save changes'. ca

Switch to a different streaming device

Amazon's Fire TV sticks are the closest alternatives to Roku devices, though they're slightly more expensive.

The cheapest – the Fire TV Stick Lite (www.snipca.com/50204, pictured) – costs £35, which is £5 more than a Roku Express. If you already have one but want to upgrade to a newer and/or better model, you can save 20 per cent using Amazon's Trade-In program (www.snipca.com/50203).

Like Roku devices, Fire TV sticks show ads on their home screens, and let you disable personalisation via their privacy settings. Unlike Roku, Amazon



acts swiftly when alerted to security concerns, recently disabling its virtual Fire TV remote control following claims it could be exploited by hackers.

Google's 'Chromecast with Google TV' (www.snipca.com/50205) is the other logical choice, priced at £35 and with a larger range of apps than Roku.

Switching to Fire TV or Chromecast is as simple as plugging the device into your TV, signing into your Amazon or Google account, and then into your streaming services. However, you'll need to remove your Roku device from your device list if a service limits how many can be linked to your account.

FIND OUT WHERE DEVICES WERE MADE



Shoppers are increasingly keen to learn where items are manufactured, but online retailers don't make this easy. **Daniel Booth** explains how you can find this information

Look closely at the packaging of any device and it'll show you where it was made. All manufacturers must include this information by law, but retailers don't have to. This is why Amazon (or any other online retailer) has never had to add a 'Country of origin' category to its product listings on any of its sites worldwide, with the exception of one country – as we'll come to.

This lack of information frustrates shoppers eager not to buy products made in certain countries, whether for environmental reasons or to avoid supporting regimes that are hostile to the UK or don't respect human rights.

China is the country that attracts the most concern. It's been widely condemned for human-rights abuses, and earlier this year was accused of hacking the UK's Electoral Commission and accessing the personal details of 40 million voters. Yet it has by far the world's biggest manufacturing output (around 28 per cent of the total), and Amazon Marketplace is dominated by sellers located in China (see www.snipca.com/50211).

Much of what we use comes from Chinese factories, so it's only natural that a feature explaining how to check where a product is from focuses on that country. However, you can use some of the tips to avoid buying from other countries, or to buy only

from UK companies.

Our advice will help you find out where your current devices were made (if you've binned the packaging) and where any future purchases come from.

Check Amazon's 'Product details'

Amazon doesn't have to list the country of origin in its listings, but in 2021 it started asking sellers to add this information, partly to keep goods passing across the UK-EU border after Brexit. It said that sellers wouldn't be able to create product listings without declaring the country of origin (www.snipca.com/50210), though we still see plenty of products listed without this information.

While many sellers do now state the country of origin, it's not easy to find. We think this is such important information, it should appear at the top of a product's listing, alongside star rating and price. Instead, you have to

scroll down to 'Product details', which is near the bottom of the listing (see screenshot below), usually just above customer reviews.

At least Amazon now expects sellers to add this information, unlike most of its rivals selling electronic products. The one exception we spotted was AO.com (<https://ao.com>), but again the site doesn't make it easy. You have to click 'Specification' followed by 'View full specification' then Product Detail.

Show location flags on Amazon

There are several browser extensions that claim to reveal an item's country of origin on Amazon, but only one – Cultivate – did an effective job in our tests. Its main purpose is to find you cheaper prices on other sites, from which it takes a commission, and offers cashback on your purchases. But it also reveals where a product was made, where the brand is based and where the seller is located.

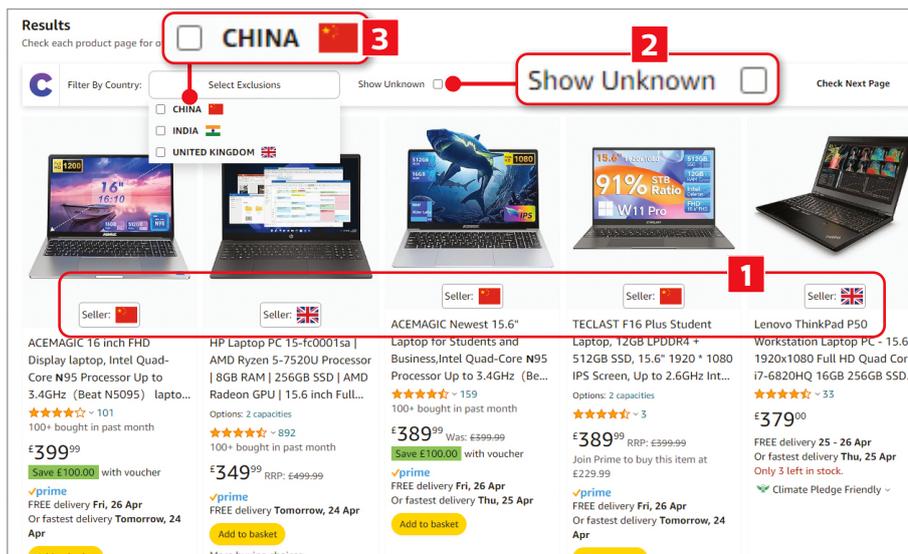
For Chrome, Edge, Brave and other Chromium browsers, install the extension from www.snipca.com/50191; for Firefox visit www.snipca.com/50194. Ignore the page asking you to sign in to receive cashback, then search for a product at www.amazon.co.uk. Under the product photos you'll see a flag indicating country of origin. We searched for 'laptops £300 to £400' and Amazon's first row showed us three models from sellers located in

Product details

Is discontinued by manufacturer : No
Product Dimensions : 5 x 5 x 5 cm; 267.62 g
Date First Available : 11
Manufacturer : Anker
ASIN : B00PK11JY
Item model number : 0848061091090
Country of origin : China
Guaranteed software updates until : unknown
Best Sellers Rank : 973 in Climate Pledge Friendly (See Top 100 in Climate Pledge Friendly)
144 in Mobile Phone Mains Chargers
973 in Climate Pledge Friendly: Shop All
Customer reviews: 4.8 ★★★★★ 2,828 ratings

Country of origin : China

Check whether an Amazon seller lists the country of origin in 'Product details'



The Cultivate extension adds flags to Amazon's search results to show sellers' location

China, and two from the UK (1 in our screenshot above).

Cultivate will show a question mark if it doesn't know the country of origin. You can exclude these marks from your results by unticking the Show Unknown box 2. You can also exclude certain countries from results by clicking Select Exclusions then ticking the country's box 3. When you click a result to go to the product page you'll see a box from Cultivate showing cheaper prices online. Look at the top of this box for details confirming the seller's location, as well as where it was made and where the brand is based.

Check on Amazon India

It's time to reveal the only country that does force Amazon to list a product's country of origin: India. It passed this law in 2020, though as you might guess by now Amazon doesn't exactly put it front and centre.

Visit www.amazon.in, search for an item, then scroll all the way down to Technical Details. You'll see the 'Country of Origin' listed near the bottom of the table, just above Item Weight. To save scrolling, you can press Ctrl+F then type the country you want to search for and press Enter. In our screenshot below, we



Look for a product's country of origin on Amazon's India site under 'Technical Details'

typed **China** into the box that appears 1, then pressed Enter to take us straight to the 'Country of Origin' listing, where 'China' is highlighted 2. Note that for non-electronic items you might find this information in the 'Product details' section.

Search customer reviews and Q&As

As interest grows in where devices are made, more shoppers are mentioning the country of origin in their reviews. So it's worth trying the Ctrl+F trick described above to search customers' reviews. On Amazon, scroll down to the 'Looking for specific info?' heading and type **country of origin** or the name of country you're concerned about. This will also search questions people have asked and the answers provided. Shoppers who have already bought and received the product can see the country of origin on its packaging and reply.

You don't even have to type the exact phrase that a shopper has used. Our question 'Where is it made?' (1 in our screenshot below) brought up the result 'In which country is it produced?' 2.

Several other major retailers have searchable reviews on their sites,



Search customers' reviews and questions for references to a product's country of origin

What about eBay?

eBay lets you remove sellers not located in the UK – click 'Advanced' at the top right of the homepage then scroll down and select 'Located in United Kingdom'. There are also options for Continental Europe, European Union and Worldwide. You'll also find these location filters down the left side when searching for a type of product.

However, many sellers give their location as UK without saying that the product needs to be delivered from overseas (usually China) before being dispatched to the buyer. This has been infuriating eBay buyers for years. 'Peterindover' spoke for many when he wrote on the site's forum: "All I want is to be able to browse and buy an item that I know is already in the UK and that I am likely to receive within a few days" (www.snipca.com/50213).

Some eBay sellers list the country of origin in the 'About this item' section, but they don't have to. You'll see where the seller is located on the right, along with delivery, returns and payment information, but this doesn't mean the product itself is based in the same country.

The surest way to check a seller's address is to scroll to the bottom of the listing and look under 'Business seller information'. Private sellers don't have to give their address.

including John Lewis (www.johnlewis.com) and Very (www.very.co.uk). You can't search Argos's reviews, but you can ask a question for a customer assistant to answer. Scroll down to 'Questions and answers' and click 'Ask a question'.

Search a database of 120,000 products

As reader Dick Matthews pointed out in Issue 682's 'Tip of the Fortnight' (page 40), the Product From site (www.productfrom.com) lets you search by brand and type of device to find out where it was made. It has over 120,000 products in its search database, as well as over 2,000 brands. You can search in the main bar on the home page, or choose one of the options in the top-right corner: product categories, brands and countries. The 'Electronics' category is comprehensive, covering everything from laptops, PCs and phones to chargers, dashcams and CCTV cameras. [ca](http://www.productfrom.com)

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Will Virgin Media be affected by the copper switch-off?

Q I live in a housing estate where most houses were connected up with BT phone lines. Later, Telewest cabled the estate with its **coaxial** system, which I watched being installed (no copper wires anywhere). This provides broadband and landline-phone services through the same cable, and I am connected to both. This was later taken over by NTL World and eventually by Virgin Media – the current provider. My question is, if I stay on this system will I be affected by the copper landline switch-off? I imagine some of your readers will be in a similar boat, but I haven't seen any relevant information.

Tom Fry

A This is a good question. The copper switch-off is national policy, driven by the Government and regulator Ofcom, and co-ordinated, in the main, by Openreach (which is an offshoot of BT). The plan is to complete the switch-off by the end of 2025. Most people who have a landline are connected via Openreach's analogue network – so most landline users will be affected.

However, 'most' is not all. In principle at least, your situation is not quite the same as most. That's because



The Copper switch-off in 2025 is being co-ordinated by Openreach

your particular internet and telephone services almost certainly travel over a technology known as hybrid-fibre coaxial (HFC – pictured below left), which Virgin Media inherited from the numerous companies before it. HFC means one cable for both services, but the landline part still operates in an analogue fashion – in that it's connected to the exchange.

Regardless of this, in practice, Virgin Media is working in lockstep with the rest of the industry to meet the Government's target of switching voice-call services

over to purely digital systems. This is to meet the regulator's expectations, but also to achieve the company's own aim to move away from its older hybrid systems. So, barring any broader policy change, you can expect to be switched over to digital-only voice services that come via a phone-socket adapter that connects to an **Ethernet** port on your router.

In January this year, the industry paused 'non-

voluntary' adoption of digital voice-call services in response to concerns raised by consumers and pressure groups. This is not least because digital phone lines aren't compatible with a whole range of existing 'telecare' equipment that rely on existing analogue technology, such as personal-alarm systems that help vulnerable people to live independently – and that are used by millions of people.

Virgin Media respected this pause, but has now resumed the rollout, though only to customers who volunteer, not those deemed vulnerable or with telecare devices (see www.snipca.com/50020).

So – whether you're a Virgin Media customer or not – if you haven't already been switched to a digital phone line, you shouldn't necessarily expect to be until the industry has decided on the way forward. If this all sounds like something of a mess, that's because it is. We'll continue to assist as best we can by answering our readers' many questions on this topic, and reporting on the latest developments.



Virgin Media broadband and phone services travel via hybrid-fibre coaxial (HFC)

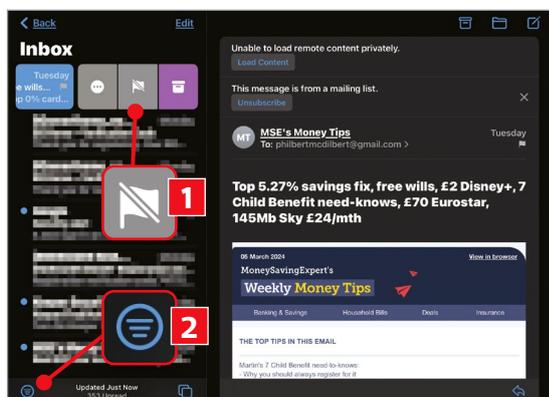
Can I colour-code emails on my iPad to find them more easily?

Q Using my iPad I frequently have to look back through emails to find a specific message. The little orange flag you can use to highlight is barely visible as I scan through my inbox. So, I wonder if there's a way to highlight an entire email in colour so that it stands out in the list? It seems this should be easy to do but no one I've asked seems to be able to help.

I'm always amazed by the breadth of knowledge of *Computeractive* staff and I enjoy reading how they unravel complex problems, so hopefully this is an easy one for you.

Paul W Hunt

A Sorry to report that Apple-related annoyances are sometimes among the hardest work for us to figure out solutions for. This is because the company controls everything so tightly that the answer is all too often: "It's Apple's way, or the highway!".



Show only flagged emails on your iPad via the Filters icon

Tap one of these to apply a flag of that colour.

This won't necessarily make the flag icons any easier to spot, but it does allow a degree of colour-coding. If that's not enough, you can also filter the inbox to show only flagged emails. This makes it easier to find specific flagged messages and, particularly when coupled

with the colour-coding, could satisfy your needs. There are definitely elements of that control freakery here, but we can offer a few ideas that should help. First, were you aware that you can apply flags of different colours? To do this, first swipe from right to left across a message in the inbox, just as you do now to tap the flag icon (1 in our screenshot). But, having first set a flag, you can then tap the More button (three dots) to see additional options – including a palette of colours.

with the colour-coding, could satisfy your needs.

To do this, first tap the Filters icon (three horizontal lines 2) at the bottom left of the inbox list. Next, under the Include heading, tap to tick Flagged, then tap Done. Now all you'll see in your inbox are flagged messages, replete with their newly colour-coded glory. To view your full inbox once more, just repeat this step to remove the tick from Flagged.

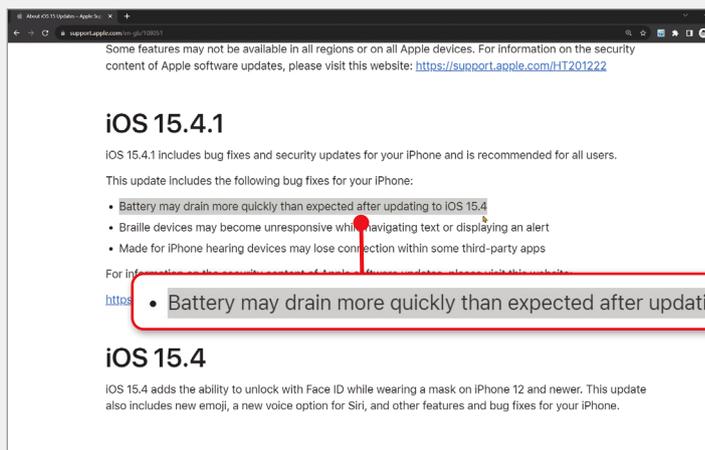
Why did an iOS upgrade improve my battery life?

Q The battery capacity on my iPhone had dropped to 79 per cent, which provided power for five to six hours with typical usage. I had Apple fit a new battery, and the capacity went up to 100 per cent, as expected. However, I didn't feel like I was getting any more life out of it. I vowed to return to the Apple Store to complain after my holiday. But, while away, I downloaded an iOS upgrade. Following this, the battery life improved substantially. Can you explain why the upgrade improved the battery's life?

Steve Sakal

A Not with absolute certainty. However, it is definitely the case that previous iOS updates have caused batteries to drain more quickly and that these problems have been subsequently fixed by later updates.

A couple of years ago, for example, the update to iOS 15.4 caused many



Some iOS updates can cause your iPhone battery to drain more quickly

users to suffer rapid battery drain. Apple admitted to this and fixed the problem with 15.4.1, just a couple of weeks later (www.snipca.com/49909 – see screenshot).

Apple hasn't made any specific mentions of battery-drain fixes with iOS 17 updates, but that doesn't mean the company hasn't quietly fixed something that was causing problems for a relatively

small number of users (with the iOS 15.4 update the problem was so widespread that the company had little choice but to act quickly).

So, while there's little doubt that your old battery's capacity had deteriorated, it's possible that a bug in iOS 17 was making it worse – a problem that Apple has now evidently fixed.

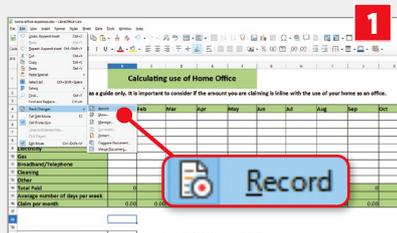
Why can't I delete LibreOffice Calc worksheets?

Q I have a LibreOffice Calc spreadsheet with multiple worksheets, each tracking investments going back several years. I'd like to delete some of the older worksheets, but Calc won't let me. All I seem to be able to do is hide selected worksheets. Do you have any idea why this might be?

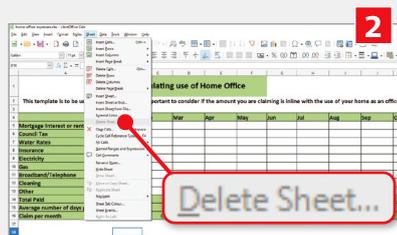
Stephen Haines

A Yes – Calc won't allow worksheets to be deleted when its Track Changes feature is in Record mode. So you probably have this enabled. If you know you have it enabled, and want to keep it that way, you'll still need to temporarily disable it in order to delete your worksheets.

To do that, first open the Edit menu then hover over Track Changes before clicking Record (see screenshot 1) to switch that mode off. Now delete your unwanted worksheets, either by choosing Delete Sheet in the Sheet menu 2, or right-clicking a worksheet tab before choosing Delete Sheet. Finally, just repeat the first step to re-enable the Record feature (assuming you want Calc to track your changes).



To delete worksheets in Calc, first turn off Record mode...



...then click Delete Sheet in the Sheet menu

Has my local council been hacked?

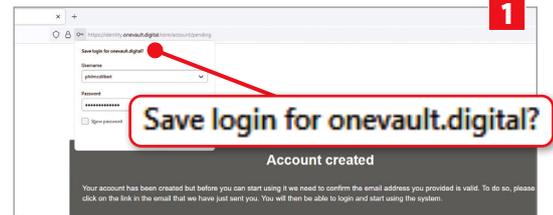
Q I signed up for the first time to my local-authority website. I usually save new login details to Firefox's password manager and – as I was completing the registration – a familiar message box appeared asking if I wanted to save the password. I did but, just as I went to do so, I noticed that it was not to Firefox but to 'onevault.digital' (see screenshot 1) – whatever that is.

I doubt my council is trying to steal passwords, but I have never heard of 'onevault.digital'. Firefox hadn't saved the new login, so this wasn't Firefox using a new name for its service. Can you explain what happened, and should I be worried?

Oliver Nelson

A We've changed your name at your request. You're certainly right to be alert to potential scams and we can fully appreciate that this would be a worry to anyone – but we're pretty confident there's nothing dubious happening here.

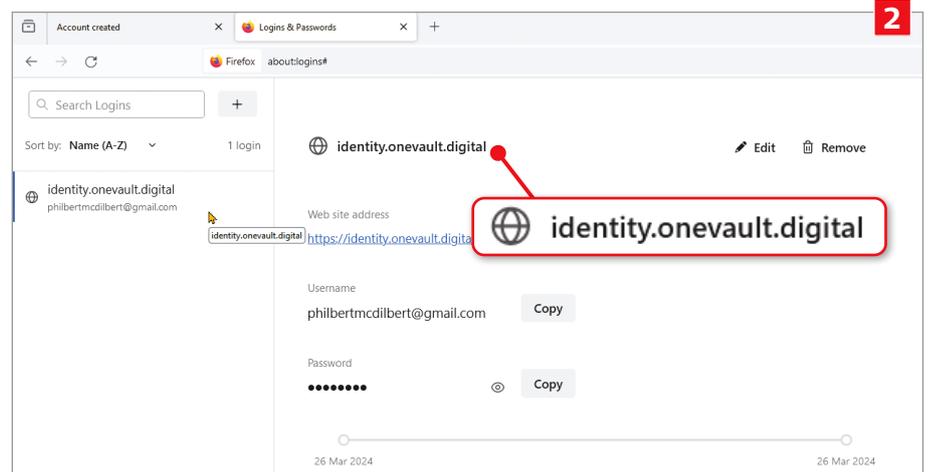
Instead, some UK councils operate



Many UK councils use 'white label' domains like this one for their online services

what's known as a 'white label' back-end system and this one uses the 'onevault.digital' domain. This service and domain are not intended to be a 'customer-facing' brand. Indeed, what users see can (and almost certainly should) be customised by the organisations using a back-end system like this. In other words, your council hasn't changed all the 'white labels' to its own branding.

Had you proceeded, the password would in fact have been saved by the Firefox password manager, albeit under the unchanged 'onevault.digital' branding 2, rather than that of your council. However, we don't think there's anything to worry about – but perhaps worth sending an email to the council outlining why you found this concerning.



The password is saved by the Firefox password manager under the 'onevault.digital' name rather than that of the council

Q: Why is my Ethernet slower than Wi-Fi?

A: Issue 669, page 65 – find it on our 2023 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/48860



Why won't my monitor's USB hub work?

Q I recently bought an Iiyama XU2792HSU monitor (pictured right), with the intention of using its various connections as a hub. The monitor is the 27in version of the 24in model featured in your Buy It! section (see page 32).

The monitor has two USB ports and these are described in its manual as 'upstream' and 'downstream' – with one of each. The monitor is connected to my computer via an Amazon Basics DisplayPort connector lead.

Unfortunately, neither of the USB ports seem to work with any device. When I plug anything into either socket they do power the connected device – so they work in that regard. The manual makes little reference to

these USB ports. I had hoped to connect my keyboard and mouse via these sockets, but so far, I can't. Do you know what's wrong?

Alec Fray

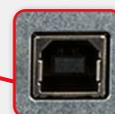
A We do. In fact, the manual (which we found at www.snipca.com/49910 – scroll down to the Downloads heading) does illustrate the necessary setup, but it's not very clear. Your monitor actually includes three USB sockets – two downstream and one upstream. However, you probably only recognise the two downstream sockets as USB, as only those use the familiar rectangular Type-A ports. These sockets can indeed serve as a hub to connect USB devices to your PC. They also provide power whenever the monitor is switched on, as you've discovered.



The Iiyama XU2792HSU monitor has two USB-A and one USB-B socket (pictured below) at the rear

However, to use those (downstream) Type-A sockets as a hub you first need to connect the third (upstream) USB socket to your PC. To distinguish it from the monitor's downstream sockets, this socket uses the squarer and less-common Type-B shape (pictured below), with a Type-A plug only at the PC end. Amazon sells a suitable cable for around £9 (www.snipca.com/49904),

though you might have one lying around – they're typically used to connect printers to PCs.



Will my sat-nav work after the 3G switch-off?

Q I enjoyed Issue 675's feature (page 62) about whether the 3G switch-off would kill smart meters, and it made me think. My TomTom car sat-nav has 'lifetime' traffic updates that come via an 'embedded SIM' and from what I gather this is via the 2G network. It seems we should be fine using it in the UK for a few more years, but for those of us who cross the channel and use it overseas could it be that we won't get traffic updates – depending on that country's switch-off plan?

Matt Synder

A We can't detail the 2G and 3G switch-off plans for the whole of Europe but yes, the various countries all have their own plans. Both across the continent and around the world both types of network have either already been discontinued, or will be

within a few years. So, if you have a device that connects via 2G or 3G, it'll eventually stop working – but remember that UK 2G networks should continue into the early 2030s.

Also, while we don't know your specific TomTom unit, as a general comment we would say that 'lifetime' offers rarely if ever mean the lifetimes of the users. Rather, the term usually refers

to the lifetime of the product or service in question. It's sufficiently vague in meaning that the supplier is usually free to end functionality whenever it decides or the technology dictates (as it eventually will do here). However, some models, like the pictured TomTom Go 520 (www.snipca.com/49905), can continue receiving updates by connecting via Bluetooth to a 4G/5G smartphone.



Sat-nav models like the TomTom Go 520 can continue receiving updates after the 3G switch-off by connecting via Bluetooth to a 4G/5G smartphone

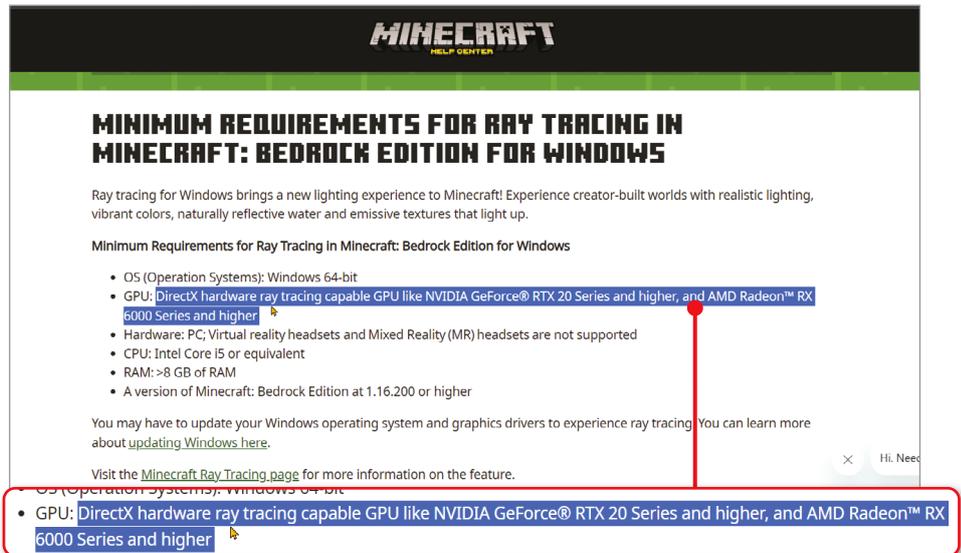
Why did GitHub let me download a virus?

Q I wanted the **ray tracing** feature in the Minecraft Bedrock Edition game, but the Microsoft Store said my PC couldn't run it – even though I have Windows 11 installed and it runs very smoothly. So I watched a YouTube video on how to get it from elsewhere, and followed a **GitHub** link in the video's description. However, my security software said the downloaded file was a virus and removed it. Is this normal with GitHub?

Patrick Doyle

A The fact your PC runs Windows 11 well is not really relevant. Enabling Minecraft Bedrock Edition's ray tracing effects requires at least an Nvidia RTX 20-series (or AMD equivalent) **graphics card** (see screenshot). Your PC doesn't have this, so you can't enjoy this particular graphical feature in Minecraft, or any other game.

Next, while we don't know which



Using raytracing effects in Minecraft Bedrock Edition requires at least an NVidia RTX 20-series or AMD equivalent graphics card

video you watched, nor the GitHub page you visited, both sound a little dubious. GitHub is a trusted website that, as it happens, is owned and operated by Microsoft. However, it is intended primarily as a resource for developers, not home users. GitHub does employ a variety of security measures, including scanning for known vulnerabilities, but

it's simply not designed or intended to be as safe as the Microsoft Store – precisely because a developer might post something with bugs, flaws or even malicious **code**.

It seems you were conned by a dodgy video into downloading a dodgy file from GitHub. Fortunately, your own security software did a good job – and saved you from potential disaster.

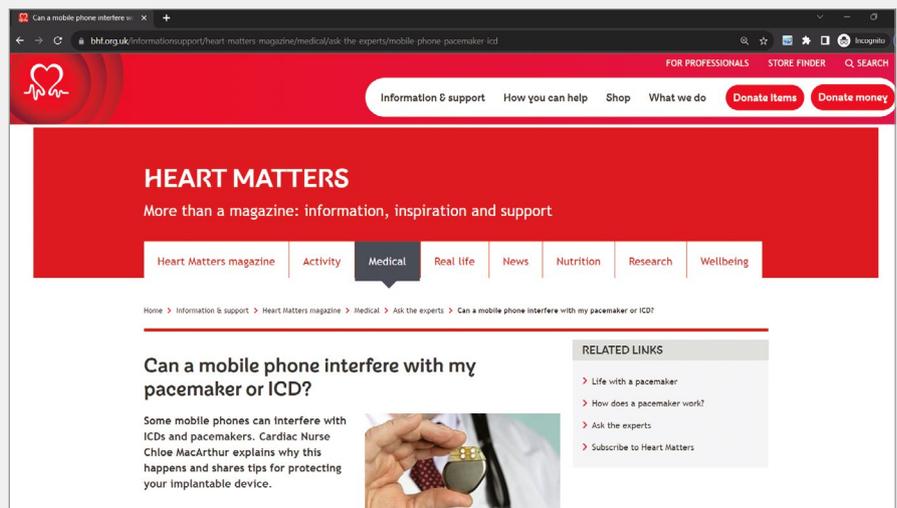
Will a fitness band affect my pacemaker?

Q I'm aware that there might be problems with using a smartphone near a pacemaker, but is there a similar issue with smartwatches and fitness bands? Not all smart devices use **bioimpedance-sensing** technology, but I don't recall any being advertised as such or seeing a review anywhere of pacemaker-friendly devices. What do you think?

Robin Lynn

A Not being medical professionals, we're sadly not qualified to comment on whether the combination of any particular device with any specific pacemaker is safe.

It is true that some studies have shown that smart devices which employ bioimpedance-sensing technology could affect the reliable operation of pacemakers. The British Heart Foundation, for example, highlights advice that suggests devices



The British Heart Foundation suggests devices should be 15 to 30cm away from a pacemaker

should be between 15 to 30cm away from a pacemaker (www.snipca.com/49906, see screenshot) – guidance that it has itself taken from Apple's website at www.snipca.com/49907.

However, for matters like this we must

refer you to your own GP or medical specialist, because what you should or should not do depends as much on your personal circumstances as any technological devices that you might have in mind.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

USB sticks and external hard drives?

Q You often recommend using USB sticks to transfer files, reinstall Windows and more. I had a 64GB USB stick that worked well for these sorts of tasks. Unfortunately, I recently dropped it on the floor and when going to pick it up rolled over it with my office chair's casters – sod's law and all that!

When trying to buy a new one, I saw that Amazon also recommended various external hard drives. Comparing relative capacities, these drives were generally much better value. So is there really much difference between a USB stick and a USB external hard drive for daily use? Could I do all the same things with a hard drive that I used to do with my USB stick?

Eric Walker

A There are significant physical differences between these two drive types. The most fundamental is that USB sticks are solid-state drives (SSDs) that use memory chips to hold data and therefore have no moving parts. Hard



Unlike a USB stick, an external USB hard drive attaches to your PC via a cable

drives, in contrast, store information on mechanically spun magnetic platters. The result is that – broadly speaking – USB sticks tend to be faster. So, if speed is a primary concern, we'd usually recommend a USB stick over a USB hard drive.

How much faster they are depends on many criteria, including the types of memory chips they use, the supported USB standard and the capabilities of the particular USB socket that a drive is connected to – as a rule, newer USB

standards are faster than old ones.

But for everyday jobs, of the sort you describe, we'd argue that most people, most of the time, wouldn't notice much – if any – difference between a USB stick and a USB hard drive.

Moreover, there are few if any functional differences:

what you can do with a USB stick on a Windows PC can be achieved with a USB hard drive, and vice versa.

The most noticeable practical difference is physical size. A USB stick will protrude directly from the socket, while an external USB hard drive attaches via a cable (pictured) and will take up desk space.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

What changed my PDF viewer's interface?

Q For years, I've been able to view and navigate PDFs in the same way. But recently, when I open a PDF the interface had changed. The control icons are now scattered all over the place, where before most – if not all – were in a single row at the top. I can't remember exactly how it's changed but it just seems all messed up now.

The icons themselves also look a bit different, though again in a way I can't really describe. I also can no longer do some things I used to be able to do, like type a number to jump to a specific page. Do you have any idea what might have happened here? Could this be the result of a malware infection? How do I put things back the way they were?

Ivan Foster

A First, don't panic – we're confident this isn't the result of a malware infection. You didn't



Click this option to revert to the previous version of Adobe Acrobat Reader

tell us which PDF viewer you're using but, from the description of your experience, we're sure it's Acrobat Reader. Adobe, the company behind this popular PDF-viewer app, has been rolling out a new layout for the last few months. It sounds like your turn for the update has arrived.

The new look has received a mixed reception, with many users as confused as yourself. Fortunately, for now at least, it's easy to revert back to the old design – but there's no reason that the average

user will know that. But all you need to do is click to open the File menu and then choose 'Disable new Acrobat Reader' (see screenshot) then restart the app. In the unlikely event you decide to embrace the new look, open the Edit menu and choose 'Enable new Acrobat Reader'.

Next Issue

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- Can I reinstall my discounted Microsoft Office?
- Why has Edge become forgetful?
- How do I donate by text? ...And many more

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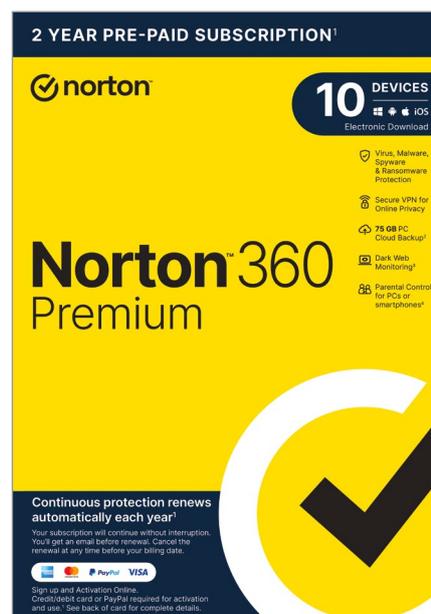
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*while stocks last



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Should I upgrade to Wi-Fi 6?

Q In Issue 679 (page 69) you explained the difference between Wi-Fi 6 and Wi-Fi 6E. I note the devices I own need to be capable of using Wi-Fi 6. But will my current devices (which I presume work on Wi-Fi 5) still work on 2.4 or 5GHz and only newer devices work on Wi-Fi 6? Also, I have a BT Hub 2 router. Do you know if BT is bringing out a Wi-Fi 6 edition?

John Murphy

A Wi-Fi 6 routers are 'backwards compatible', so older devices will connect fine if you upgrade to a new model – but only at their current speeds and frequencies. As you surmise, only devices that work with Wi-Fi 6 will benefit from the faster connection speeds.

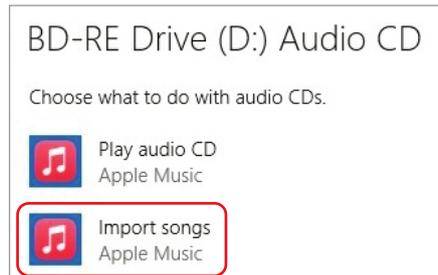
BT/EE recently released a Wi-Fi 6-enabled Smart Hub Plus (www.snipca.com/49926), so you should ask its customer-support team to send you one. You might even be able to talk your way into getting one for free – though this will likely involve signing up for a new contract with your broadband provider.

Alternatively, consider buying a third-party Wi-Fi 6 router, though you'll need to set it up yourself. The Asus RT-AXE7800 is our current favourite – see page 33.

Can I upload music to Apple's app on my PC?

Q I downloaded Apple's Music app (www.snipca.com/50055) to my PC after reading about the demise of iTunes in Issue 678's Make Windows Better (page 46). Sure enough, when I opened it all my music had transferred across from my iTunes library. But I couldn't see any way to upload new music from a CD or USB stick as I used to do on iTunes. Is it possible with Apple's Music app, or will I have to find some other way to transfer music to my phone?

Malcolm Whistance



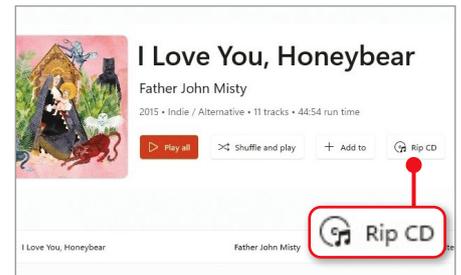
Windows offers to import audio CDs via Apple Music, but clicking it currently does nothing

A The Windows version of Apple's Music app is finally out of beta, but there still seem to be a few features missing – including ripping audio CDs. Windows does offer the option to 'Import songs' using Apple Music in the 'Choose what to do with audio CDs' prompt that appears when you insert a disc into your PC (see screenshot above). But currently nothing happens when you click this.

Instead, try using Microsoft's recently revamped Media Player app to rip CDs, then import them into your Apple Music library. Pop a CD into your disc drive and launch Media Player. You'll see a CD icon in the left-hand menu pane – click this, then the 'Rip CD' button (see screenshot above right).

By default, Media Player will rip your CDs to your Music folder, so navigate to this in File Explorer and drag the artist's folder to the **Music\Apple Music\Media\Automatically Add to Apple Music** folder in another File Explorer window. You can also import tunes from a USB stick this way.

To remove 'Show all options' from the right-click menu, you might have to open then close the 'Value data' box



In Windows' built-in Media Player app, click the CD icon on the left, then the 'Rip CD' button

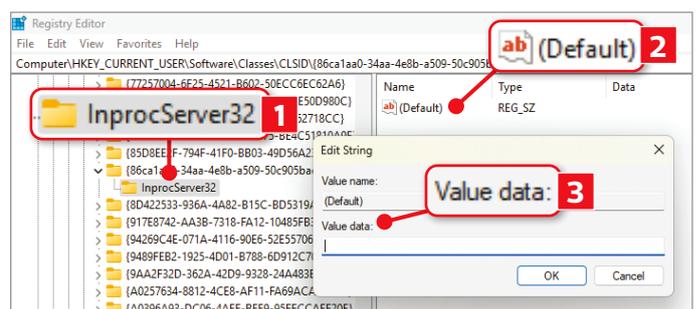
Why can't I change Windows 11's right-click menu?

Q I've just tried getting rid of 'Show more options' in Windows 11's right-click (context) menu using the registry key you suggested in Issue 679 (page 64). However, when I restarted my PC there was no change.

W J Wildman

A We accidentally omitted a dash from the registry key. We've now corrected this, so you can copy and paste the correct registry key `{86ca1aa0-34aa-4e8b-a509-50c905bae2a2}` from our Pastebin account at www.snipca.com/49982. Apologies for any frustration this may have caused.

If that still doesn't work, after you create InprocServer32 (1 in our screenshot below), click to open it, then right-click '(Default)' (2). Now select Modify, don't type anything into the 'Value data' box (3), then press Enter to close. Now restart your PC.



Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

2G/3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

Administrator Someone who can make changes to a computer that will affect others who also use it.

AI Artificial intelligence. Intelligence demonstrated by a machine rather than a human being. Often used to describe technology that can perform human-like tasks.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions are often released so problems can be ironed out.

Bioimpedance-sensing Testing how hard it is for electricity to pass through your body.

Biometric Using measurable personal characteristics, such as fingerprints, for identification.

BMP Bitmap. A type of image file.

Buffering Downloading a certain amount of data before starting to play a video. Can cause delays to your streaming.

Cache A temporary space for storing information. Can be memory used on a computer processor, or space on a hard drive used by a web browser.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users, especially over the internet. Typically used to offer automated customer support.

Coaxial A type of cable where one wire is surrounded by insulation, which is then surrounded by another wire.

Code Programming languages used to create software.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website. Used to store browsing preferences, website log-in details and so on.

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country. The most popular is Bitcoin.

Dark mode Showing white text on a black background.

Dark web Websites that can only be accessed using special software such as the Tor browser.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Dual-band router A Wi-Fi router that operates on two bands: 2.4 and 5GHz.

Dump file A file containing contents of PC memory in order to show why a crash happened.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

EXIF Exchangable Image File Format. A method for storing extra information, such as the date, time and camera model, inside digital photo files.

Favicon A small icon for a website, usually appearing in the address and bookmark bars of a web browser.

Field of view The amount of space measured in angles that can be seen from the camera lens.

Fingerprinting A tracking method used by websites to identify you from the device and software you're using.

Freemium A business model, especially on the internet, where basic services are provided for free, while more advanced features must be paid for.

FTTP Fibre-to-the premises. Fibre broadband that goes straight to the doorstep. Faster than FTTC (fibre-to-the-cabinet).

Geo-restricted Content such as TV programmes and films that's intended to be watched only in a specific country.

GHz Gigahertz. A measure of how many instructions a chip can process per second. 1GHz is equal to 1,000MHz.

GIF Graphics Interchange Format. A type of image file often used on the web, but now largely superseded by PNG.

GitHub A place where software developers can share code, and where users can download programs. Owned by Microsoft.

GPS Global positioning system. Satellite-based navigational system.

GPU Graphics Processor Unit. A chip designed to create 3D graphics, but which can also be used for other computing tasks.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet, either free or for a fee.

IFTTT If This Then That. A website and app that lets you automate tasks.

Incognito mode A browser mode that doesn't save your internet history, so other people using your computer can't see which sites you've visited.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours than monitors that do not use this technology.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras. Some image quality is lost with each save.

LCD Liquid-crystal display. The technology used to create almost all flatscreen monitors.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

Local account A Windows account that's stored on a particular computer and can only be used on that machine. Alternative to creating a Microsoft account, which is stored online and used across multiple devices and services.

Macro lens Lets you take sharp, detailed, close-up photos of small objects.

Manifest V3 Third version of the software that runs Chrome browser extensions.

Mesh router Wireless network system that uses multiple, connected routers to stretch Wi-Fi further than a traditional router.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

.NET Microsoft's tool for building software.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Onion address URLs for websites on the dark web, accessible only through Tor Browser.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

Passkey A method for signing into accounts by typing a one-off code, fingerprint or facial recognition rather than a password.

Phishing A form of internet fraud that tries to trick you into revealing personal details.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software or to your web browser.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

Proxy server A computer that sits between your computer and the internet and filters the connection.

QR code Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

Ransomware Malware run by hackers who lock files on your PC and demand a payment to release them.

Ray tracing Provides realistic lighting in an image by recreating how light behaves.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Refurbished A second-hand device that has been repaired by its manufacturer so that it can be resold and reused.

Registry keys The Windows Registry equivalent of a folder.

Response time How fast a coloured pixel turns to white and back again.

Sat-nav Satellite navigation. A technology that uses signals from satellites to determine the location of a device or vehicle.

Scissor switch Keys that have two plastic pieces that interlock in a scissor-like fashion.

Script A short program that is stored on a web server to control part of a website.

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

Subreddit A forum dedicated to a specific topic on the website Reddit.

TIFF Tagged Image File Format. A standard file format used to store graphics images.

Timestamp The time which an event is recorded by a computer.

TTF True Type Font. A format for storing info about fonts, developed by Apple and Microsoft in the 1980s.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A new connector that's reversible.

Vector graphics Graphics rendered as smooth lines so they can be enlarged without a loss of quality.

VoIP Voice over IP. The routing of voice calls over the internet.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

Waveform An image that represents an audio recording.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called 802.11ax.

Wi-Fi card Adds Wi-Fi connectivity to a computer.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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Attempting to spring-clean his PC without uninstalling useful programs, Robert Irvine tries to...

Free up space by shrinking software

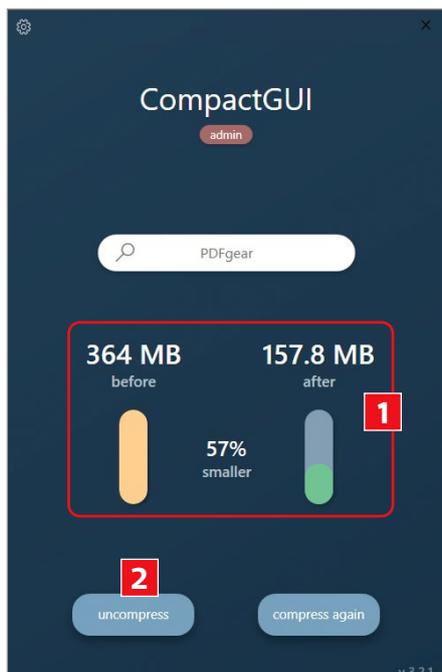
When I moved house last year, it took me three ‘passes’ to reduce my collection of personal belongings to a manageable and transportable size. Boxes of old Christmas cards, faded clothes that no longer fit me and broken gadgets that had beeped their last were all eventually – albeit reluctantly – disposed of in the appropriate recycling bins, once I’d overcome the notion they might one day prove useful again.

I have the same inclination to keep software I rarely use installed on my PC – just in case I ever need it in future. And while removing a program I can easily download again isn’t as big a deal as chucking out a spare toaster or a pair of jeans I could have squeezed into if I breathed in a bit, I still think it’s risky. As a result, I’ve been rapidly running out of space on my hard drive, with only 5GB remaining, so felt obliged to do some spring cleaning.

The sensible course of action would be to uninstall the biggest storage hogs using BCUninstaller or O&O AppBuster. But that would mean losing essential tools such as PowerToys, Chrome and Files, just because they were on the large side – a bit like an army discharging capable but overweight recruits. Instead, I decided to reclaim drive space by slimming down my most bloated software.

To achieve this, I downloaded a free program called CompactGUI (www.snipca.com/50082), which “compresses your games and programs, reducing the space they use without affecting their functionality”. It works by removing redundant bits of data, rather than entire files, and uses ‘transparent’ compression – instead of repackaging items into ZIP archives.

I grabbed the latest version (3.2.1) from its GitHub Releases page (www.snipca.com/50083) by clicking the ‘CompactGUI.exe’ link in the Assets section. Somewhat inevitably, it triggered a Microsoft Defender SmartScreen warning, but as I knew it was safe to use



Robert used CompactGUI to shrink large software on his PC by 57 per cent

– with only a single red flag on malware-checker VirusTotal (www.snipca.com/50085) – I clicked ‘More info’ then ‘Run anyway’. CompactGUI requires .NET 6, which I already had installed – if you don’t, it will prompt you to download the framework from Microsoft.

The program opened on a simple interface consisting solely of a ‘select target folder’ search box. I clicked this and navigated to the installation folder for Calibre, one of the programs I wanted to shrink, at C:\ProgramFiles\Calibre2. After I clicked Select Folder, CompactGUI warned that I didn’t have permission to make changes to the folder, so I clicked Restart App to try again as an administrator. This told me the size of the Calibre folder (459MB) and gave me the option to compress it.

I clicked the Compress button, chose LZX (the highest compression level listed) in the ‘compression mode’ dropdown menu and clicked Compress again.

Although the shrinking process was

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In total, I freed up 2.9GB of drive space, without uninstalling anything

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speedy, the result was disappointing – the Calibre folder was exactly the same size. I tried a different compression mode, but again there was no change – “0% smaller”. Perhaps Calibre is already pared-down enough.

Undeterred, I tried to reduce another bloater – the free PDF editor PDFgear. This time, CompactGUI shrank the software from 364MB to 157.8MB, making it 57-per-cent smaller (1 in our screenshot) – an impressive result.

To make sure it hadn’t wrecked the program, I launched PDFgear and was pleased to find it worked just fine. In fact, it even seemed slightly faster than before. Besides, in the event of performance problems, CompactGUI provides a handy Uncompress button (2) to undo its changes.

I subsequently applied my new slimming skills to several other big programs, including Paint.NET (reduced from 419MB to 170MB), DisplayFusion (210MB to 81MB) and Mozilla Thunderbird (239MB to 85MB). In total, I freed up 2.9GB of drive space, without uninstalling anything.

If only I could employ the same tactics with my waistline, I could have fit into those old jeans after all.

 Need help with freeing up space on your PC? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

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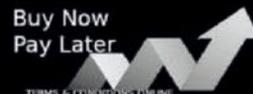
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