



TRY WINDOWS 11 WITHOUT PAYING
And go back if you don't like it **p38**

BEWARE THIS FAKE PHONE UPDATE!
It's a convincing scam **p11**



DON'T BIN YOUR OLD TABLET

Use it as a...

- Second monitor
- Smart speaker
- TV remote
- + more**

p60



Computer

active

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Microsoft's ads reach tipping point - **p21**

Learn something new in every issue

Ditch **Google** for...

BRAVE

▶ Switch now to a **BETTER** and **MORE PRIVATE** browser **p50**

- Block adverts Google won't
- Use Tor to stay anonymous
- Make unlimited free video calls
- Hide all your internet history
- Stop websites tracking you

+ Brave's search engine is better too!



PLUS

TAKE COMPOSITE PHOTOS - AND EDIT FOR FREE **p35**

WHY WE STOPPED USING OUTLOOK **p62**



And what we've switched to (not Gmail!)



FOR THE

GAMERS AND THE CREATORS



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It might sound impressive that nearly 79 million people use Brave, but it barely registers on the global browser league table. Look at this chart from StatCounter (www.snipca.com/50742) and you'll see Google's Chrome way out in front, followed by Apple's Safari and Microsoft's Edge.

Brave, unmentioned, is squeezed into the 'Other' category hovering at around one per cent. And yet those 79 million people know something other users don't: it's the best browser for staying private online. No ads, no trackers, no clutter. It's

fast too, and has loads of superb features.

Robert Irvine reveals the best of these in his Cover Feature, and also explains why you should try Brave's search engine - which similarly fails to make StatCounter's chart (www.snipca.com/50743) - instead of Google.

The fact is, it's *hugely* impressive that an independent outfit like Brave, lacking the billions available to its bigger rivals, can attract as many users as it does. I'm one of them. I hope you'll become one too.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

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➔ Brave's search engine is better too!

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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.

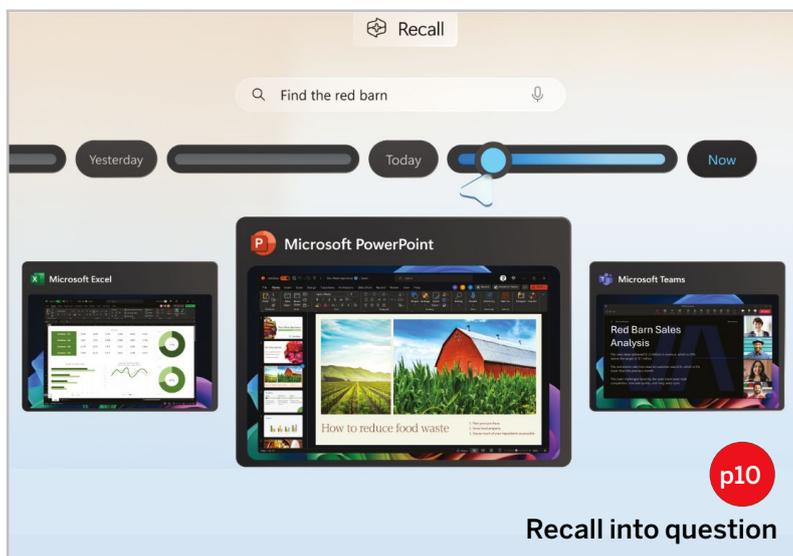
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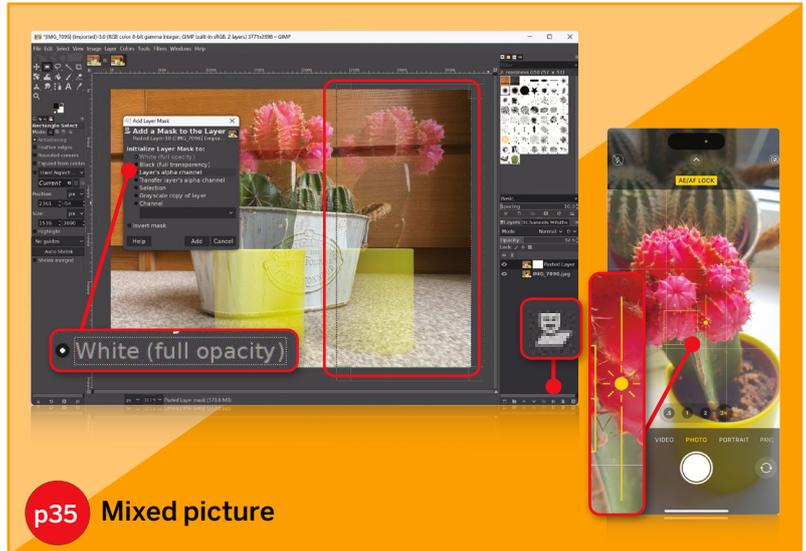
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COVER
FEATURE
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Don't Bin Your Old Tablet

p60



Freely arrives on cheapest TVs yet – just £230

Freely is available on the cheapest TV yet – a 43in model available only from Argos.

It's one of five TVs all made by British company Bush, all with a resolution of **4K/UHD** and **HDR** brightness and contrast.

The TVs, which all run the

TiVo operating system, rise to £379.99 for 65 inches (see box bottom right).

Launched in April by the UK's main broadcasters, it's the first service that lets you stream live shows and on-demand content for free on a smart TV, removing the need for a dish or aerial.

All shows will be displayed in a single menu (pictured below), whether they're broadcast over the air or streamed via the internet.

It's intended to be the long-term replacement for Freeview – which is still watched in nearly 40 per cent of UK households (16 million people – and Freesat, which is in two million households).

However, it's not going to be added to any existing sets – nor will it be available in a separate box – so you'll have to buy a new TV.

Until these Bush TVs were released, it was available only on new TVs made by Chinese manufacturer Hisense.

Hisense models start at



WHAT WE THINK

These new TVs look like decent devices in their own right, and might be worth buying for access to Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, Netflix and YouTube. But there's no point getting them yet just for watching Freely. If your current TV has Freeview or Freesat, don't consider buying a new one until Freely expands beyond its meagre 31 channels. And even when it does, Freely will have to offer something significantly different to entice viewers. A revamped TV menu won't be enough.



£249 for 32in HD (www.snipca.com/50800) and rise to £329 for 40in. It's also available with a 55in screen (£429 from www.snipca.com/50801) in 65in, 75in, 85in and 100in sizes.

Freely's launch was widely seen as disappointing, with only 31 channels from the UK's five main broadcasters – BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5 and STV.

As well as Freely, the new Bush TVs provide access to Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, Netflix and YouTube, but not Sky's Now TV.

They have two USB ports, three **HDMI** sockets (pictured above right), and support for Wi-Fi, Ethernet and Bluetooth. They also let viewers stream from other devices that have Sony's **DLNA** technology.



WHERE TO BUY BUSH'S FREELY TVs

- 43in £229.99 www.snipca.com/50784
- 50in £269.99 www.snipca.com/50785
- 55in £299.99 www.snipca.com/50786
- 58in £319.99 www.snipca.com/50787
- 65in £379.99 www.snipca.com/50788



You'll like this...

Microsoft Flight Simulator 2024 is being released in November (www.snipca.com/50778)



but not this...

A fake Asda 'prize survey' is spreading online (www.snipca.com/50779)

Man sentenced for selling hacked Amazon Fire TV sticks

A man has been given a two-year suspended sentence after pleading guilty to selling modified Amazon Fire TV sticks that let viewers watch paid-for content for free.

Kevin O'Donnell, 41, sold the devices for between £40 and £85 on Facebook and made more than £130,000. More than 3,600 people were members of his Facebook group.

He was arrested after police raided his home in Liverpool in 2023 and found several PCs, laptops, mobile phones and hacked Fire Sticks. The devices gave viewers access to movies, Sky Sports and other Premier League football coverage without having to pay.

O'Donnell spoke to customers through Facebook and WhatsApp, and delivered the sticks by post or in person.

He also received a 25-day rehabilitation activity and was ordered to complete 150 hours of unpaid work.



His arrest followed a joint investigation by the Federation Against Copyright Theft (Fact) and Merseyside Police's cybercrime unit.

Kieron Sharp, chief executive officer of Fact, said: "The message is very clear – if you sell a device that provides access to content that is not licensed to you or owned by you, you could face criminal investigation, prosecution and a conviction."

Police have warned sellers of illegal sticks that they face

arrest, as authorities continue to crack down on the devices. Fact is encouraging the public to report people selling these devices though Crimestoppers (www.snipca.com/49765).

The problem is widespread across the UK. A YouGov survey last November revealed that almost 1 in 10 people in the UK had recently watched sport illegally for free.

 Do you know anyone who uses an illegal Amazon Fire TV Stick? Let us know letters@computeractive.co.uk

EBay to stop accepting American Express card payments

EBay will stop accepting American Express cards as a direct payment method from 17 August.

It said it was making the change due to "the unacceptably high fees American Express charges for processing credit card transactions".

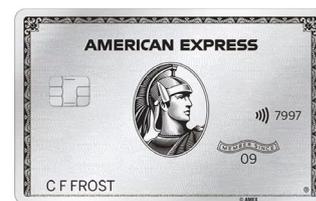
You'll still be able to use American Express when using PayPal to buy on eBay, but you'll lose the protection offered by Section 75 of the Consumer Credit Act.

This states that for items costing between £100 and £30,000 on a credit card, the card company is jointly liable with the seller if something goes wrong.

But Section 75 only applies if there's a direct link between the shopper, the company issuing the card, and the place you bought it from. Using PayPal in some cases breaks this link.

PayPal does have its own protection scheme (www.snipca.com/50773), giving you 180 days to raise a case if your item doesn't arrive, is defective or doesn't match the seller's description. It refunds the full purchase price plus the original shipping costs you paid.

EBay will continue to accept Mastercard and Visa credit cards after 17 August. Paying with these directly on eBay –



not through PayPal – gives you Section 75 protection.

American Express said it was "disappointed" by eBay's decision, claiming it would "limit customers' payment choices".

If you currently use American Express as your default payment method, follow eBay's instructions to change it: www.snipca.com/50775.

For more information on eBay's decision visit www.snipca.com/50774.

IN BRIEF

BUY NEW MANHATTAN FREEVIEW BOXES

Manhattan has released its T4 and T4-R Freeview Play boxes, to fill the gap left by the T3-R, which it stopped making last



year. Both contain UK-based services like BBC iPlayer and ITVX, though only the T4-R lets you record shows. The T4 costs £70 (www.snipca.com/50759), while the T4-R costs £169 for 500GB (www.snipca.com/50760), £199 for 1TB and £229 for 2TB of storage.

GET DISCOUNTS ON O2 REFURBISHED PHONES

O2 is offering a £360 discount on selected refurbished phones as it relaunches its 'Like New' scheme. Existing customers can also get an extra £70 off certain phones, including the Samsung Galaxy S23 5G 256GB. Both offers – which can be used together – run until 7 August. For details visit www.snipca.com/50757.

TOMORROW'S WORLD



This is a six-legged guide robot for blind and visually impaired people built by China's Shanghai Jiao Tong University. It's meant to address the shortage of real guide dogs in the country – only 400 in a population of 1.4 billion. Its six legs form a "triangular base", making it sturdier than four-legged robots. See for yourself at www.snipca.com/50765.



IN BRIEF

FULL-FIBRE IN 517 NEW UK LOCATIONS

Openreach has named 517 new locations across the UK that will receive full-fibre broadband. It covers 2.7 million homes, including more than 400,000 in hard-to-reach rural areas. Providers including BT, EE, Sky, TalkTalk and Vodafone will be able to offer services via Openreach's cables. To see every location visit www.snipca.com/50699, and search for your postcode at www.snipca.com/50700.

PLUSNET CLOSING ALL MOBILE SERVICES

Plusnet has confirmed it's closing all its mobile services during June, after which you won't be able to make calls or send texts. It's contacting customers at least 30 days before their account closes, and giving them 40 days to move their service to another provider. To keep your mobile number when you switch, you'll need a nine-digit PAC. Get this by texting PAC to 65075. For more details visit www.snipca.com/50731.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!



Three quarters of Generation Z – those born between 1997 and 2012 – don't know who they really are. A Lenovo survey found most youngsters have one identity online and another in the real world, creating "a disconnect that's fuelling loneliness and anxiety" (www.snipca.com/50701). Might the simple solution be to not go online as often?



Sony removes Netflix from over 40 of its older TV sets

Sony will soon remove Netflix from 42 of its TV models sold in 2014, including the popular W8 and X9 models. Netflix will stop working on these TVs on 24 July, Sony said. It blamed the technical limitations of running the app on old sets.

The move will force some viewers to buy new TVs in order to watch Netflix, such as our current favourite – Samsung's Q60B (see page 33). Its remote control comes with a Netflix button.

You can also access Netflix by buying a streaming device such as Amazon's Fire TV Stick, Google's Chromecast or Roku's Express and plugging it into your TV's HDMI port. Additionally, it's available

NETFLIX



through gaming consoles such as a PlayStation or Xbox.

Affected Sony TVs include the KDL-32W706B (pictured), which cost £350 when released and was named best 32in TV of 2014 when reviewed by our sister title *What Hi-Fi*: www.snipca.com/50716.

Sony's decision comes seven months after Netflix stopped its app working on all TVs and Blu-ray players released between 2011 and 2013.

You won't be able to seek a refund from Sony because legally manufacturers don't have to continue providing services beyond what's considered an acceptable time period, even if the service is the main reason why you bought the device.

For a full list of affected TVs visit: www.snipca.com/50709.

WATCH ANYTHING ON YOUR TV STICK

For details on what's available on TV sticks read Issue 684's Cover Feature – available as a back issue from www.snipca.com/50718.



Russian hackers targeting Olympics, Microsoft warns

Microsoft has warned that Russian hackers will target the 2024 Summer Olympics with a campaign of misinformation on social media.

The company's Threat Analysis Center says that Russia-based groups called Storm-1099 and Storm-1679 will try to discredit the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and create the impression that terrorists will attack the tournament.

The attacks began in June 2023 when Storm-1679 released a fake film on the messaging service Telegram

called *Olympics Has Fallen* (pictured).

It used fake audio created by AI that impersonated Tom Cruise and criticised the IOC's leadership. Microsoft said that "slick special effects and fake endorsements from Western media outlets and celebrities indicates a significant increase in skill and effort" from previous campaigns to influence events (www.snipca.com/50708).

More recently the groups have posted videos online making the false claim that



people have returned their tickets due to fears of terrorist attacks.

They've also posted fake press releases stating falsely that the CIA has advised people not to attend the games because of the risk of attacks.

Microsoft's experts warn that this kind of misinformation will increase in the weeks prior to the Games, which begin in Paris on 26 July.

YouTube ‘mutes and skips’ videos if you use ad-blockers

YouTube has been accused of muting and skipping videos for viewers who have ad-blockers installed.

Several users complained about this on the social-forum site Reddit. One person posted an example of a video skipping to the end no matter where they started watching it from (www.snipca.com/50681).

Other users said they could only hear the audio if they constantly adjusted the volume.

They said the problems occur most commonly with the Adblock Plus extension installed, or when watching in browsers with built-in ad-blockers like Opera GX.

Users also said that they didn't experience the issue if they blocked ads using *Computeractive* favourite uBlock Origin (<https://ublockorigin.com>).

Google, which owns YouTube, didn't comment on this particular complaint, but



did confirm that efforts to improve the site's "performance and reliability" may lead to a "suboptimal viewing experience".

It's the same explanation Google gave in late 2023 when users accused it of loading videos more slowly if they had ad-blockers installed (www.snipca.com/48429).

Earlier last year it also started showing messages warning viewers that unless they turn off their ad blockers they can watch only three more videos.

The moves are part of

Google's "global effort" to crack down on ad blockers. It says ad-blocker tools "violate YouTube's Terms of Service, and we've been urging users for some time to support their favourite creators and allow ads on YouTube or try YouTube Premium for an ad-free experience".

However, some users who complained on Reddit said the developers of the ad-blockers had responded by updating their extensions to prevent automatic muting and skipping.

Microsoft's weather forecasts are the 'most accurate' in the world

Microsoft's weather forecasts have been named as the world's most accurate for the second year running.

The accolade comes from US firm ForecastWatch (<https://forecastwatch.com>), which measures the accuracy of weather predictions from thousands of locations around the world.

It analysed forecasts of 22 weather services throughout 2023, including from the BBC, Met Office and The Weather Channel. It found the predictions in Microsoft's Start app were the most accurate when predicting high and low



temperatures and cloud-cover forecasts, and scored highly in other categories.

Microsoft said it has reimagined weather forecasting using AI, bringing together "massive weather datasets, large scale computation models, mapping and topography data plus real-time reports from users" (see www.snipca.com/50684).

The company called this a "comprehensive, data-driven approach" that offers a wide range of solutions to users, from up-to-the-minute "nowcast" predictions to longer forecasts up to 30 days.

It added that in March alone it sent 150 billion weather notifications to users, nine billion of which were for severe weather alerts.

To see Microsoft Start's forecasts, download the app from www.snipca.com/50685 or search for 'weather' in the Start menu.

 Do you think Microsoft's weather forecasts are the most accurate? Let us know letters@computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF

SKY AXES CHANNELS FOR OLD SD TV BOXES

Sky is switching off all channels for viewers with standard-definition (SD) TV boxes. To keep watching them after August you'll need to get a Sky Q box, which Sky is providing for free. If you're affected, you'll see the message 'BBC One in SD' when you select channel 101 on your remote control. Visit Sky's site for details: www.snipca.com/50679.

WORDLE SUES 'CONFUSING' GAME WORLDLE

New York Times, which owns Wordle, is suing Worldle (<https://worldledaily.com>) for "creating confusion" over its similar name. Worldle (pictured below) challenges you to identify a location from an image in Google Street View. It's run by Kory McDonald from Seattle, who said there's "a whole industry" of games that end in 'le'.



REPAIR SURFACE LAPTOPS AT CURRYS

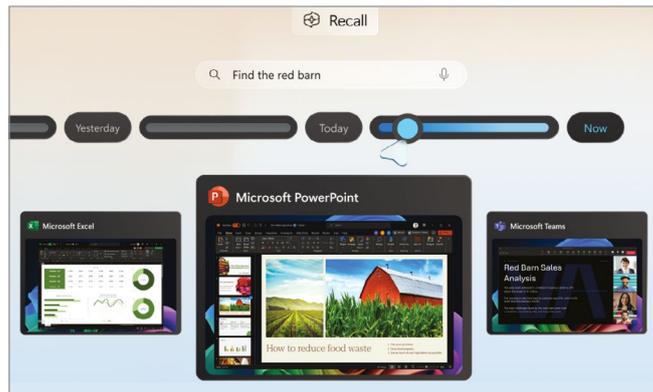
Anyone with a faulty Microsoft Surface laptop can get it examined in person at Currys after the store became the tech giant's first "official retail repair partner" in the UK. Previously, customers could only go through Microsoft's own support channels. Currys is also offering replacement Surface laptops within the warranty period. Read more at www.snipca.com/50680.

Is Microsoft's new Recall tool a 'security disaster'?

Experts warn that hackers can use it to steal your data

When the UK's data watchdog says it will investigate the privacy implications of a new Windows tool, you know it's not talking about a small update to File Explorer. Instead, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is worried about Microsoft's new Recall feature, which takes screenshots of your computer every five seconds and stores them in a folder.

It uses this information to let you search what you've done on your laptop by scrolling through a timeline of 'snapshots' (ie, screenshots) that includes websites, documents, programs, emails and more. In our example (pictured) the user is looking at a PowerPoint presentation he made earlier in the day, in between an Excel spreadsheet on the left and a chat on Microsoft Teams.



the company will be troubled that all the publicity surrounding it has been about potential security risks.

Cybersecurity expert Kevin Beaumont, who briefly worked for Microsoft in 2020, has tested Recall and found that it stores information in a database in **plain text**. He warned that this could make it easy for a hacker to use malware to access the data, and proved it could be

(www.snipca.com/50790).

Before you start searching your settings for an option to disable Recall, bear in mind it'll only be available in the new range of Copilot+ computers. You don't need to worry about it being added to your existing PC in an update. But such is the level of concern that some experts have already explained how to turn off Recall in the computers it'll be built into – and thankfully it'll require just a few clicks.

Microsoft has clearly been rattled by Beaumont's concerns because a few days later it said Recall wouldn't be turned on by default. Writing online Pavan Davuluri, Corporate Vice President at 'Windows + Devices', acknowledged that the company had heard a "clear signal that we can make it easier for people to choose to enable Recall on their Copilot+ PC and improve privacy and security safeguards" (www.snipca.com/50776).

Davuluri also said Microsoft will make the data in Recall harder to access. You'll need to turn on Windows Hello to use it, which means signing in with

THE FACTS

- A cybersecurity expert called Microsoft's forthcoming Recall tool a "security disaster"
- Recall takes screenshots of your PC every five seconds to create a searchable history of what you've done on it
- Microsoft responded to the criticism by saying that Recall would be turned off by default

a face scan, fingerprint or a PIN sent to you every time you want to see data stored by Recall.

This should be enough to prevent anyone from remotely accessing computers and stealing data from Recall. Microsoft also tried to reassure users by saying the screenshots are encrypted, stored locally (ie, on the computer) not online, and never sent to the company.

Also, taskbar and system-tray icons will tell you when Recall has been switched on, and you'll be able to exclude certain sites or programs from being screengrabbed.

It remains to be seen whether these measures will reassure the ICO, but Kevin Beaumont seemed pleased that Microsoft had acted, saying there were some "good elements" to the changes (www.snipca.com/50780).

We agree. With these security improvements, Recall could prove an incredibly helpful tool. But Microsoft's blunders may already have deterred many from ever using it.

Microsoft boasts it 'feels like having photographic memory' because you'll be able to find anything you've done on your computer

Microsoft boasts that using Recall "feels like having photographic memory" because you'll be able to find – or 'recall' – anything you've done on your computer.

It's a key part of the forthcoming range of Copilot+ laptops, which are designed to maximise the potential of AI. Microsoft claims they are "the fastest, most intelligent Windows PCs ever built". So

done by posting his database on X (formerly Twitter): www.snipca.com/50777.

Beaumont said he wouldn't reveal how it could be done because he wanted to give Microsoft time to address his concerns. However, that didn't stop "ethical hacker" Alexander Hagenah from building a tool he called TotalRecall to show how data could be stolen from Recall

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Fake Google Play Store updates

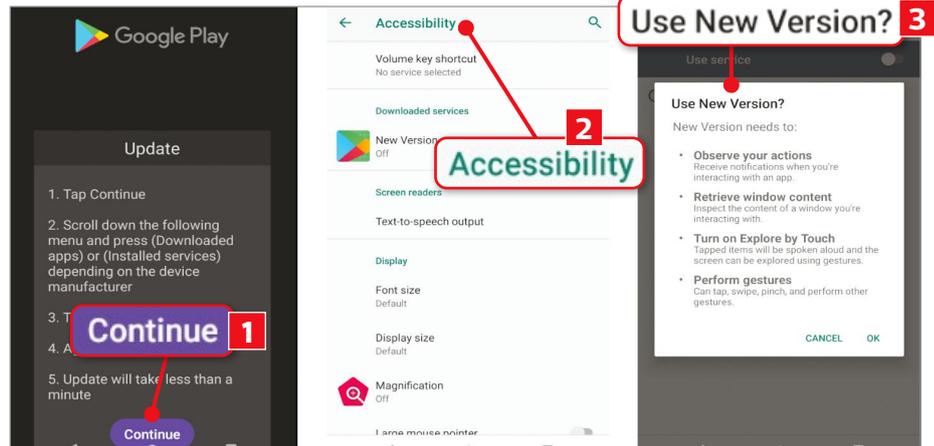
What's the threat?

Scammers are tricking Android users with fake Google Play Store updates that contain malware. Installing the update gives the attackers access to the victim's phone or tablet.

First, the scammers send an email or text message claiming to be from Google, telling you to click a link to update the Google Play Store on your device. Doing so **sideloads** the malware, called Antidot, then shows a message with a five-step set of instructions and a purple 'Continue' button (1 in our screenshot). Clicking the button opens your device's Accessibility section (2), where the malware asks you to 'Use New Version?' (3). Clicking OK lets the malware access your text messages, control the camera and screen lock, and track what you tap on your device.

How can you stay safe?

First, always remember that Google will never email or text you a link to update



the Play Store. Instead, it updates in the background, though you can also do it manually by following the instructions at www.snipca.com/50663.

Also be suspicious of any app or update that tries to sideload on to your device, which is a sign that it's trying to bypass Google's Play Protect security. This protection is switched on by default,

but if you want to check that it's active, open the Google Play Store app, then tap the top-right profile icon. Now tap Play Protect followed by the top-right Settings cog and make sure both blue sliders are switched on. Also tap the Scan button while in Play Protect to make Google search for any malicious apps you've installed.

New tools | Share Google passwords with family members

You can now share passwords you've saved in Google Password Manager with other members of your Google 'family' group. The new feature already works on Android devices and will probably come to Chrome on PCs soon (see 'Security & Privacy' at www.snipca.com/50664).

Open the Password Manager in the Chrome browser on your phone or tablet, then select a saved account. You'll see a message asking you to 'Share a copy of your password'. Type your family member's details here, then click Share (see screenshot). It'll then appear in your family member's own Google password manager.

If you haven't created a family group, you can do so using one of the methods at www.snipca.com/50665. You can add six people as long as they live in



the same country and are 13 or over. Once you've set it up, you can share Google subscriptions and content such as YouTube Premium, apps from the Play Store and Google One storage.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers

McAfee expiring in '24 hours'?

I have McAfee on my PC, so when I received an email claiming my subscription "has expired in 24H", it caught my attention. I wasn't sure what it meant – perhaps that McAfee would expire in 24 hours? The message said my PC would be "susceptible to many different virus threats". The words 'susceptible' and 'virus' were both clickable links, as were others in the message. There was also a big red button urging me to 'Reactivate My subscription' – note the inconsistent capitals. There was a serial number at the bottom, and a countdown timer to get a discount.

Ron Hargreaves

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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Beware 'bait and switch' tactic of paid-for software

✉ What Carl Hughes overlooks in his defence of paid-for software are the crafty tricks developers use to grab our money (Letters, Issue 685). The worst is the bait-and-switch tactic of offering an important tool in the free version, then moving it to the paid-for edition a few months later.

This would perhaps be forgivable if it was a minor tool, like something you might use in a photo editor. It would be annoying, sure, but you're probably not relying on it for some essential task. The worst offenders are probably password managers, and of these LastPass is the biggest culprit. I stopped using it in 2021 when it altered its free plan so it would apply to only one type of device.

I know not all paid-for programs are guilty of these underhand tactics, but I lost my trust in them following the LastPass debacle. These days I stick only to software that doesn't have a paid-for edition.

Iain Deighton

CA SAYS Iain's right to point the finger at LastPass. The decision he refers to was one of the most shameless examples of bait-and-switch marketing we've seen. This tactic is becoming so common that we devoted Issue 664's Cover Feature (pictured right) to software that will almost definitely remain free forever. It includes photo-recovery tool PhotoRec, video converter HandBrake and password manager KeePass, which must have benefited from LastPass's short-sighted move back in 2021. You can read the feature on our 2023 Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/48860.



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Nothing 'scandalous' about Ring's price rise

✉ In Issue 683's Readers' Tips (page 40) Simon Barrow complained about the "scandalous" increase in single-device subscriptions for Ring doorbells, and bought an EZVIZ DB2 doorbell instead.

I own a number of Ring devices, but the Plus plan I subscribe to hasn't increased. However, while I'm not trying to defend Ring's price increase, it has to be put into perspective. Ignoring the 43-per-cent increase for a moment, the actual monetary increase, if you take up the annual option, is only £1.25 a month (or just over 31p a week). I suspect there are very few people who would genuinely find that scandalous.

Simon paid £80 for his new EZVIZ camera, which would have paid for over five years of a subscription with his Ring doorbell. He would then have retained a well-supported, mature product with a slick, highly configurable app.

More importantly, it would already be fitted to his door and, I assume, continue to work well. Incidentally, if Simon decides to opt for the more basic EZVIZ CloudPlay 30-day storage plan for his new doorbell (the closest equivalent to the Ring Standard plan), it would cost him £99.99 a year – that's double what Ring is now asking and even more than the unlimited Ring Plus plan!

Les Hornby



Why I switched from TalkTalk to BT to TalkTalk

✉ In the early months of this year, my copper internet connection became unstable. TalkTalk, my internet provider, couldn't determine the cause and refused to send me a replacement router free of charge. In frustration, I signed up to BT's Full Fibre 100 because, like Bruce Hunt (Letters, Issue 683), I thought TalkTalk didn't offer a VoIP line with their FTTP service.

Next day, TalkTalk told me they'd charge me for leaving my contract early. I rang them, intending to challenge this, as I judged them to have broken the contract first by failing to supply a reliable service. TalkTalk then told me they *did* offer a VoIP line, so I decided to stay with my original provider.

I cancelled my new BT contract without penalty, as this was possible up to the day before installation. My property has had a nearby telegraph pole since the estate was built 45 years ago, and already had a pre-cabled fibre connection. It took the engineers only 20 minutes to organise the switch, leaving me with a crystal-clear landline and a stable and fast internet connection.

Best of all, their service was 25-per-cent cheaper than BT's and they even gave me an £80 voucher in compensation for my earlier difficulties.

Ray Wilson

What's the Issue...?

✉ I'm interested in buying Samsung's Galaxy Tab S9 tablet, but want to read your review of it first. When was that?

Neil Fellows

CA SAYS In Issue 667, page 24.

✉ I need to reinstall Windows. When did you explain to do this using Hasleo's backup tool?

Oliver Newcombe

CA SAYS In Issue 660's How To, page 35. Read it on our Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/48860

✉ When did you list all the items that are too risky to store in password managers?

Doug Malpas

CA SAYS Issue 678, page 62. Buy the back issue from www.snipca.com/50622.

Virgin engineer did 'half a job' switching my landline

✉ As a Virgin customer, I'd like to tell you my experience of the switchover. I have my landline with an answering machine on a table beside my armchair for easy reach as I'm a 76-year-old widowed pensioner with a slipped disc that causes me pain every day.

I have a spare bedroom which houses my desk, PC and monitor. I fixed a shelf, above head height, to accommodate the Virgin modem/router and my connected TP-Link router, because Virgin's router (which I've had for almost 15 years) was incapable of sending Wi-Fi to my living room 10 yards away.

The engineer arrived, took my phone/answering machine from the table next to me and plugged it into the phone connection on the Virgin router.

He then placed the phone/answering machine on the high shelf and prepared to leave. I asked him if he could put the phone back on my table beside me and he replied saying he was only here to plug it into the router – nothing else. He then left.

I then had to find 30 feet of phone cable with the correct fittings to run from the bedroom shelf, over three door frames in my hallway, down one door frame to the floor. Then I tucked it in and stapled it under the edge of the living-room carpet until it reached its rightful home on the table beside me.

It would seem the engineer thought it was OK to do half a job, and expect me to run to the bedroom every time the phone rang, stretch to the high shelf to pick it up, and stand while taking the call. Let's hope it goes more smoothly for everyone else.

Pete Goldie

Check that keyboards have UK layouts

✉ When you review keyboards can you please check they come with UK layouts? I was looking for a good-value mechanical keyboard and thought the Epomaker x Aural F75 reviewed in Issue 684 (page 28, £80 from www.snipca.com/50289) would be a good choice. But closer inspection showed that the layout is US. It means the £ sign isn't in its usual UK place (on the 3 key), as well as several other differences.

Other Chinese-made keyboards you've reviewed recently have the

STAR LETTER

The sooner vulnerable people switch to digital the better

✉ You're probably right to say that the decision to extend the copper network switch-off deadline to January 2027 was "inevitable" (Issue 685, page 6), but the more important point you made was that the network is "crumbling" and needs to be replaced. Very true.

Over the past 20 years I've worked for various internet providers – regional and national – and have witnessed the decay of the copper network. Campaigners often warn that a new digital network would be vulnerable to power cuts, but it'll still be more reliable than the copper lines we're stuck with.

Much of my work as an engineer was fixing faults in the copper cables that led to people having no phone line for several days – usually longer if the fault occurred on a Friday and the work had to wait until after the weekend.

I often spoke to customers with telecare alarms who were worried about being cut off for such a long



time. Sadly, there was little I could do. But at least with digital systems they can get back online using a power supply. It's not perfect, but it's better than what we've got.

I don't blame campaigners for highlighting the plight of vulnerable people, but nothing they say addresses the technological urgency of upgrading our network. They need to be told that sticking with copper makes things worse for them. The sooner they upgrade to digital the better.

Derek Butcher



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

same problem. In contrast, the Cherry KC 200 MX keyboard that you recommended as an alternative is available with UK, US and other layouts, so that was my choice.

Ian Stewart

CA SAYS Ian makes a good point, so yes we'll point out in future if keyboards don't have UK layouts. You can change the layout to UK in Windows settings, so that pressing Shift+3 will type a £ sign – though of course the \$ sign will still appear on the 3 key itself. Epomaker does make keyboards with UK layouts, including the TH66 – priced £86 from www.snipca.com/50670 (pictured below).



Anyone got an older printer?

✉ I wonder if anyone can beat the age of my Samsung IZZI printer (pictured above), which is still going after 23 years and now runs in Windows 10. It's been an excellent workhorse and is a credit to Samsung's design and engineering.

John Luce

CA SAYS That's quite a challenge, John. If any reader still uses an even older printer please let us know, and reveal any tips on how you've kept it going for so long.



We stand up for your legal rights

Do I have to pay VAT for new power supply?

Q In August 2022 I bought a £34.99 Kolink power supply unit from Currys. It stopped working in March, since when I've been ping-ponged between Currys and Kolink in Germany. It's still under warranty, but Currys says this has nothing to do with it. Kolink says it will replace the power supply, but that I'd have to pay VAT to have it delivered to me. Are they both right?

Steve Cliffe

A Yes, they are. As the retailer, Currys has a contract with Steve under the Consumer Rights Act, but it's not responsible for rights given to the buyer under a manufacturer's warranty. If Steve can prove this is an inherent fault, Currys must replace or repair the power supply, or refund him. Currys can deduct some money from the refund to reflect the time he's already used it.

Kolink is also correct because HMRC will charge Steve VAT to import the power supply. The standard rate is 20 per cent and is calculated on the value of the



LEAD CASE



goods, postage, packaging and insurance costs, and any duty you may owe.

However, because the power supply cost under £135, he won't pay any custom duties (see Gov.UK's page explaining this: www.snipca.com/50617). These are collected by the courier and passed on to the customer, plus any handling charges.

When Steve bought the power supply he paid the normal 20 per cent in VAT, adding £5.83 to £29.16. To import a replacement from Germany, he would have to pay a separate fee of £5.83. If he doesn't want to do this, he might prefer seeking help from Currys under the Consumer Rights Act.

CASE ONGOING

Have I been scammed by 'car history' site?

Q I'm selling my car online and two prospective buyers advised me to pay £50 to a website to check its history. I've paid this money but heard nothing back. Can you investigate this?

David Vango

A Yes, we will, and it doesn't look good. Our antivirus warned us about the site when we tried to visit it, so it's probably a scam. David must contact his bank for a chargeback, which reverses a payment made on your credit or debit card. Both Mastercard and Visa offer this protection, as do some banks. But their terms and conditions will determine whether David gets his money back.

He must tell the bank that he suspects a scam, and that his card details have been stolen. He should also run a security check on his computer to make sure no malware has been downloaded.

David should also tell Action Fraud about the scam (www.snipca.com/50519). He received some texts from the supposed buyers, so the police might be able to investigate the numbers as leads.

CASE CLOSED

LEGAL UPDATE

New law lets you cancel subscriptions with one email



You'll soon be able to cancel a rolling subscription simply by telling the company in an email, under a new law that significantly boosts your consumer rights. Previously, you had to follow a company's process for cancelling, which was often difficult to complete or hidden on their website.

The change is part of the Digital Markets Competition and Consumers Act, which passed on 23 May (www.snipca.com/50729).

It aims to "stop technology businesses with strategic power from misusing their position to disadvantage competitors and consumers".

Retailers will have to give customers clearer pricing before they sign up for a subscription, ensuring that "unavoidable hidden fees" will be prominently displayed. Additionally, they'll have to let them know when any trial period is coming to an end. The law also bans fake reviews online.

Over the past year we've seen a rise in

cases from customers who didn't realise they were on rolling subscriptions, and have found it hard to cancel. It's a widespread problem. According to Citizens Advice, more than 13 million people "accidentally took out a subscription" in the 12 months to March (www.snipca.com/50730).

Although the Act is now law, the Department for Business and Trade says it's up to the new Government to bring the most significant elements into force – probably around October of this year.

Can I get compensation for router failure?

Q In Issue 684 you told Adrian Hudson that under Ofcom's automatic compensation scheme Virgin owed him money for sending a faulty router, which led to a loss of service.



faulty hardware in my home, not a loss of service outside. Is that right?

Paul Davies

A Paul is absolutely right – we made an error in

our advice. Apologies for this oversight.

But I don't think this is correct. I had a similar case with Vodafone, which refused to pay automatic compensation for the 10 days I was offline. It said this is because the problem was caused by

In its explanation of how the scheme works, Ofcom says, 'If the loss in service is caused by equipment or activity within your home, you are not entitled to

compensation under the scheme'.

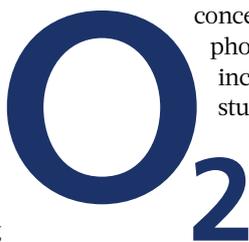
You'll find this under the heading 'When might a provider not pay automatic compensation under the scheme?' – see www.snipca.com/50562. This means that if a provider sends you a faulty router, it only has to refund you the subscription fees for the days you had no service. You also won't receive any compensation if you refuse to pay your subscription, thereby breaching your contract. Similarly, you won't be covered if you caused the fault, or if you've made it difficult for your provider to fix it.

CASE CLOSED

Do I have to sign a new O2 contract?

Q I've got four phones with O2 for my family. They're all SIM-only, and I pay monthly. Everything was fine until O2 said it was changing its direct debit system.

It hasn't taken the correct money since 10 February, and is trying to get my son's phone on a 12-month contract with a new number. O2 seems incapable of sorting



this mess out. Can you help?

Simon Curtis

A We'll try, but it's a confusing situation. O2 is taking the monthly subscription for three of Simon's phones, but not for his son's. It's still working for now, but Simon is concerned that O2 will cancel this phone. This would be particularly inconvenient because his son is studying in Germany for a year, and needs a way to stay in touch with the family back home.

He also doesn't know how

much he owes O2 for the past three months' worth of calls and data usage linked to his son's phone. O2 wants to set up a new contract with his son, but Simon doesn't want this. If O2 does this, it may end up breaching its contract with Simon – and he should then complain to the Communications Ombudsman (www.commsombudsman.org). Before that though, he should ask O2 for a deadlock letter to explain what it has done to resolve the problem.

We've sent all the details to O2. It has responded well to us in the past, so hopefully we'll have a positive outcome soon.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Hughes sent me £10 after I forgot discount voucher

 I read with interest James Deviner's case asking whether Hughes or Amazon was responsible for dealing with his broken TV (*Consumeractive*, Issue 684). If my experience is anything to go by, he'll be well served by Hughes.

I bought a TV from the company in March, but stupidly forgot to apply a £10 voucher code at purchase. It's not a great saving, but every little helps. I emailed Hughes asking if I should re-order the TV with this discount

Hughes

to my bank account. This arrived within 24 hours, and the TV – a Samsung 4K model – came soon after. It's superb, too. Full marks to Hughes for being so flexible.

Matthew Hare

or whether they could deduct £10 from the order somehow.

To my pleasant surprise, they said it would be quicker to send a £10 'goodwill' payment

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

Contact
Hughes

- Email sales@hughes.co.uk
- Phone 0371 231 3113



Grow Your Family Tree



There are plenty of records of people who were institutionalised due to mental illness. Follow **Judith Batchelor's** advice to...

Search records from lunatic asylums

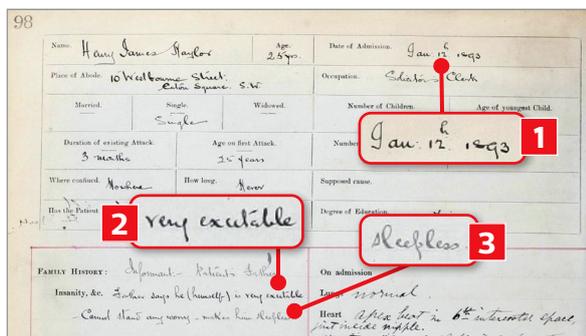
Before the middle of the 19th century, most people suffering from mental illness were cared for by their families or the local community, though wealthier families could pay privately for their relatives' treatment at so-called 'madhouses'.

Despite the stigma surrounding mental health, there was growing recognition that more help was needed. This led to the first county lunatic asylums being built in England and Wales in 1808, while many more followed in 1845 after the passing of the Lunacy Act (1857 in Scotland).

Access Bethlem records on Findmypast

Originally, Bethlem Hospital (known as Bedlam) was the only public institution where patients could be treated without charge. Findmypast has digitised admission records and casebooks from 1683-1932. Subscribers can access them by visiting www.snipca.com/50469 and searching by name. You'll find individual case files, as well as staff records and minutes of governors' meetings.

One example we found was Henry James Naylor, admitted on 12 January 1893 (1 in our screenshot above right).



Henry James Naylor was admitted to Bethlem in 1893, and was described by his father as "very excitable"

His father said Henry was "very excitable" 2 and worrying made him "sleepless" 3.

Findmypast also has records for specific asylums across the UK, as well as in Australia and Canada: www.snipca.com/50470. Asylums were inspected regularly by the Lunacy Commission, and records of patients meticulously kept. If you know where an ancestor was treated, you might be able to find their case file, plus maybe even a photograph.

Browse Ancestry's admission registers

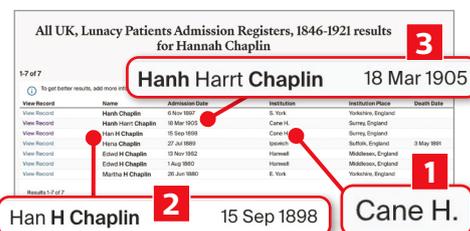
Ancestry subscribers should start at the Lunacy Patients Admission Registers

from 1846 to 1921 (www.snipca.com/50453). We searched for Charlie Chaplin's mother, Hannah, who suffered from mental illness and was admitted to Cane Hill asylum in Surrey (1 in our screenshot below) on more than one occasion. Searching under her name, I found two entries that related to her.

Hannah was admitted to the asylum on 15 September,

1898 2, and again on 18 March, 1905 3. She stayed for nearly two months in 1898, her date of discharge being 12 November 1898 with the register indicating that she had recovered. However, after her admittance in 1905, she remained as a patient until 20 September 1912, though her condition had not improved upon discharge.

Ancestry also has some additional asylum records, which you can find by typing **asylum** into Title or Keyword at www.snipca.com/50471. Also try the 'Criminal Lunacy Warrant and Entry Books 1882-1898' (www.snipca.com/50466), which contains warrants for the criminally insane to be removed from prisons and transferred to asylums. You'll find details of criminal lunatics at Bethlem Hospital 1823-1835 in Ancestry's collection 'Criminal Lunatic Asylum Registers 1820-1876': www.snipca.com/50467.



Ancestry's records show that Hannah Chaplin was twice admitted to Cane Hill asylum

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

I'd like to find the World War 2 record of my father George Arthur Gilbey, who served in the Army billeted with a Collins family in Thornbury, Gloucestershire. His home address was London NW7. I know he survived the war, but don't know more than that.

John Gilbey

All World War 2 Army service records were recently transferred from the Ministry of Defence to The National Archives (TNA).

However, most have yet to be indexed in the TNA's catalogue and aren't available to view.

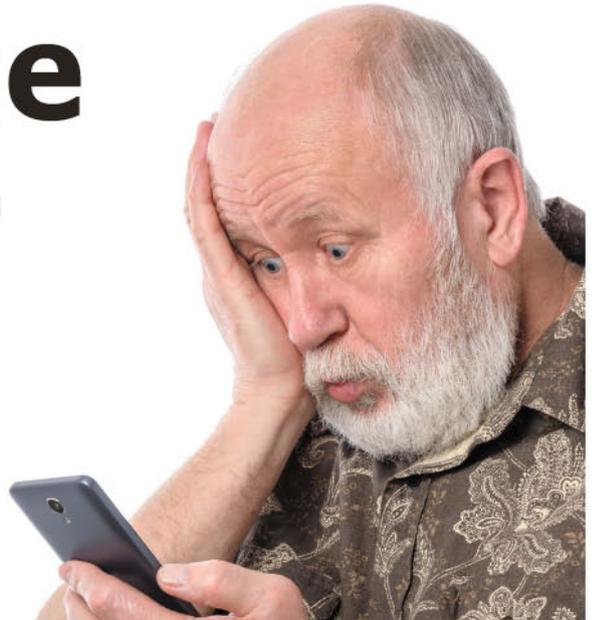
To obtain a copy of your father's records, you'll need to fill in an application form to request a search. You'll find details at www.snipca.com/50450. For information on wartime activities in Thornbury visit www.snipca.com/50451.



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.
- 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 – only direct from the publisher.

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Best Free Software

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

SYSTEM ANALYSIS TOOL

Glow 24.09

www.snipca.com/50749

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



Back in Issue 676 (page 19), we reported that Glow had reached its final version, but the popularity of the program has persuaded its developer to keep it going. That's good news for us because the free system-information tool now receives frequent updates and continues to evolve and improve.

Since we last wrote about Glow, it's been updated six times and has added a host of handy features for analysing your PC. The most notable are two **benchmarking** tools, which test the performance of your processor and hard drive to ensure they're working properly.

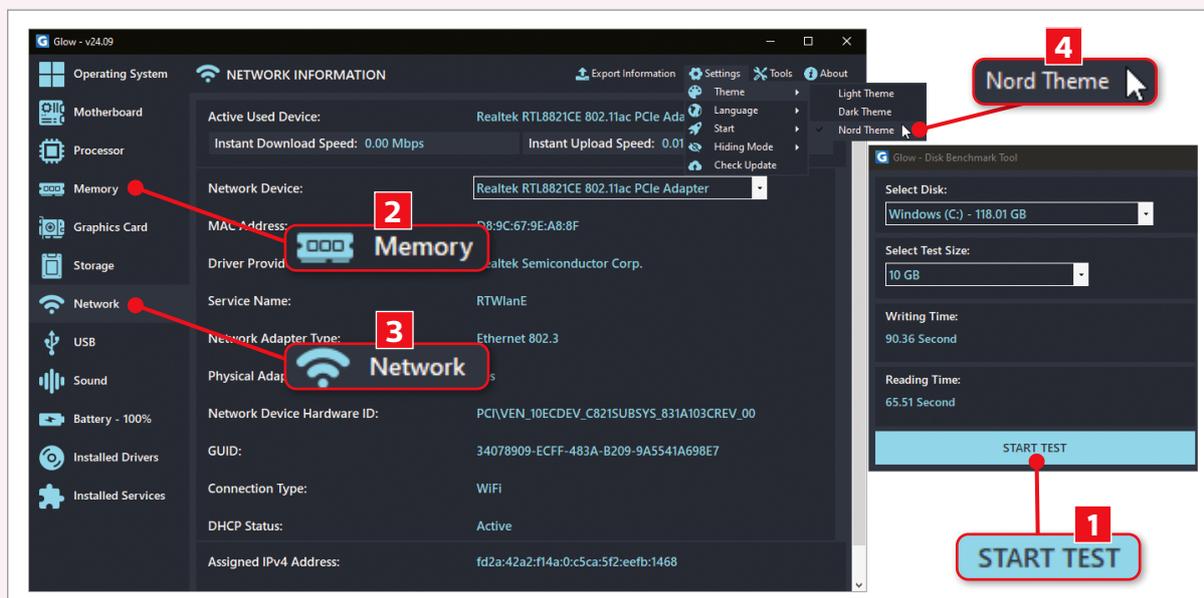
These new options are in the Tools menu in Glow's top-right corner. Select 'CPU Benchmark Tool' to benchmark your processor, then specify the length of the test, from 30 seconds to one hour, and a 'mode' – from 'Basic' to 'Lethal'. Click 'Start Test' and Glow will provide scores for single-core and multi-core performance. Make a note of these for future reference. The Disk Benchmark Tool works in a similar

manner – see screenshot below.

Another useful addition to the Tools menu is the Monitor Test Tool. This lets you check your monitor for 'dead pixels' by cycling through a series of full-screen, solid-colour images. If there are any dead pixels, you'll easily be able to spot them – press Esc to exit the test. You can also run the Dynamic Color Range Test to ensure your monitor is accurately displaying colours.

Glow has additionally applied lots of bug fixes, cleaned up its **code** and improved its detection of devices connected to your PC, including network cards, graphics cards and **RAM** modules. It will now notify you when a new version is available, or you can check manually by clicking the new Check Update option in the Settings menu.

Note that Glow still triggers a Microsoft Defender SmartScreen warning, but it's completely safe to use, so just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.



1 To use Glow's new Disk Benchmark Tool, choose the drive you want to test and the size of the sample. Click 'Start Test' and Glow will tell you how long it takes to **write** data to and **read** data from the selected drive (it won't overwrite any files).

2 Glow's Memory Information tab tells you the total amount of RAM available on your PC, how much is currently in use and how much is free. This has been updated to additionally show the brand of memory module in each RAM slot.

3 Glow has also updated its Network tab to provide more real-time information. It now tells you the name of the network adapter you're currently using, the amount of **bandwidth** available and your download and upload speeds.

4 As well as standard light and dark themes, Glow lets you apply a Nord theme to its interface. This gives it a tasteful blue look (pictured) that's easy on your eyes. Click the Settings menu and choose Nord in the Themes sub-menu.



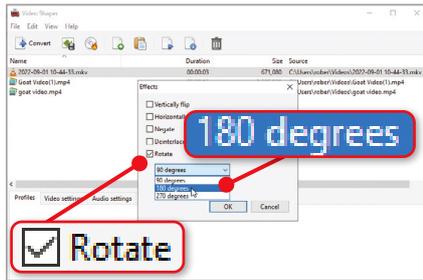
VIDEO CONVERTER

Video Shaper 5.8

www.snipca.com/50745

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

This lightweight video converter packs lots of useful tools into a simple interface, and has a quirky psychedelic-campervan logo. It lets you convert videos between popular formats



like **MOV**, **MKV** and **AVI**, extract the audio in **MP3**, **WAV** or **FLAC** format, and adjust the resolution, **frame rate** and **aspect ratio**. What's more, you can use Video Shaper to burn your video files to CD, DVD and Blu-ray, and even erase rewritable discs. Version 5.8 introduces the ability to rotate videos – click the Edit menu, choose Effects then Rotate, and select how many degrees (see screenshot). Unlike some video converters, Video Shaper doesn't restrict features to a paid-for version, or limit the length of clips you can convert. Just make sure you untick the option to install WinX DVD Ripper Platinum.

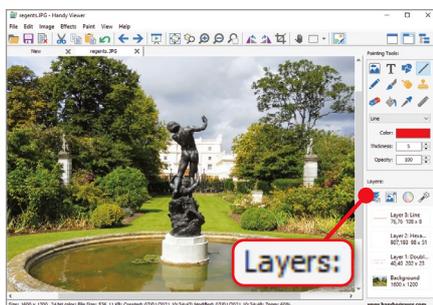
IMAGE EDITOR

Handy Viewer 2.5

www.snipca.com/50755

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1, 10 or 11

Handy Viewer is one of our favourite new programs of 2024 – see our Workshop in Issue 684 (page 32) – and this update brings it closer in line with image editors that have



been around for years. Like Paint.NET, it now supports layers, which means you can make adjustments to pictures without affecting the originals. To use this new feature, click the Paint menu and select Show Paint Tools. This opens a sidebar on the right-hand side that shows all the layers for the current image (see screenshot). New layers are created automatically when you use the painting tools, and manually when you right-click and choose New Layer. Handy Viewer has also added the option to start from a blank canvas, by clicking the File menu and selecting New, and now lets you view **EXIF** data for photos by pressing Ctrl+I.

SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Bitwarden Premium

www.snipca.com/50763

Price: £10 per year

Free trial: N/A

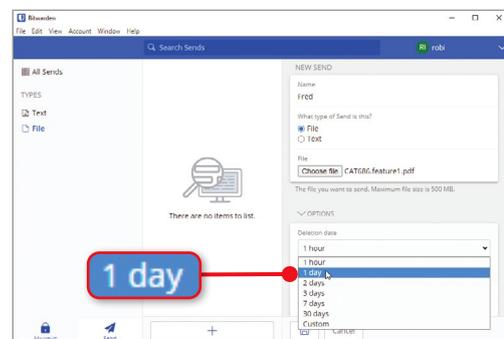
What you need: Windows 10 or 11, macOS or Linux

As we explained in our 'Ditch your old passwords now' Cover Feature in Issue 685, Bitwarden's free plan offers "everything you're likely to need" from a password manager. So why bother paying for a subscription? There are actually several good reasons.

Bitwarden Premium has the same simple interface as the free version, but fits in lots of useful extra features. As well as sending encrypted messages, it lets you send encrypted files of up to 500MB in size, which can be set to delete after a set number of hours or days (see screenshot below), and gives you 1GB of secure storage for those files.

In addition to storing passwords and **passkeys**, the paid-for plan has an integrated **authenticator** you can use to verify your identity on sites and apps that use **two-factor authentication** (2FA) by generating and storing one-time passcodes. While the free version of Bitwarden lets you manually check if your usernames and email addresses have been involved in data breaches, Premium goes further by warning you about leaked and weak passwords, websites that don't use **HTTPS** and accounts for which you're not using available 2FA. You can also grant trusted people temporary access to your password vault in an emergency.

All these extras cost a mere £10 a year – less than £1 a month – which is much cheaper than the paid-for versions of rival tools such as 1Password, LastPass and Proton Pass.



OUR VERDICT: Pay for it

Although Bitwarden's free plan is very generous, the low cost of a subscription means you won't regret upgrading. It gives you even more ways to protect your accounts and data, plus you'll be supporting an excellent company.



What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

How can I encrypt files and folders?

Q Can you recommend a free and simple tool for encrypting files and folders? I'm not talking about national security levels, but **AES 256-bit** standards for personal use.

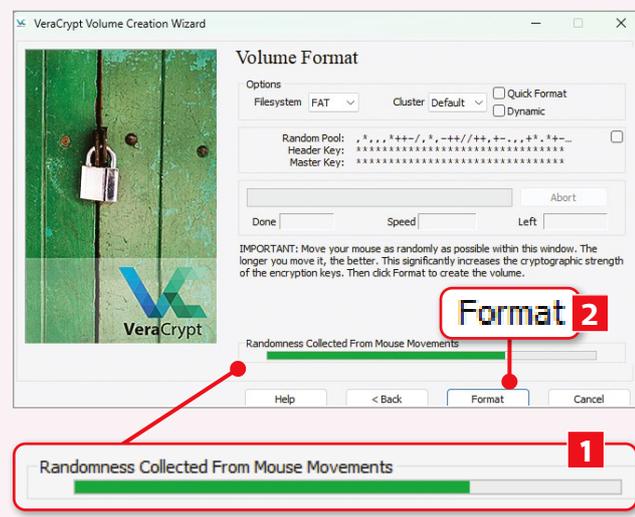
Dr Mark Cutaneous

A Give VeraCrypt a go – it's free from www.snipca.com/50354. Launch the program, then click Create Volume. Click Next twice, then click 'Select File...'

and navigate to the folder where you want to create an encrypted 'container' for your files. Type a suitable file name for this in the 'File name' box, then click Save.

Click Next twice then specify how large you'd like to make the container. Make sure it's a little bigger than the files/folders you want to encrypt. Click Next, then enter the password you want to use to protect the encrypted files. Click Next once more, then, on the next screen, move your cursor around in random directions as the bar at the bottom of the window turns from red to green (1 in our screenshot). This generates the random algorithm that encrypts your files. When the green bar stops, click Format (2) and you'll see a message confirming that the volume has been created.

To encrypt files, click Select File, then choose your file and click Mount. Enter the password you specified and the container will be added to the File Explorer sidebar, where it will behave like a regular drive. Now simply drag your sensitive files into it.



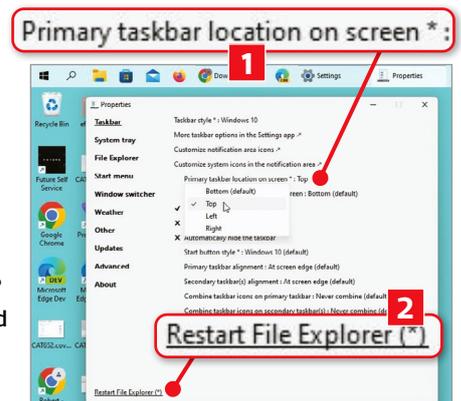
Can I revert to the Windows 10 taskbar?

Q I've just upgraded to Windows 11, but don't like its taskbar. Are there any tools that let you bring back the Windows 10 taskbar?

Jim Hammond

A Yes, the excellent

ExplorerPatcher. Visit www.snipca.com/50455, then scroll down and click the Assets heading. Click the 'ep_setup.exe' link, then run the installer. Click 'More info' then 'Run anyway' if you see a Microsoft Defender SmartScreen warning. ExplorerPatcher lets you move the taskbar elsewhere on your screen. To do so, right-click it, then choose Properties followed by Taskbar. Click 'Primary taskbar location on screen' (1 in our screenshot), then select Top, Left or Right. Finally, click 'Restart File Explorer' (2).

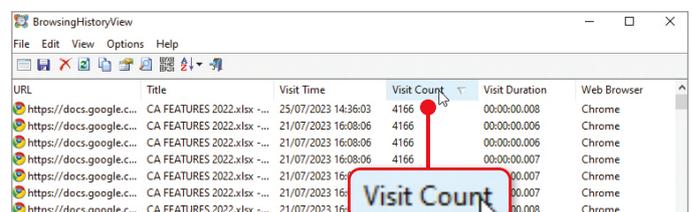


Can I see all my browsers' history in one place?

Q I hop between several browsers, and was wondering whether there's a way of seeing my history for all of them in one place.

Barry Astley

A You can do this in BrowsingHistoryView (www.snipca.com/47049), from the prolific developer NirSoft. Click the Visit Time column to sort the list of web pages chronologically, or Visit Count (see screenshot) to see which sites you've been to most often. The tool was updated last year with the option to generate scannable QR codes for pages in your history.



Named & Shamed



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

SOFTWARE WARNING!

Microsoft's switch-to-Bing repair 'tip'

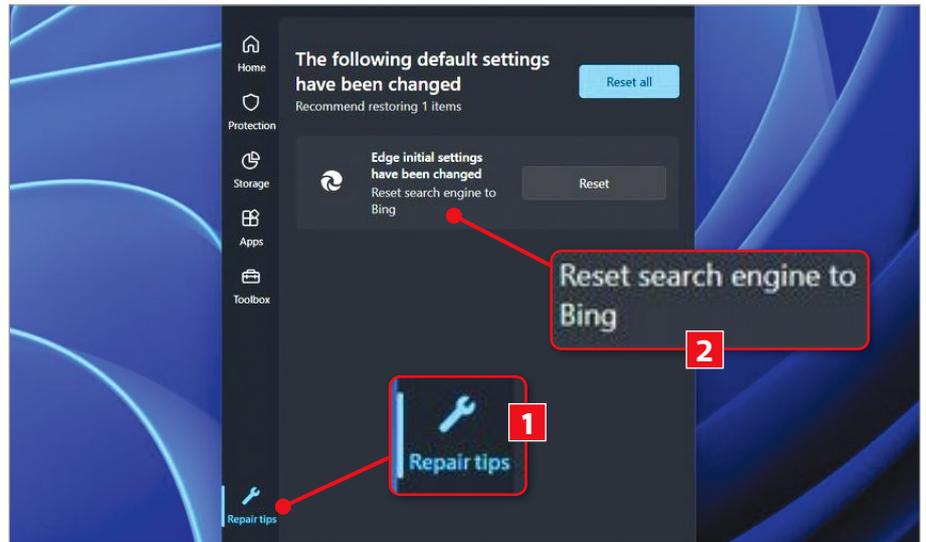
Looking for a reliable PC-cleaning tool can feel like sticking your hand in a hornet's nest. I've been stung enough times by tricks and junk from CCleaner, IObit and Auslogics to be wary of any new program offering to declutter my system with a single click.



But I was hopeful that Microsoft's much-hyped PC Manager (www.snipca.com/50492) would succeed in refreshing the parts other cleaners couldn't reach. Yet when it launched earlier this year, it included the dubious option of deleting items from the Prefetch folder. This is a bad idea because these are files that make programs load faster.

My hope was revived when the latest version added an effective file-removal tool (see Issue 685, page 46). But every silver lining has a cloud – in this case a new Repair Tips option (1 in our screenshot). Clicking it doesn't give you advice like checking your drivers are up to date, but tells you to change Edge's search engine to Bing (2).

This isn't a 'repair tip', nor does it even have anything to do with Windows. It's



Microsoft's idea of a repair 'tip' is to get you to switch your search engine to Bing

simply a misleading advert for a search engine that's below Google, Brave and DuckDuckGo on my priority list. It's also another example – following ads in the Start menu and lock screen – that Microsoft considers every part of your computer as a billboard.

I've yet to make up my mind about PC

Manager. It's well designed and has all the tools you'd expect in a decent cleaner. But I'll never recommend it as long as it indulges in such deceitful behaviour. So here's my own 'repair tip' if you've installed PC Manager: ignore it until further notice, and download BleachBit (www.bleachbit.org) instead.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?



WHAT THEY SAY

Microsoft on a

"new era of AI at work"

www.snipca.com/50557

"Utilizing powerful new silicon with an NPU (neural processing unit) capable of an incredible 40+ TOPS (trillion operations per second), Copilot+ PCs provide organisations an exceptional AI endpoint for work, and a foundation for your chip-to-cloud solution stack."

WHAT THEY MEAN

New era, same old JOPS (jargon orations per second).

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Russian 'influencer' Mellstroy



The idiot pictured here is Russian social-media 'influencer' Mellstroy, who it's claimed challenged his followers to invade Wembley's pitch during the Champions League final on 1 June. It seems he promised 30,000,000 rubles (around £260,000) as a prize to the first person who could dodge the stewards.



The reason he could make such a generous offer is that somehow he

has earned over \$7m (about £5.5m) through videos on Instagram and TikTok, despite being convicted of abuse after attacking a model during a livestream.

Three men did invade the pitch in the first minute of the game, each with Mellstroy's logo printed on their T-shirts. They were all arrested by police. Frustratingly, the Moscow-based Mellstroy is likely to remain free to post his moronic drivel online.

MINI PC | £510 from GMKtec www.snipca.com/50616

GMKtec NUCbox K8

Pipped at the post

If you were simply looking at the specs of the GMKtec NUCbox K8, you might conclude that it's a more powerful mini PC than our current favourite, the Minisforum UM780XTX (£649 from www.snipca.com/50421 – see page 32). The Minisforum may have twice the RAM – 64GB instead of the 32GB here – but the K8 has a more recent processor. The AMD Ryzen 7 8845HS processor certainly sounds like an improvement over the Minisforum's AMD Ryzen 7 7840HS chip.

“This mini PC runs a close race with our current favourite”

And to be fair, it is. Because it's a mobile processor designed for laptops, it's more power efficient, meaning it would drain a laptop battery more slowly. It also follows the current trend in processors of adding hardware that improves the performance of AI-based software.

Obviously, the NUCbox K8 is a mini PC not a laptop, but GMKtec – based in Shenzhen, China – has chosen this chip precisely because it can work in a small, enclosed space rather than for its ability to run efficiently on battery power. And because we suspect that most of our readers aren't constantly carrying out AI-powered tasks, we think these recent

advancements are fairly irrelevant in our analysis.

The similarities between the two chips were borne out in our benchmark tests, where the results were incredibly close. In the processor test the K8 was a couple of percentage points slower than its rival, though it was one-per-cent faster in the Windows test. The two processors have identical graphics hardware, and in these tests were more or less on a par with each other.

This means we have to look at other aspects if we want to find points of difference. At the time of going to press, the K8 costs £510 – down from its launch price of £678. Taking into account the price of the £649 UM780XTX's additional 32GB of DDR5 RAM (around £100 were you to upgrade this yourself), it still looks as if the discounted K8 is a better deal.

However, the UM780XTX maintains the edge in other areas. The K8's case is made entirely of plastic, while the UM780XTX

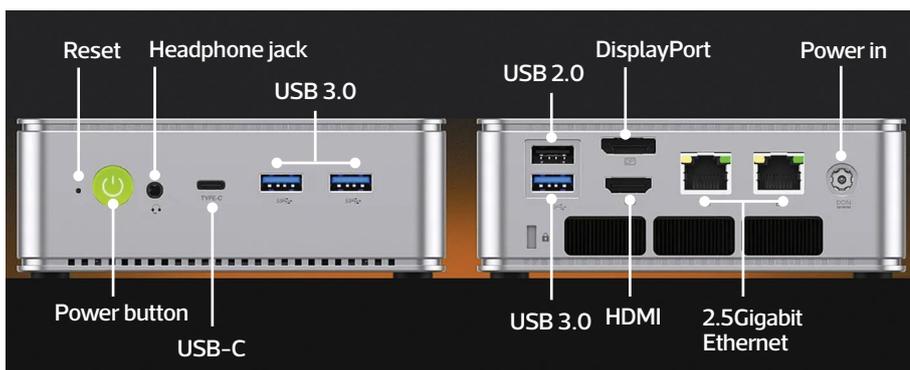
PC has a metal chassis, which is better at dissipating heat. The UM780XTX has two USB-C ports (the K8 has one) and more USB 3.0 ports.

We feel this is enough to justify the UM780XTX retaining its position as our current favourite mini PC, but the margin could hardly be slimmer. If you don't need the additional RAM, superior construction and extra ports, the GMKtec NUCbox K8 is a good-value alternative, particularly given its performance level is pretty much identical.

However, this assessment only applies if the K8 stays at its lower price. If it drifts back up to £550 or more, we'd recommend you to spend a little extra on Minisforum's impressive machine.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core AMD Ryzen 7 8845HS processor • 32GB memory • AMD Radeon 780M graphics • 1TB SSD • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.2 • 2x 2.5Gigabit Ethernet port • 1x HDMI port • 1x DisplayPort • 1x USB-C port • 3x USB 3.0 ports • 1x USB 2.0 port • Windows 11 Home • 43x123x111mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50616



VERDICT Good value with a powerful new AMD processor, though some of its AI benefits are lost on this PC



ALTERNATIVE Minisforum UM780XTX £649 Our current favourite mini PC is pricier but has more RAM and better build quality



LAPTOP | £1,200 from Huawei www.snipca.com/50722

Huawei MateBook 14

Luxury good

Anyone looking for a 14in laptop is spoilt for choice at the moment. If you want to stay below £1,000, there's our current favourite laptop, the Dell Inspiron 14 Plus (£849 from Dell at www.snipca.com/50079 – see page 30). If you have a bit more to spend on an improved specification, then the new Huawei MateBook 14 takes a few things up a notch, but adds another £350 to the price.

For example, Huawei has cranked up the levels of luxury. The MateBook is much slimmer than the Inspiron, at only 14.5mm compared to 17.9mm, and 300g lighter at 1.3kg. It also has a snazzy green finish to its metal case.

“It's slim with good storage and a sharp screen, but the price tag is hefty”

Internally, the two laptops have similar specs, with the same processor – the increasingly popular Intel Core Ultra 7 155H – and 16GB of RAM. Huawei ups the ante on storage, though, with a more generous 1TB SSD compared with Dell's minimal 256GB. This made no difference in our benchmark speed tests, however – they were identical.

Huawei has pushed the boat out with the screen, which is a 14.2in OLED display with a frame rate of up to 120Hz. It can reproduce 97 per cent of colours in



the DCI-P3 standard, which trumps the 64 per cent you get from Dell's VA panel. Huawei's resolution of 2880x1920 pixels is better than the 2240x1400 pixels of the Dell, too.

This takes its toll on the battery. Dell's Inspiron lasted a phenomenal 15 hours in our Windows battery test, while the MateBook only reached nine hours 36 minutes. That's still not bad and enough for a working day, but the Inspiron's reserves are stronger. The charger that comes with the MateBook 14 can restore it to 41 per cent in just 30 minutes, though, so you don't need to be near a mains socket for long.

The MateBook's trackpad has a smooth coating and an area of 120x72mm, which does the job capably. There are no reasons to get excited by the keyboard, but the backlight is effective, the keys are well separated, and a double-height Enter key is always welcome.

This all makes for a fine laptop and, if it weren't for the competitive pricing of the Inspiron 14 Plus, it might even win our hearts. Keep an eye on the price, then, because if it drops over the next few months, it might be a winner.

As it stands, though, it doesn't have quite enough to make it worth spending another £351 over the price of our favourite laptop.

SPECIFICATIONS

Sixteen-core Intel Ultra 7 155U processor • 16GB of RAM • Intel Arc graphics • 14.2in 2880x1920-pixel OLED screen • 1TB SSD • 1x USB-C port • 2x USB 3.0 port • 1x HDMI port • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.3 • Windows 11 Home • 14.5x313x227mm (HxWxD) • 1.3kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50722

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 great option for fans of OLED screens, but you get the same performance for much less with our favourite laptop

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Dell Inspiron 14 Plus £849 The screen isn't as good, but

battery life is longer and Dell offers identical performance for much less



TABLET | From **£599** from Amazon www.snipca.com/50636

Apple iPad Air (13in)

Breezy does it

Apple's mid-range iPad Air has received a significant update. There are now two models, one with an 11in screen, like the previous generation, and a second model with a larger 13in screen.

The new 11in model costs £599, while the 13in version costs £799. That's much cheaper than the iPad Pro (£999 for the 11in model or £1,299 for the 13in), but quite a leap up from the basic iPad, which costs £349 for a 10.9in screen. Both sizes of iPad Air come with 128GB of storage as standard, while 256GB, 512GB and 1TB versions are available for an extra £100, £300 and £500 respectively.

“A few welcome refinements make the Air better than ever”

We tested the 13in model. At 618g, it's surprisingly light for its size and is basically an enlarged version of the previous generation's 11in model, with a larger frame but the same 6.1mm thickness. The 12-megapixel rear camera is in the same place as before, as are the volume buttons and the responsive Touch ID button for switching on and signing in. However, the front-facing camera on both the 11in and 13in models has moved to one of the long edges, which is better for video chats in landscape orientation.

Screen quality is as high as ever. It's essentially the same technology found in

the previous generation, and offers a sharp pixel density of 264ppi, with eye-pleasing DCI-P3 support for bright, accurate colours.

The only minor difference is that the 13in model goes up to a maximum brightness of 600cd/m², while the 11in Air remains at 500cd/m².

Until now we never felt we needed more than the standard 11in screen of the previous Air, but we must admit that the 13in display makes games and movies a lot more enjoyable. It's arguably better for sketching and digital painting, too, especially when combined with Apple's Pencil Pro, which costs an extra £129.

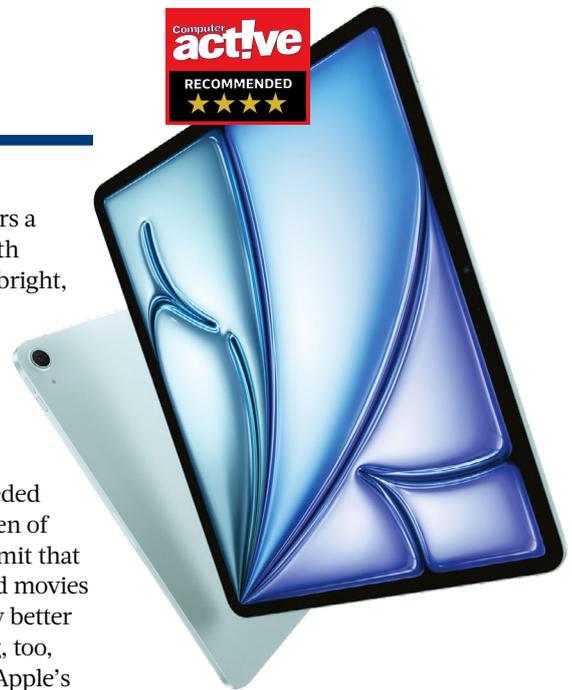
The rear 12-megapixel camera offers a 5x digital zoom and can even shoot 63-megapixel panoramas if you don't mind holding up the tablet and slowly panning it round. Test photos came out with plenty of colour and detail, though they don't quite live up to the standards of the best smartphone cameras.

Both new Airs use Apple's M2 processor. While that's two generations behind the cutting-edge M4 found in the latest iPad Pro tablets, it's still a powerful processor that until now has been reserved for Apple's laptops.

With an eight-core CPU and 10-core GPU, it's the most powerful tablet we've tested to date, and has enough power to run anything you'd care to try. We had no trouble editing 4K videos in iMovie and managing dozens of tracks in Logic Pro music-creation software. It's also an able gaming platform, providing smooth, detailed graphics in all the games we tested. Meanwhile, the landscape stereo speakers on either side of the tablet deliver rich audio.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Apple M2 processor • 10-core Apple M2 graphics • 8GB RAM • 11in 2360x1640-pixel resolution or 13in 2732x2048-pixel resolution IPS touchscreen • From 128GB storage • 12-megapixel front and rear cameras • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • USB-C port • Apple iPadOS 17 • 249x179x6.1mm (11in model) or 281x215x6.1mm (13in model) (HxWxD) • 462g (11in) or 618g (13in) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50636



Apple claims the Air's battery will last a "full day" of around 10 hours. We often put it through 10 hours of activity during our tests, although depending on which apps you're using and the screen's brightness, this could fall to eight or even six hours. Our standard battery test ran for 11 hours 30 minutes, which compares well with competing tablets.

These new iPad Air models are not revolutionary, but they bring positive refinements to performance and design while doubling the standard storage offering of previous models. What's more, the addition of a 13in model means you can now enjoy a big-screen iPad experience for significantly less than the price of an iPad Pro.

VERDICT Apple's mid-range iPad is better than ever and the 13in model is especially attractive, but the basic iPad remains the best value



ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 FE+ **£519** A slightly smaller 12.4in tablet compared with Apple's 13in iPad Air, but it's much cheaper



PHONE | £449 from Amazon www.snipca.com/50688

Google Pixel 8a

Snappy apps

The Google Pixel 8a is to the Pixel 8 what the Pixel 7a (our current favourite Android smartphone – see page 30) is to the Pixel 7. The ‘a’ at the end of its name tells us that it’s a pared-back version of the original, with corners cut to keep the price down.

So why isn’t the 8a taking the mantle as our new favourite? Simply because the launch of the 128GB 8a for £449 has forced down the price of the Pixel 7a to £399, which makes it even more of a bargain than before.

“An impressive compromise that handles apps well and offers more advanced photo modes”

In performance tests the 8a, which uses the same Google Tensor G3 processor as the Pixel 8, is faster than the 7a. In **benchmark** tests that push the processor to its limits, it’s 18-per-cent faster. If you tend to put a lot of strain on your phone’s chip by using resource-hungry apps, this improvement will be noticeable. When checking emails, messaging and browsing the web, it’s unlikely you’ll notice any difference.

The screens on the two phones are almost identical, measuring 6.1in across the diagonal and offering 2400x1080-pixel resolutions. Both are **OLED** panels so produce excellent contrast, but the 8a’s screen can go significantly brighter – 2,000cd/m², compared with the still-excellent 1,000cd/m² on the Pixel 7a.

The camera takes impressive photos

SPECIFICATIONS

Nine-core Tensor G3 processor • 8GB RAM • 128GB or 256GB storage • 6.1in 120Hz 2400x1080-pixel OLED screen • 64-megapixel rear camera • 13-megapixel ultra-wide camera • 13-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • Android 14 • 152x73x8.9mm (HxWxD) • 188g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50688



that will look great on your PC screen and social-media page. They do suffer under close scrutiny, however – zooming in reveals a few fuzzy details. The 8a uses a 64-megapixel sensor but only produces 16-megapixel images. This is because it combines four pixels into one in a process known as **pixel binning**, and there’s no way round this to get full-resolution shots.

That said, it does have the same advanced shooting modes as the Pixel 8 Pro – which is a step up from the 7a – and includes the option of long exposure for shots of moving traffic and running water, for example.

It also uses the same Google Photos image-editing app as the Pixel 8 and 7a, so you can use Magic Eraser to remove unwanted people and Magic Editor to enlarge them or move them to one side.

Battery life is somewhat disappointing – it required a daily charge in our tests. That’s not unusual for phones with demanding OLED screens, however.

VERDICT Another impressive mid-range phone from Google, which can cope more easily with demanding apps than its predecessor

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Google Pixel 7a **£399**
Recent price drops make this great all-rounder more appealing than ever



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Colour ebook screens



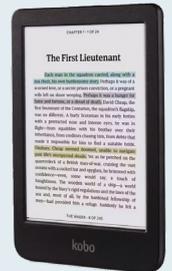
What are they?

If you’ve ever used an ebook reader you’ll be familiar with

E Ink screens, though most up to this point have been mono panels. These have low

refresh rates, so are ideal for showing static information, such as a page from a book. They are not suitable for dynamic digital environments, such as operating systems on tablets and smartphones.

E Ink screens don’t use much power because they only draw from the battery when moving from one page to the next. The latest innovation is colour screens, such as the E Ink Kaleido 3 panel on the Kobo Clara Colour (pictured, £140 from www.snipca.com/50515, reviewed in Issue 685).



How do they work?

Colour E Ink screens use filters built into the surface of the screen to make the pixels underneath appear as different colours. So while the pixels still transition from black to white through shades of grey, the filters make them appear as reds, greens and blues. Combine these in a cluster and you can produce a wide range of colours – up to 4,096 on the Clara Colour.

What are the specs?

The resolution when displaying colour pages isn’t as high as mono, because the screens need to use several pixels to make up each point on the screen. For example, the screen on the Clara Colour is 150dpi when displaying colour, but can be up to 300dpi for black-and-white documents.

Can I change it later?

No, the screens of ebook readers are integral to the device they’re in and can’t be upgraded. If you want a better screen in the future you’ll need to buy a whole new device.

MOUSE | £55 from Logitech www.snipca.com/50671

Logitech Signature AI Edition M750

All chat matters

Manufacturers seem to be crowbarring AI into all sorts of products now, but this is the first time we've seen it show up in a mouse. This doesn't mean the mouse will go off and do all your clicking for you, however. Instead, it has a teal shortcut button (pictured), that provides instant access to a dedicated feature in Logitech's new Options+ software. This connects to ChatGPT using an interface called Prompt Builder that brings the AI tool straight to your fingertips.

“This mouse lets you summon ChatGPT at the touch of a button”

First, though, let's look at the mouse itself. Like most of Logitech's full-featured mice, it has a small button on the underside that lets you pair it with up to three different devices using its Bluetooth connection. It also comes with a wireless USB dongle so you can use it with a PC that isn't equipped with Bluetooth.

The mouse feels comfortable to hold and works well. Its symmetrical design

means it won't be uncomfortable for left-handers to use. However, they won't have access to the thumb buttons, which are located on the left where they're most convenient for right-handers. The mouse is powered by a single AA battery, which Logitech states will last for two years of typical office work.

It's the software that makes this mouse stand out, though, and this might prove invaluable if you often use ChatGPT to help with tasks such as writing.

For example, you could press the dedicated button and copy some text you're working on into the box that appears. You could then ask the AI to rephrase it, summarise it or draft a reply that sounds as if you wrote it, with the option of tweaking the output to sound playful or official, or use one of a handful of other writing styles.

This makes the AI software incredibly easy to access, because it's always there alongside any other software you're using, and you won't have to switch

SPECIFICATIONS

4,000dpi • Bluetooth LE • Wireless USB dongle supplied • 1x AA battery supplied • 39x61x108mm (HxWxD) • 101g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/50483



to the ChatGPT website (<https://chatgpt.com>) as you otherwise would.

If you like the sound of this and you already have a Logitech keyboard or mouse, check its specifications online or in the manual to see if it supports Options+. If so, you may not even need to buy a new device to enjoy this feature. You can simply configure an existing button on your mouse or keyboard to use as the AI shortcut, rather than having a dedicated button.

VERDICT A decent wireless mouse with shortcut access to AI software, but check that your existing hardware doesn't already support it



ALTERNATIVE

Microsoft Modern Mobile Mouse £44 If you don't need the AI button or software, you can save money and still get a good-quality mouse



WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

Can I still buy a black-and-white printer?

Q Do any printer manufacturers still make mono printers? I don't need colour prints. I'm looking to spend around £100.

Errol Faria

A Affordable mono printers are surprisingly few and far between. We couldn't find a single inkjet model that fits the bill, because most budget printers come with one black and one three-colour cartridge.

However, HP makes a mono laser printer that looks perfect for your needs. It's called the HP LaserJet M209dw Black & White Wireless Printer and is available from HP for £99.98 at www.snipca.com/50672. It's a fast printer, with output at a rate of 29 pages per minute, and it can automatically print on both sides. Replacement cartridges are available in high-yield versions that cost £86 each and run to 2,400 pages, which works out at around 4p per page. It has Wi-Fi, so you can print from any device. It also



comes with USB and Ethernet ports, so you can connect it directly to a PC or plug it into your router.



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RADIO/SPEAKER | £100 from Amazon www.snipca.com/50653

Roberts Revival Petite 2

Something old, something new

We reviewed the original Roberts Revival Petite back in Issue 621 and awarded it four stars. This second-generation device is basically the same concept – a retro-styled radio with up-to-date features.

It's small – 73x124x85mm (HxWxD) – though it won't fit in your average pocket. That said, it's very easy to move around the house or pack for your holiday. It's a DAB and FM radio, so it can pick up live broadcasts, but also functions as a Bluetooth speaker, so you can stream to it from your smartphone or tablet.

The build quality is reassuringly solid

SPECIFICATIONS

DAB, DAB+ and FM radio • Mono OLED screen • Bluetooth • Alarm function • Headphone socket • 73x124x85mm (HxWxD) • 430g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/50653

and oozes quality. Compared with the first-generation model, it's slightly shorter but deeper, and lighter by six grams. It has an impressive battery life (20 hours) and charges via a **USB-C** port, which replaces the **microUSB** port of its predecessor. Also new here is the 3.5mm headphone socket, which is much more useful than the 3.5mm auxiliary input. Additionally, it gains a telescopic antenna, which helps to guarantee a more consistent signal.

Perhaps most importantly the Revival Petite 2 radio sounds incredibly good, considering its size. Under the hood is a 40mm **speaker driver** with a **passive radiator**, which help it reach surprisingly loud volume levels. Be aware, however, that turning the dial above 15 (out of 20)



on the volume scale, can start distorting the output.

VERDICT A retro miniature radio with a number of modern features that make it sound as good as it looks



ALTERNATIVE Pure Elan Connect+ £50 Less stylish but cheaper and comes with internet radio functions



MP3 PLAYER | £35 from Amazon www.snipca.com/50654

Majority MP3 Music Player

Tunes out

These days many people listen to music by streaming it via their smartphones, but it's not always practical to rely on a single device and an internet connection for all your digital needs. Also, you might want to leave your expensive smartphone behind when you're out and about.

Thankfully, a number of manufacturers still produce small MP3 players that don't cost a fortune, including British company Majority.

The Majority MP3 Music Player is a tiny device that weighs just 33g. A handy 'sports' clip on the back lets you attach it firmly to your clothing, bag or anything else, which is a useful option even when you're not out on a run or having a

SPECIFICATIONS

1.9in screen with resolution of 240x240 pixels • 16GB storage • Supports microSD cards up to 128GB • USB-C port • 68x44x19mm (HxWxD) • 33g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50473

workout. The Music Player's interface is easy to use – though it's operated by physical buttons rather than a touchscreen – and its battery will last up to 34 hours.

Out of the box, it can store up to 16GB of music files, which typically equates to around 4,000 songs. However, if you add a compatible **microSD card**, you can expand this by 128GB, raising the track capacity to about 36,000. The device's main limitation is that it supports only MP3 files, so you won't be able to play **AAC** or **WAV** files.

The Majority has a few extra tools up its sleeve, including a stopwatch and the ability to record voice notes. You can create music folders and playlists directly on the device, and it has a 3.5mm jack for wired headphones, as well as Bluetooth for connecting to wireless earphones or a portable speaker.



VERDICT A useful device for listening to music when you don't want to rely on your smartphone



ALTERNATIVE SanDisk Clip Jam £39 This alternative can play AAC files but doesn't offer Bluetooth



SMART TV | £125 from Amazon www.snipca.com/50707

RCA Roku TV

Set aside

US company RCA is a newcomer to the budget smart TV market, but if this space-saving set – which costs just £125 and uses Roku’s excellent interface – is anything to go by it’s a very welcome entry.

At 24in across the diagonal you’re not getting a huge screen, but if you’re looking for something to go in a spare room or on a kitchen worktop, it might be just the thing.

The edges, rear panel and feet are all made from plain black plastic, and the bezels are wider than many current sets. It comes with a Roku remote control (pictured below) that’s larger than those that accompany Roku’s plug-in devices, but otherwise uses the same layout.

“An ideal second TV set with all the streaming services and a decent screen”

If you haven’t used a Roku device before, it has a simple interface that includes a scrollable list of icons for the various streaming services it supports. And they are just about all present and correct – from Disney, Apple+ and Amazon Prime Video to all the main terrestrial catchup services. Select the service you want and you’ll be directed straight to the relevant app. It also has Netflix, making it a cheap replacement for any old Sony TVs (see page 8).

That it doesn’t try to do anything too clever with pop-up windows, recommendations and the like is quite refreshing, unlike the increasingly complicated operating systems on many pricier TVs.



The screen is low resolution by modern standards, only hitting basic HD at 720p, though it still looks sharp thanks to its smaller size. At typical viewing distances you’re unlikely to notice that this isn’t Full HD.

It also lacks support for any of the HDR viewing options you’ll find in more expensive sets. However, it’s brighter than we were expecting, with dazzling whites. It also renders dark scenes well considering it uses VA technology rather than OLED.

Its biggest problem is the fact that you don’t need to spend much more to get a significantly larger screen. The JVC LC-32CR230 (www.snipca.com/49465, reviewed in Issue 679), for example, is a 32in model with Roku built in and costs just £14 more.

SPECIFICATIONS

720p resolution (1280x720 pixels) • 24in VA screen • 60Hz refresh rate • 3x HDMI ports • 380x550x180mm (HxWxD, including stand) • 3.33kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/50707

VERDICT A surprisingly capable small TV for the price, which would suit a bedroom or kitchen

★★★★☆

ALTERNATIVE JVC LC-32CR230

£139 A larger 32in Roku TV that’s only a little more expensive



DO I REALLY NEED...

A USB stick that lasts 100 years?

What is it?

German company Machdyne has developed a USB stick that it claims can survive for decades. The Blaustahl Storage Device (pictured) costs around £26.



What does it do?

The stick uses FRAM (Ferromagnetic RAM) rather than standard RAM. Regular RAM needs refreshing every few years or the data can disappear. FRAM can store data for much longer.

What’s the catch?

It only has 8KB of storage, letting you store 8,000 characters – enough for four pages of a book. The reason is that FRAM is very expensive, restricting how much storage Blaustahl can offer. You could use it to save a few passwords, but not much else.

So can I do without it?

Yes. If you really want four pages of text to last 100 years, you’d be better off printing them and storing them somewhere safe.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 3 July

Kobo Clara BW

Kobo’s 6in ebook reader gets a new mono screen with better contrast and a faster refresh rate



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LAPTOP

PRICE
DROP

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus

£849 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 14 Still a fast and powerful laptop, with a great 14in screen. £1,099 from www.snipca.com/49733

DESKTOP PC

Palicom 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. £499 from www.snipca.com/33050

ANDROID TABLET

Samsung Galaxy Tab S9

£799 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. £799 will get you the 128GB version. If you want 256GB you'll need to spend around £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. £400 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.

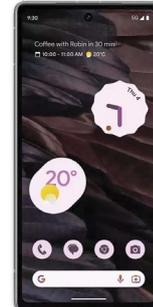
ALTERNATIVE iPhone SE With a single camera and smaller screen but the same powerful A15 processor and 64GB storage as the iPhone 14, it's great value. £429 from www.snipca.com/34773

ANDROID PHONE

Google Pixel 7a

£399 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 Nothing Phone 2a Don't be put off by the odd name. This has a distinctive design, superb camera and decent battery life. From a UK company too. £349 from www.snipca.com/49930

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MINI PC

PRICE DROP

Minisforum UM780XTX

£649 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

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

PRICE DROP

Logitech C925e Business Webcam

£50 from www.snipca.com/50751

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

PRICE DROP

BenQ XBL2970QT

£199 from www.snipca.com/50454

Tested Issue 685



With a 1440p resolution on a 27in screen, this has a pixel density of 109 pixels per inch, making it extremely sharp. Also has great speakers, lots of controls and plenty of ports. It's the best balance between size, resolution, quality and price.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution, with a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £269 from www.snipca.com/49898

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 £89; 2TB costs £158.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £57 from www.snipca.com/37304

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 3 Twelve South HiRise 3 Wireless Charging Stands



Twelve South's HiRise 3 Wireless Charging Stand is a space-saving wireless charger that offers luxury charging for your iPhone, Apple Watch and AirPods.

Place your iPhone on the MagSafe charger and adjust the angle of the screen to see notifications at a glance. Place your Apple Watch at the back, so it charges effortlessly. And finally, charge your AirPods or a second phone on the soft charging base.



The HiRise 3's vertical design saves precious space on your bedside table or desk. Everything, from the aluminium post to the matte black/white finish, has been designed to evoke quiet luxury. Round corners and smooth edges put the finishing touches to the modern design. The wireless charger at the back is not just for AirPods, but anything that charges wirelessly.

In this competition you can win one of three matte white HiRise 3 charging

stands. To enter, answer the question at www.snipca.com/50461 and submit your details.

It runs until midnight Tuesday 2 July. Good luck!

You can buy the **Twelve South HiRise 3 Wireless Charging Stand** for £99.99 from Apple's store www.snipca.com/50744. For more information on Twelve South products, including stands, chargers, cases and covers, visit <https://twelvesouth.co.uk>.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830
£220 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 £60 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. £160 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. £765 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. £230 from www.snipca.com/49161

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HOW TO...

Shoot composite photos using your phone

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Smartphone, tripod, GIMP **Time required:** One hour

Photographs usually capture a single moment in time, but that doesn't always tell the whole story. If you want to present before and after shots, illustrate how something's grown or show off the results of your handiwork, it can make more sense to create a composite shot: a single frame that contains two or more images, laid one on top of the other, and cropped.

We sometimes use these in the magazine when we want to illustrate the effect of making changes to software or hardware. We did so recently in our feature on calibrating your monitor and printer to make sure the colours you see on screen are accurately reproduced on paper (see Issue 685, page 36). Here's how we usually go about producing a composite image.

1 Mount your phone on a tripod

If you have very steady hands and you're shooting the two images in quick succession, you can do this freehand – especially if you're happy to spend more time lining everything up in an image editor afterwards. That said, for the best results we'd recommend



We used the Oktosta tripod to take a photo of our cactuses, before editing them into a composite

using a tripod.

Tripods come in all shapes and sizes, and at a wide range of prices. Unfortunately, most are designed for use with cameras that have a quarter-inch tripod mount point on the underside. No phones that we know of have such a mount point, so you'll need either a tripod designed specifically for phones, or an adapter for a mainstream tripod.

We chose the first option, and have used an Oktosta tripod, which we picked up on Amazon for just over £11 (www.snipca.com/50661, pictured below). We were very impressed when it arrived. Despite being so inexpensive, it feels substantial, with thick, pliable legs coated in rubber that makes them easy to grip, a poseable head, and a phone mount that attaches directly to the tripod's standard camera-mounting screw.

The tripod arrived with the mount screwed on upside down – perhaps to protect it – so your first job is to release it and screw it on the right way round. Once you've done that, pull the two halves of the clamp apart, place

your phone between them, then release them so they grip the phone. When you've positioned your phone at the correct angle, use the screw on the side of the uppermost ball joint to fix it in place.

Here, we're going to make a composite image of some cactuses. We have only one brightly coloured plant, while the rest are dull green, so to make our photo more interesting, we'll add a second example of our pink specimen to the frame.

2 Use your phone's manual controls

Smartphone cameras are great at picking out the most likely subject in a frame, focusing on it and using it as the reference point for setting its sensitivity. When you're taking multiple pictures to use in a composite, there's a risk that the two shots will have different levels of sharpness, or that one is much brighter than the other, if the phone focuses on a different subject in each frame. Fixing the focus and lighting as much as possible when taking the picture will save you a lot of work in the long run. Whichever phone you have, launch your camera app.

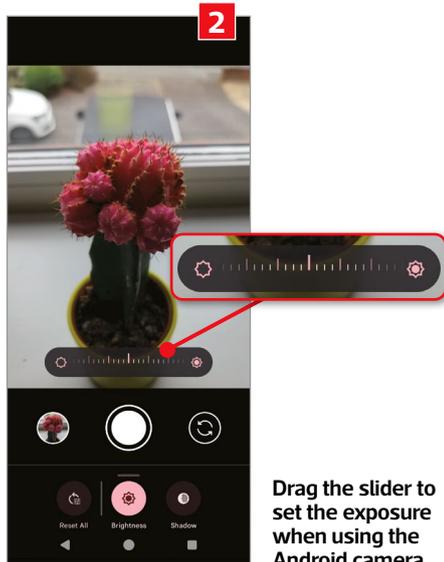
On an iPhone, you can tap once on a subject to tell the phone to focus on it. To lock the point of focus, press and hold on the object for a couple of seconds.

The familiar focus box will flash, then stay static. Take your finger off the screen. You've now told the camera to keep that object in focus as long as it stays in the frame – even if you move your phone to a different position or something else appears that would otherwise draw its attention.

Now hold a finger on the screen and swipe up and down to set the exposure. Notice the sun icon that slides up and down as you do this (see screenshot **1** below). This shows your current exposure setting. When you've got it where you want it, let go.

The camera controls on Android devices vary depending on the manufacturer and model. Using the camera app on our Pixel 5 phone, which uses Google's standard version of Android, we again long-press on the object in the frame on which we want the camera to focus. After a couple of

The 'sun' slider to the right of the focus box indicates the exposure setting



Drag the slider to set the exposure when using the Android camera

How I use composite images

I find composite images particularly useful to show how things have changed. When you create them as described here, the two photos remain independent. If I ever want to recover the upper image, I can simply remove the mask I applied at the end of the process, while hiding that layer reveals the photo beneath. This is useful if I ever want to use the shots as non-composites.

Nik Rawlinson



How do you intend to use composite photographs?
Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

seconds, the focus box flashes and a padlock appears above it to indicate that the camera will continue to focus on that object, even if it moves.

To set the image's exposure, we then tap the button showing three sliders on the toolbar at the bottom of the screen and drag the gauge left and right (see screenshot **2** below left) to lighten or darken the shot.

When you've set up your camera as required, take the pictures you'll use to create your composite image. Then download them to your computer.

3 Open and merge your images

Next you need to use an image editor to merge your images. You can use any editor that supports **layers**, such as Affinity Photo 2.5 or, as we're using here, GIMP – free from www.gimp.org.

Launch GIMP and open the two images you're using. These will open in separate tabs in the same window. Whichever image is visible when they're both open, press M to activate the move tool, then Ctrl+A to select the whole image. Now press Ctrl+C to copy the frame. Above the open image, you'll see thumbnails for both pictures (**1** in our screenshot above right). The one to the right will have an 'x' next to it, indicating that it's the one you're editing. Click the other image to switch to it, then press Ctrl+V to paste the copied image on top of it.

Although it looks as if the image you've pasted has replaced the other image, you've actually pasted the picture into a separate layer, as you can see in the Layers panel on the right hand side of the screen. This shows the original photo at the bottom of the stack, and a 'Floating Selection' **2** above it, which is the image you've just pasted. Click the green button on the bottom-left of this panel **3** to



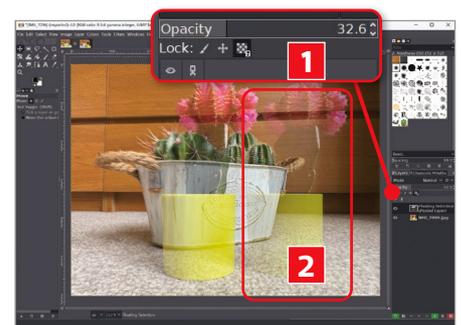
To switch between your photos, click the thumbnails at the top of the window

confirm the creation of the new layer, and it will add the second image to your document.

4 Align your photos

If you used a tripod to take both pictures, they should be fairly well aligned. However, it's worth checking before you go any further. Drag left on the Opacity slider at the top of the Layers palette until the number at the right-hand end of the slider reads around 30 per cent (**1** in our screenshot below). Your new layer will become semi-transparent **2**. Check that the move tool is still active (press M again if you want to make sure), then drag the new layer until it lines up with the one below it.

You may find that the angle of the camera changed slightly between shots.



We've reduced the opacity of our top layer then dragged it to line up with the layer below

You can't compensate for this by dragging alone, so press Shift+R to select the rotation tool, then click and hold one of the corners of your pasted image and drag it round in a circle until the orientation of the two pictures match.

If you're still having problems, and it's not possible to re-shoot your pictures, try the 'handle transform' tool. Start by using the methods we outlined above to align a prominent feature in your layers, then press Shift+L to activate 'handle transform' (look for two small circles on your image) and click on that prominent feature where it appears in the frame. This in effect pins the two layers together at that point.

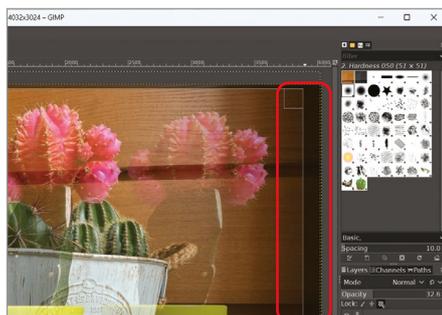
Now click and drag somewhere else in the frame to stretch, compress and reorientate the uppermost layer until another prominent object is lined up on both layers. Notice that as you do this the original pinned object remains aligned. Again, click on the new object to pin the two layers in the new position.

You'll probably need to keep switching between move (M), rotate (Shift+R) and handle transform while making a series of incremental adjustments until your images are perfectly aligned. That's why it's worth getting familiar with their keyboard shortcuts.

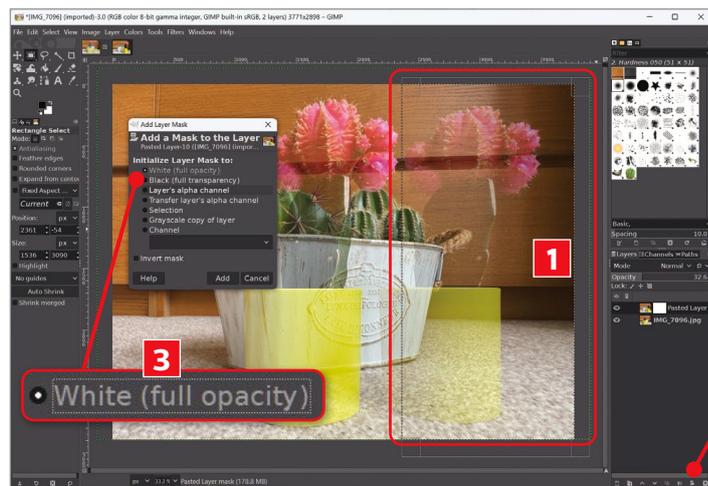
5 Tidy up the edges

If your upper layer has shifted significantly, you'll see a lot of the lower layer hanging off the edges. It's worth cropping your stack of photos to remove this before you go any further. Press Shift+C to switch to the crop tool, then click in one corner of the top layer at a point where you can see that it's on top of the layer below, and hold the mouse button while dragging to the opposite corner.

Let go when you've selected the entire area where the two images fully overlap, leaving any parts that have only one or



Crop the images to remove the parts around the edges that don't line up



The rectangle shows the area we'll show or hide in our composite image

the other layer on them. Notice that any part of the stack that's outside this selected area looks slightly darker (see screenshot below left). Press the Return key to crop the stack and remove everything outside the selected area.

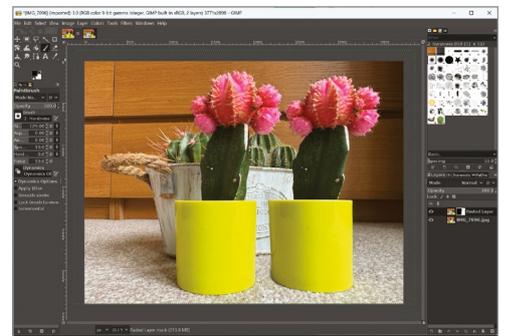
6 Slice the top layer in half

Now that you've aligned the images as best you can, you need to slice the top layer in half so the bottom layer shows through. As you've already reduced its opacity, you should be able to see where the most logical dividing line is between the two images. This will often be a vertical line, so your composite elements will be on the left and right-hand sides of the image, but there's no reason why it couldn't be horizontal (for top and bottom parts), or even diagonal.

We want to create a left and right composite, so that's what the following instructions will do. You can easily adapt them if you'd prefer a different orientation. Press R to activate the rectangle tool, then click and hold outside the top-right corner of the frame. Now, keep the button pressed as you drag the rectangle until it encompasses the part of the image you want to hide (1 in our screenshot above). It doesn't matter at this point whether the part you want to hide is on the upper or lower layer. Make sure you select the full height of the frame, then release the mouse button.

Now, click the Mask button at the bottom of the Layers palette (2 in our screenshot). Leave 'White (full opacity)' selected (3), then click Add.

Press Shift+B to activate the 'bucket fill' tool, then X to set the selected colours to



Our final photo shows a composite of two pink cactuses, where originally we had just one

black and white. The two squares below the toolbox show you which colours are active. Keep pressing X until black appears on top. Now click in the area you selected with the rectangle tool, and that half of the upper image will disappear.

Press Shift+Ctrl+A to get rid of the rectangle, leaving a composite image that shows the left half of the top layer and the right half of the bottom layer. If this is the wrong way round, click Colors on the main menu, followed by Invert, and the two sides will swap to show the left side of the bottom layer and the right side of the top.

Finally, click the thumbnail for the upper layer in the Layers palette, and slide the Opacity slider all the way to the right, so the number at the end of the slider reads 100 per cent.

You can now export your composite image as a regular JPEG by pressing Shift+Ctrl+E and giving it a name, adding .jpg at the end. GIMP will spot the .jpg extension and automatically select JPEG as the output format. Our final image (pictured above) shows the results of our editing – we now have two pink cactuses, where originally there was only one.

Workshop

Try Windows 11 free for an unlimited time

What you need: VMware Workstation Pro; Windows 11 ISO file

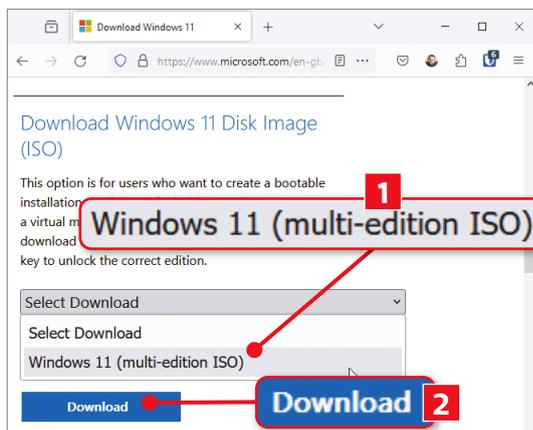
Time required: 1 hour

If you're using Windows 10 and want to try Windows 11 to see if you like it, you should consider running it within a **virtual machine** such as VMware Workstation Pro, which in May became free for personal use (www.snipca.com/50736). Here we'll show you how to use Workstation Pro to set up a

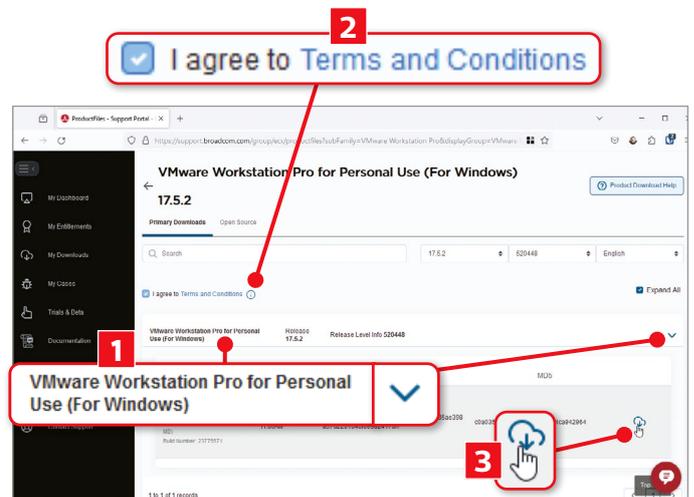
version of Windows 11 that you can use for an unlimited period of time without having to activate or purchase a **licence key**. You will have restricted options to personalise Windows, and after 30 days a permanent watermark will appear on screen asking you to activate – but you can ignore this.



STEP 1 First, go to www.snipca.com/50691 to download the Windows 11 installation disc as an **ISO file**. Click the 'Select Download' dropdown menu to choose 'Windows 11 (multi-edition ISO)' **1** and click Download **2** to save the file. It's 6.3GB in size, so might take some time if you have a slow internet connection. You'll need a free Broadcom account to download VMware Workstation Pro. Go to www.snipca.com/50692 to register. Type your email address, then enter the six-digit verification code that's emailed to you. Complete the form with your name, country and a strong password. After creating your account, click 'I'll do it later' to complete registration.

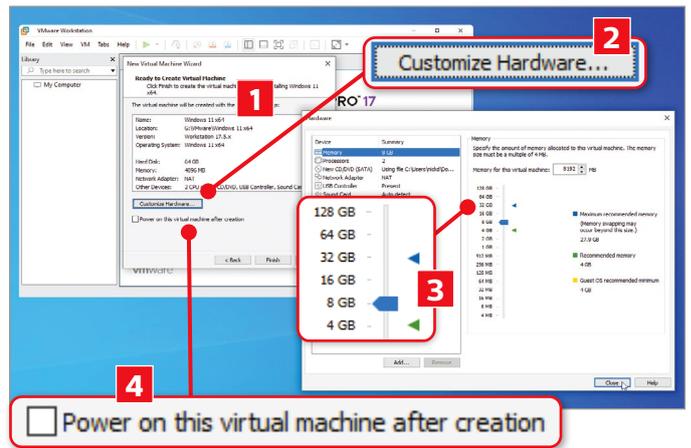
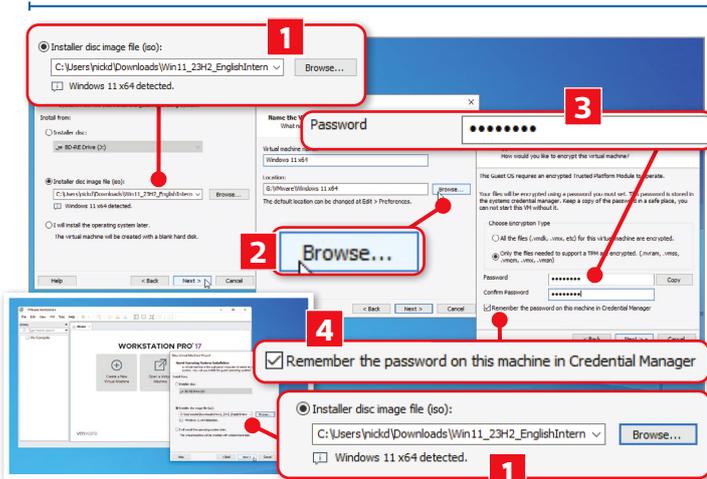


STEP 2 The Broadcom support portal can be confusing to navigate, so use our direct link (www.snipca.com/50693) to log into your account and then go to the VMware Workstation Pro downloads page. Expand 'VMware Workstation Pro 17.0 for Personal Use (For Windows)' **1** and click the latest release (17.5.2 at time of writing). Tick 'I agree to Terms and Conditions' **2** and click the download button **3**. You will need to enter your home address before being returned to the downloads page. Click the download button again, and this time the file will download to your PC.



STEP 3 Once downloaded, double-click the **EXE** file. Follow the installer's instructions, leaving the default settings as they are – including keeping the 'Enhanced Keyboard Driver' box unticked. Once installation is complete, click Finish. Open the Start menu then click 'VMware Workstation Pro' under 'Recently added' **1**. Select 'Use VMware Workstation 17 for Personal Use' **2** and click Continue followed by Finish to open the main VMware Workstation Pro window. You'll see three prominently displayed buttons – click the 'Create a New Virtual Machine' button to continue. The 'New Virtual Machine Wizard' will open. Leave 'Typical (recommended)' selected and click Next.

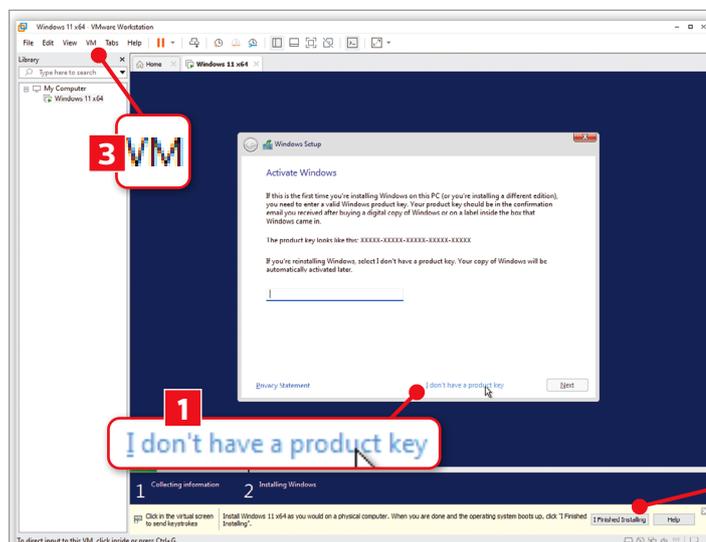
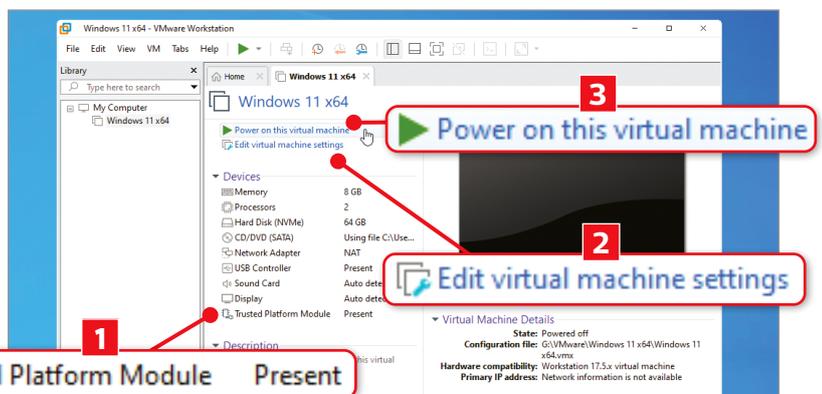




STEP 4 On the next screen, select 'Installer disc image file (iso)' and click 'Browse...' **1** to select the Windows 11 ISO image you downloaded in Step 1. Click Next. By default, virtual machines are stored in your Documents folder – click 'Browse...' **2** again to choose a different drive or directory if you want then click Next. You'll now be told the guest requires an encrypted Trusted Platform Module (TPM) to operate – VMware can provide a virtual one if your PC doesn't have a TPM chip. You'll need to choose a password **3** to encrypt the files with – leave 'Remember the password...' ticked **4** and you won't need to recall it each time. Click Next.

STEP 5 Now specify how large you want your virtual machine's hard drive to be – the default 64GB is fine for trying Windows, but we recommend selecting 'Store virtual disk as a single file' before clicking Next. Finally, review your virtual machine's settings **1** and click 'Customize Hardware...' **2** to make changes. If your PC has 16GB RAM or more, increase the memory to 8192 MB (8GB) **3** from the default 4GB. Click Close, untick 'Power on this virtual machine after creation' **4** then click Finish. Wait until the virtual drive is created. Your new virtual machine will appear in the main window.

STEP 6 You should see your virtual PC has been given a Trusted Platform Module (TPM) **1** – this ensures you can test Windows 11 on PCs that don't have the required TPM chip. Make further changes if you want by clicking 'Edit virtual machine settings' **2** or click 'Power on this virtual machine' **3** to start it up. A new window will open where your virtual PC will run. You'll be prompted to press any key to boot from CD or DVD – do so, and the Windows 11 installation process will start. Now follow the setup process as if you were installing Windows on your actual PC.



STEP 7 When prompted, click 'I don't have a product key' **1**, then choose the version of Windows 11 (Windows 11 Home or Pro) you want to try. Also remember to choose 'Customised: Install Windows only (advanced)' when prompted. From here, follow the rest of the installation process through to the end. When you find yourself at the desktop, click the 'I Finished Installing' button **2** at the bottom of the VMware window. The message will vanish, and then to finish setting up your new VM, open the VM menu **3** and choose 'Install VMware Tools...' to improve your virtual machine's performance.

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Get alerts when you exceed the speed limit

I agree with your assessment that all the recent changes to Google Maps have made it worse (Issue 684, page 63). I switched to Here WeGo (www.snipca.com/50387) a while ago and haven't regretted it. I particularly like the way it can warn you when you're driving faster than the speed limit.

Tap the Settings menu followed by 'Speed limit alerts'. Make sure 'Alert when over limit' is switched on, so the

slider is blue (1 in our screenshot). Adjust the two sliders to alert you when you go over the limit by a certain amount. The top slider is for limits under 50mph (2), while the bottom one is for those over 50mph (3). The 'Play alert sound' is on by default, so keep this.



It's a great idea and will hopefully make drivers more careful, especially in towns where it's easy to exceed 20mph limits.

Tom Stubbs

Tom wins a copy of our 2023 Back Issue CD

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

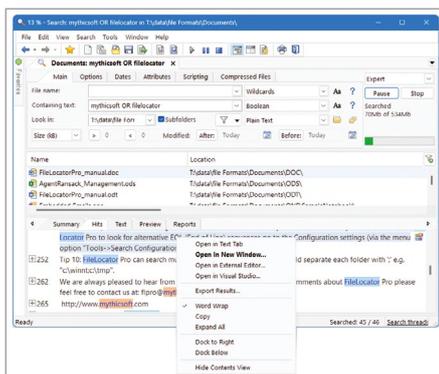


SOFTWARE

Search inside Word files using Agent Ransack

✓ In Issue 681's Problems Solved (page 65) you told Ian Machen how to search for text inside Word files. I use the free tool Agent Ransack (www.snipca.com/50507, see screenshot below). It's great at searching within files, although it can't search inside compressed files. Make sure you select the Lite (free) version when you first run it.

Iain Sillars



SOFTWARE

Reactivate WinX DVD Ripper on new laptops

✓ In Issue 684's Reader Support (page 71), you mention that a subscription to WinX DVD Ripper (www.snipca.com/50228, pictured below) costs around £32 a year. I've been using this software for a number of years, having bought it for roughly £24. I paid only once (for a one-user licence), so I haven't had to pay a subscription. What's more, I've successfully transferred the software to each new laptop I've used. I simply insert the code they sent to reactivate it.



When I reinstalled Windows 11 on my laptop recently, I wanted to install WinX DVD Ripper again. I wasn't sure what the code was so I simply emailed the company, and by the next morning they had sent me a reminder.

Ken Brown

APPS

Convert pace between miles and kilometres

✓ I've been using the excellent All In One Smart Tools app (Android www.snipca.com/49660; iOS www.snipca.com/49616) ever since you recommended it in Issue 680 (page 56). It has lots of great features, such as a torch, compass and QR code scanner, but the Units Converter is worth the installation alone. It converts everything you'd expect, including temperature, power and mass. But I use it to convert my pace between minutes per mile and per kilometre (see screenshot above right). It's ideal for walkers and joggers alike.

Roy Knight

Why I stopped using...

Virgin Media broadband

✓ In Issue 680 (page 60) you explained how to switch to a mobile broadband service for home use. I did this about a year ago after getting fed up with receiving speeds of just 4Mbps from Virgin Media, even though I was paying for 250Mbps. I have not regretted my decision.

And what I use instead...

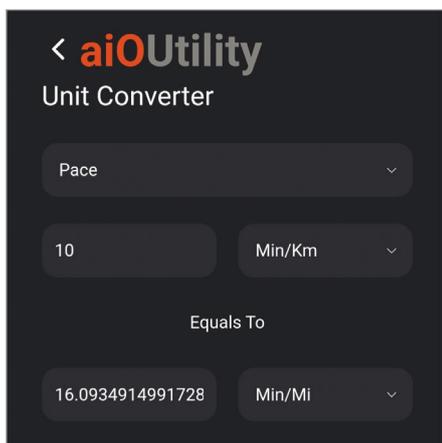
Since switching to **Three mobile broadband** (www.three.co.uk/broadband) I've been happily enjoying speeds of well over 200Mbps. When I checked online, the website told me I could receive **5G** at my home address, but staff at the Three store said I could only get **4G**.



Thankfully, I persuaded them to give me a 5G router (pictured). It does occasionally drop to 20Mbps on 4G, but I can live with that. Ask for a 5G router, and if the store only offers 4G, ask them to guarantee an upgrade later.

Paul Flanagan

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



SOFTWARE

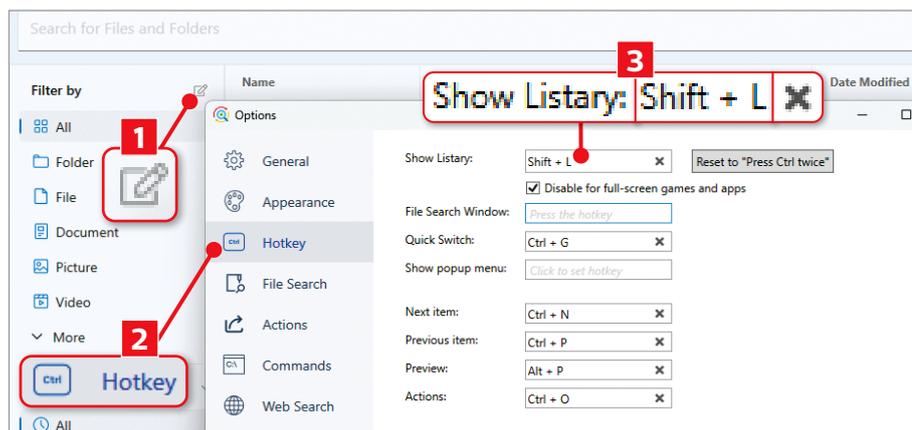
Change Listry's search bar shortcut

✓ Listry (www.snipca.com/50390) is the best tool I've used for finding files on my PC, so I was pleased to see that a new version is available (Issue 684, page 18). Anyone trying it for the first time might like to know that you can bring up its search bar by pressing Ctrl twice. This shortcut works whatever else you're doing on your computer. You don't need to have Listry open.

The drawback is that many people use Ctrl as the **modifier key** for a host of other shortcuts, and if you have clumsy fingers, as I do, it's easy to accidentally press Ctrl twice when you wanted to perform a different shortcut.

The solution is to change the shortcut that opens the search bar. Open Listry then click the pencil icon next to 'Filter by' (1 in our screenshot below). Now click Hotkey in the menu (2) and change the shortcut in the 'Show Listry' box. You do this by pressing the keys you want to use for the shortcut on your keyboard – your selection will appear in the box. I've changed mine to Shift+L (3). Click 'Apply' at the bottom to confirm the change.

Len Boardman



Reader recommends...

Indoor Tapo TP Link C100 £19.99 from www.snipca.com/50533

✓ Your feature on spy-cams (Issue 684, page 60) was a good read, but the Indoor Tapo TP Link C100 camera is better than the ones you recommended. It's a similar shape to those cameras but has an **SD card** slot for saving images, so you don't need to pay a subscription to view your footage.

A green **LED** on the front flashes when activated by movement. It also beeps – which you can hear outside the window – and sends a notification to your phone. The app is as simple as it gets, although you may need to adjust your modem from 5GHz to 2.4GHz.

I've attached mine to the ceiling, looking through the kitchen window, (pictured). It's upside down, but I



simply rotate the image in settings, as well as switch from auto to day mode to deal with reflections.

Alan Merser

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

MAPS

See a more detailed map of buses

✓ Ian Mynott is a man after my own heart. Like him, I use Bustimes.org (<https://bustimes.org>) to see when buses are due (Issue 684, page 41). However, I find that the default view lacks detail. I always switch to the Bright or Outdoors option, which makes elements such as the names of towns and roads easier to see. You can



do this by clicking the icon at the top right – see screenshot below left.

Also, the site's name doesn't quite do it justice, because you can see coach, ferry and tram times, too.

Mick Stanmore

HARDWARE

Buy Belkin adapter to play music and charge phone

✓ I'm the proud owner of some good-quality wired headphones. I loved using these with my ancient mobile phone, so I was disappointed when I had to replace it with a more recent model. Unfortunately, the new phone has a **USB-C** slot and no headphone socket, so I can either charge the phone or listen to music, but not both at once.



Thankfully, you came up with the perfect solution in Issue 684's Problems Solved (page 65) when you answered my question ('How can I connect two items to one USB-C port?') by recommending the Belkin RockStar USB-C Audio + Charge Adapter. I bought one (£20 from www.snipca.com/50070, pictured above) and it works perfectly. Now I can listen to Mozart late at night while charging my phone. Bliss!

Glyn Foster

Browser Tips

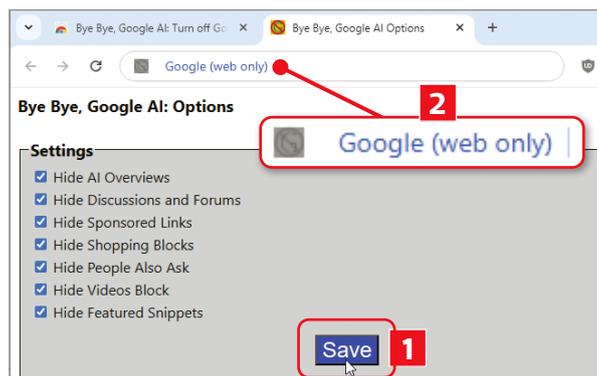
CHROME

Hide unwanted elements in Google search results

It's hard to remember a time when Google presented its search results in a clean, minimalist way. Search for something these days, and your results include sponsored links, ads for related products on online stores, 'people also ask' suggestions and other distracting junk.

As if that wasn't bad enough, Google is now showing 'AI overviews' at the top of the results page, which often include misleading information – recent examples recommended eating rocks and putting glue in pizzas (www.snipca.com/50618). AI overviews are currently limited to users in the US, but the feature will roll out in the UK later this year.

You can clean up your Google search results by installing the new Chrome extension 'Bye Bye, Google AI' (www.snipca.com/50619). This hides AI



overviews by default, and offers further options for removing other annoyances, including discussions, sponsored links, shopping blocks, videos and featured snippets. Right-click its toolbar button, select Options then tick the settings you want to apply and click Save (1 in our screenshot below left).

Additionally, the extension lets you search from Chrome's address bar without your browser directing you to a junk-filled results page.

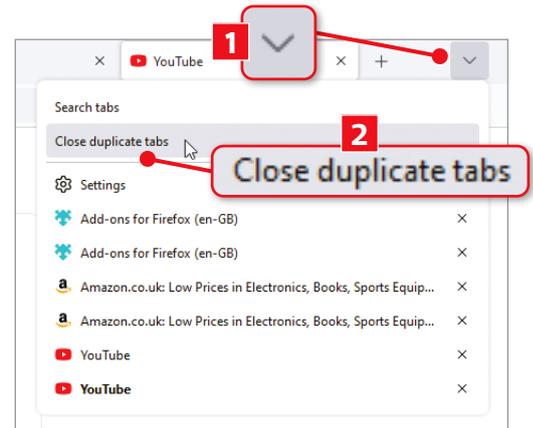
Type **w** into the address bar and press Enter to switch to a 'Google (web-only)' search (2 that focuses solely on the results.

FIREFOX

Close all duplicate tabs with one click

Unlike Chrome and Edge, Firefox doesn't yet have a memory-saving feature that puts tabs to sleep after a set period of inactivity. This means you need to keep an eye on how many tabs you have open, in case excessive demand on your PC's RAM makes the browser crash.

Firefox 127, released 11 June, introduces an option that helps you deal with at least some redundant tabs. It identifies all the duplicate tabs you have open, and



lets you close them all in one go, so you won't have the same web pages loaded in multiple tabs.

To use this feature, click the 'List all tabs' down-arrow button on the right-hand side of the top toolbar (1 in our screenshot above). Rather than click the 'x' next to each duplicate tab, you can simply choose 'Close duplicate tabs' (2).

A message will appear, telling you that Firefox will keep the most recently active tabs open. Click 'OK' to close all the older copies.

OPERA

Chat with AI assistant Aria more easily

Every browser that has added an AI chatbot, including Edge and Brave (see page 50), lets you access and interact with it in the sidebar. The same is true of Opera's AI assistant (Aria), but the latest version of the browser (111.0.5168.3,

WORKSHOP Speed up Chrome by preloading web pages

Chrome has long given you the option to speed up your browsing by 'preloading' pages you're likely to visit. Now it has moved this setting to its Performance section. Here's how to find it and tweak it for a seamless browsing experience.



1 Click Chrome's three-dot menu button, move your cursor down to 'More tools' and select Performance in the side menu (1). When the Performance settings load, scroll down to the Speed section and switch on the option 'Preload pages' (2).

2 Some extensions, including the popular content blocker uBlock Origin, disable this option, in which case it's greyed out. To unlock it, right-click uBlock Origin's toolbar button, select Options (1) then Settings and untick 'Disable pre-fetching' (2).

3 Choose between 'Standard preloading' (1), which preloads some web pages, and 'Extended preloading' (2), which preloads more but is less private – because it may use Google's servers and tell Google which sites you're visiting.

BEST EXTENSION FOR...

Viewing 'dislikes' on YouTube videos

Return YouTube Dislike

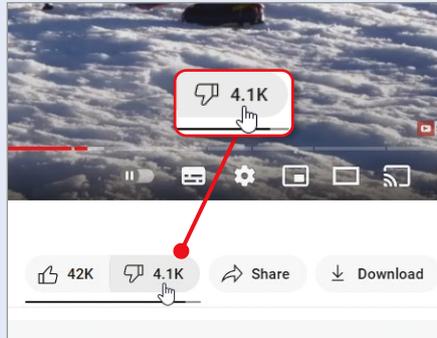
Chromium

www.snipca.com/50633

Firefox

www.snipca.com/50635

In November 2021, YouTube started hiding 'dislike' counts for videos, which showed you how many viewers had clicked or tapped the thumbs-down button. Its official reason was to stop content creators being targeted by trolls, while still letting them privately see how many people disliked their work. But it also means YouTube users can't tell at a glance if a video is poor quality, because there's no counterbalance to the number of 'likes'.



Return YouTube Dislike restores the count not only for videos that were disliked before 2021, but also for content that's been disapproved of since then. Just click the

thumbs-down button below a video (see screenshot) to register your own negative opinion. This also influences the content YouTube recommends to you. Return YouTube Dislike has been a 'featured' extension on the Chrome Web Store, so Google itself clearly doesn't dislike it!

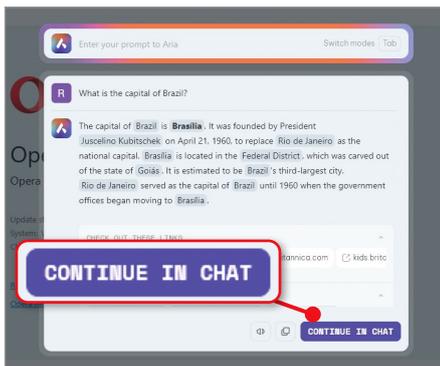
If you don't like that, try...

KellyC Return YouTube Dislikes

Chromium

www.snipca.com/50632

This extension also shows YouTube's dislikes, and tells you which tools viewers used to express them, but its information isn't always accurate.



released in May) adds a second, more convenient way to chat.

Rather than open the sidebar, you can now press Ctrl+/ to launch a 'command-line' text box above the current page. This lets you ask Aria questions and read its answers without leaving the page, and includes the option to 'Continue in Chat' (see screenshot above) if you'd rather use the sidebar for a more in-depth conversation.

You can also press the Tab key to switch to Aria's new Page Context mode, which responds to commands about the page you're currently viewing. For example, you can ask the chatbot to summarise the content of an article, find specific information within it and translate foreign text into English. Press the Tab key to switch to Writing mode and get Aria to generate emails, social-media posts, poems and other text, based on the prompts you enter.

Aria is free to use, but you need to sign into your Opera account – or sign up if you don't already have one.

EDGE

Generate custom browser themes using AI

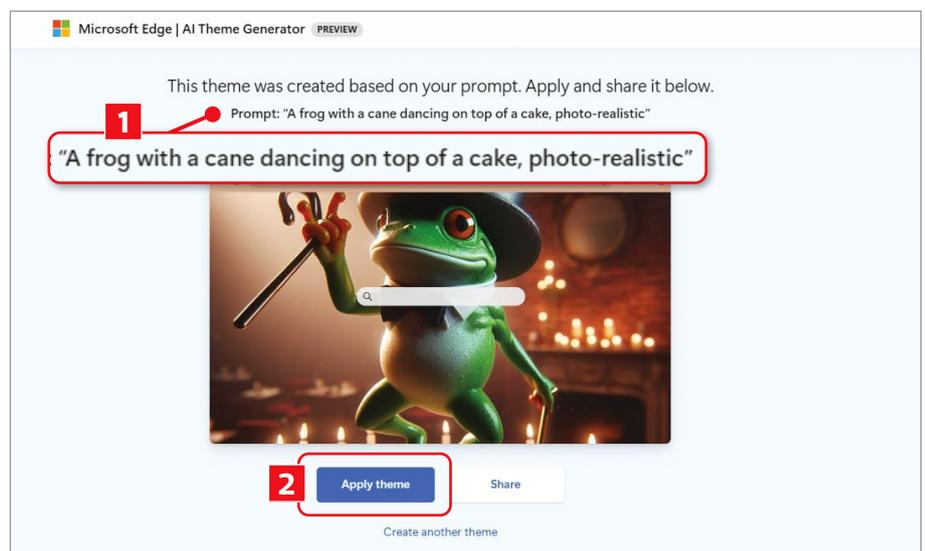
While Google has yet to bring AI features to Chrome in the UK, Microsoft is continuing to add them to Edge. Version 126, released 13 June, introduces the option to personalise the browser by using AI to create your own themes.

First make sure you're signed into Edge using your Microsoft account details, then visit the new AI Theme Generator page (www.snipca.com/50624). Here you can describe the theme you want to create by typing a few words into the text box – we've entered 'A frog with a cane dancing on top of a cake, photo-realistic' (see our screenshot below).

Click 'Create theme' to see what the tool comes up with and, if you're happy with the result, click 'Apply theme' to add it to your browser. This will change the colour of Edge's toolbars and display the AI-generated image on your 'New tab' page. Click 'Share' to send a link for your theme to another Edge user or to download it to your PC.

Alternatively, click 'Create another theme' to try again or choose 'Surprise me' to enter a randomly generated text prompt. You can also select and modify the prompt templates that appear on the AI Theme Generator page, such as 'An alien-filled spaceship landing on Earth depicted in a pixelated-style'.

To remove your new AI theme, go to Settings then Appearance and choose one of the browser's simpler themes instead.



Phone and Tablet Tips

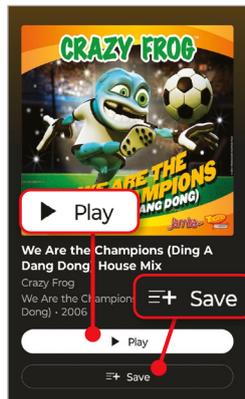
ANDROID

Identify songs by humming in YouTube Music

The YouTube Music app for Android (www.snipca.com/50640) has added the useful ability to identify songs by humming, whistling or singing them. Tap the search button and press the new waveform icon that appears in the top-right corner.

Give YouTube Music permission to access the microphone on your phone or tablet, then hum, whistle or la-la-la a few bars of the tune you want to identify. YouTube Music will display its best guess and let you tap the Play button to listen to the song, or Save to add it to your library (see screenshot below). You can also press the three-dot icon to save the track to a playlist and view more information about the artist, songwriter and album.

The results are a little hit and miss – the app thought our rendition of Queen’s ‘We are the Champions’ was an awful version by novelty ringtone character Crazy Frog. However, the feature is fun and may stop you being tormented by mystery ‘earworms’. If the idea sounds familiar, that’s because Google introduced a similar option in the YouTube app for Android last year, and



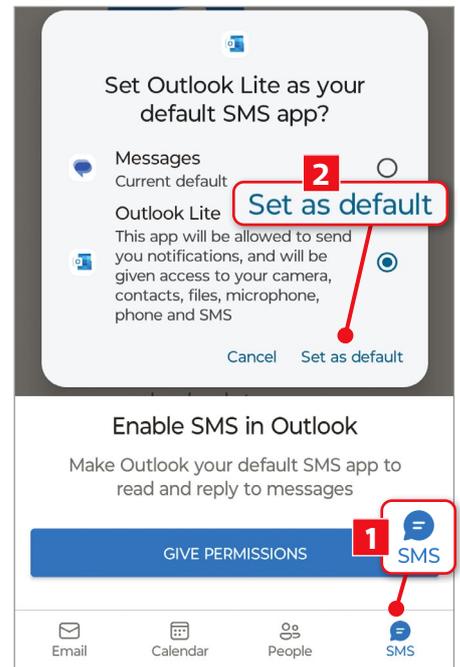
in the Google app in 2020. It has yet to confirm if the feature will appear in YouTube Music for iOS.

ANDROID

Send and receive text messages in Outlook

Microsoft’s Outlook Lite app for Android (www.snipca.com/50644) is a lightweight alternative to the full email app, aimed at people whose phones lack storage or processing power or who don’t need lots of business-oriented features. The app has now been updated with an option that doesn’t appear in the main Outlook mobile app: the ability to send and receive SMS text messages.

This saves you having to switch between Outlook Lite and the Messages app on your phone to check your emails and texts. To activate the feature, sign into your Outlook account then tap the new SMS tab in the bottom-right corner of the app (1 in our screenshot above right). Press the Give Permissions button to set Outlook Lite as your default SMS app (2). It will then import your text messages so you can read, reply to and search them through the SMS tab. Tap the plus button in the bottom-right corner to compose and send a message. To switch back to the default Messages app, open the Settings app on your Android phone and choose Apps, then ‘Default apps’ and tap ‘SMS app’.



See our feature on page 62 to discover the best alternatives to Outlook.

iOS

Stop deleted photos and messages reappearing

As we reported in Issue 685 (page 8), some iPhone users who installed Apple’s iOS 17.5 update in May found that deleted photos and voicemail messages had reappeared on their phones. Some of the pictures and messages were supposedly deleted several years ago – as far back as 2010 – which sparked privacy

BEST NEW APPS

What you should install this fortnight

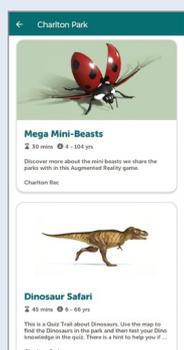
Love Exploring

Free

Android www.snipca.com/50648

iOS www.snipca.com/50649

This augmented reality app offers games and guided trails for families to enjoy while



out and about in woodlands, beaches, parks and other outdoor areas. The latest update notifies you when new games are available in your area, and fixes audio problems with its Space Walk and Mega Mini-Beasts games.

Arc Search

Free

iOS www.snipca.com/50646

The iOS version of Arc browser has a new AI-powered feature called Call Arc that lets



you search the web using your voice without feeling self-conscious. Hold your iPhone to your ear, speak a search query and Arc Search will respond as if you were having a phone conversation. An animated smiley face presents the answers on screen.

Glasswire Data Usage Monitor

Free

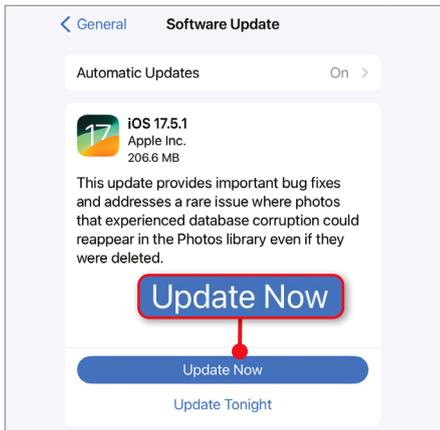
Android www.snipca.com/50643

Glasswire has made all the features in its Android app available for free, so you can monitor your phone’s data usage without



paying a penny. Identify which apps are hogging bandwidth, set up alerts to keep you within your monthly data limit, block background connections and more. Look out for a Workshop in our next issue.

Brilliant things to do on your device



concerns about how long Apple actually keeps users' data.

Thankfully, Apple has now released a fix for the bug, which it says was caused by a database-corruption issue, not – as previously believed – a syncing problem between iPhones and iCloud. To apply the fix, you need to update your iPhone or iPad to iOS 17.5.1 or iPadOS 17.5.1. Open the Settings app, select General then Software Update, and press Update Now (see screenshot above).

ANDROID & iOS Chat with Microsoft Copilot in Telegram



Microsoft has already integrated its 'AI companion' Copilot with many of its own apps, including Edge, Bing and Microsoft 365, and has now made the chatbot available for the

third-party messaging app Telegram. This means you can ask Copilot to look up information, provide travel inspiration, recommend books, tell you jokes and much more, as if you're chatting to a particularly knowledgeable friend.



To try the tool in the Telegram app for Android (www.snipca.com/50650) or iOS (www.snipca.com/50651), visit the 'Copilot for Telegram' page in your mobile browser (www.snipca.com/50652) and tap the 'Try now' button. Telegram will then open a conversation with Microsoft Copilot.

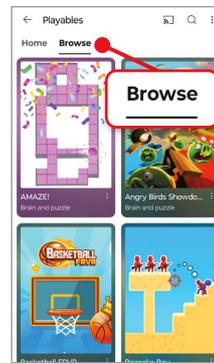
Tap 'Start' then 'I Accept' to agree to Copilot's terms of use. You'll then be prompted to send the bot the phone number linked to your Telegram account, which may put you off but is apparently necessary "to ensure a secure experience". Once you've done that you can start talking to Copilot, either by typing a query or command into the message box, or by tapping a suggestion (see screenshot below left). You're limited to 30 interactions per day.

ANDROID & iOS

Play free games on YouTube



YouTube now offers dozens of games you can play for free, both in its mobile app and on its website. In the app, tap the Explore button to the left of the search box to open the sidebar and press the Playables option. Select 'Browse' (see screenshot left) to see the full range, which includes Angry Birds Showdown, Cut the Rope and Words of Wonders. Tap a game to play it. There are no ads or in-app purchases (yet).



BEST APPS FOR...

Planning a holiday

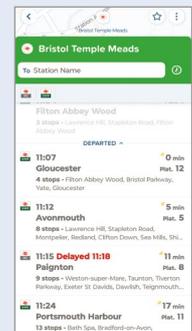
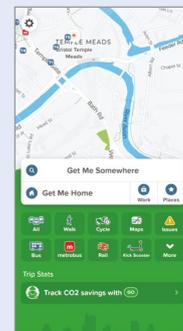
Citymapper Free*

Android www.snipca.com/50657

iOS www.snipca.com/50658

Citymapper helps you find your way around major cities in the UK, Europe and beyond by providing detailed information for buses, trains, cycling, walking and other forms of transport. This includes live departure times, route planning and maps, all presented in a way that's clear and easy to understand. You can even book taxis through the app.

Best For Viewing transport information



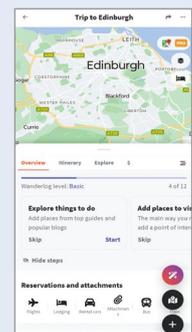
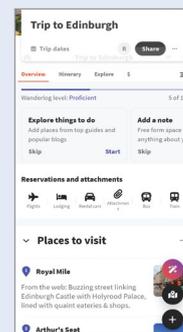
Wanderlog Free*

Android www.snipca.com/50656

iOS www.snipca.com/50655

This feature-packed app makes planning trips a doddle, whether you're travelling alone or with others. Get recommendations for places to stay, visit and eat, and create itineraries and checklists. You can also track your expenses and reservations in the app, as well as view maps and directions. A Pro subscription unlocks offline access and other useful tools.

Best For Creating holiday itineraries



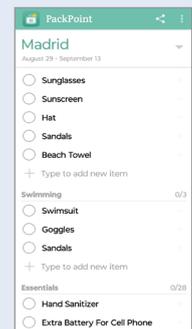
PackPoint Free*

Android www.snipca.com/50659

iOS www.snipca.com/50660

If you often pack too much, or too little, in your suitcase when you go on holiday, PackPoint can help. Specify your gender, destination, length of trip and planned activities and the app will generate a list of items you should pack. You can add and remove items as required, and share the list with other apps and people.

Best For Help with packing your case

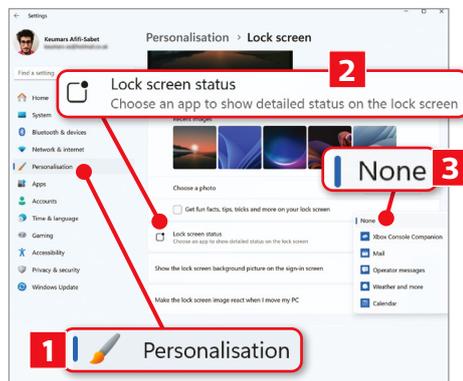


*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 11

Hide lock-screen widgets

With the update KB5035942 in March Microsoft added **widgets** to the lock screen in Windows 11, showing information like weather forecasts and stock-market prices. You can disable these if you don't want them. Press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click Personalisation (1 in our screenshot below) followed by 'Lock screen'. Now click the dropdown menu next to 'Lock screen status' (2) and select None (3).

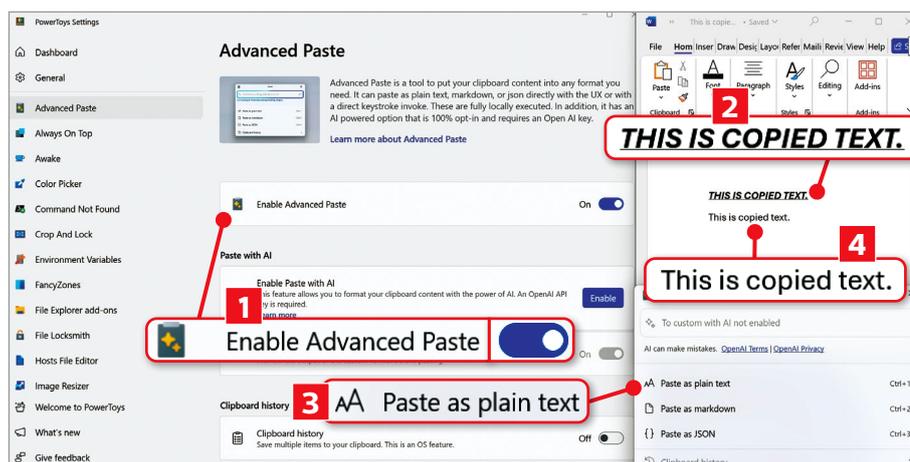


WINDOWS 10 & 11

Paste copy as plain text using PowerToys

Version 0.81 of PowerToys, released in May, added an Advanced Paste tool that lets you paste as **plain text** (ie, without any formatting) across any Windows system tool or program you're working on. This is a more versatile equivalent of the Ctrl+Shift+V keyboard shortcut that pastes as plain text in some programs and web apps like Gmail. But it's not universally supported in Microsoft Office – only Microsoft 365 insiders on the Beta Channel can currently use it (www.snipca.com/50750).

To update PowerToys, open it then click



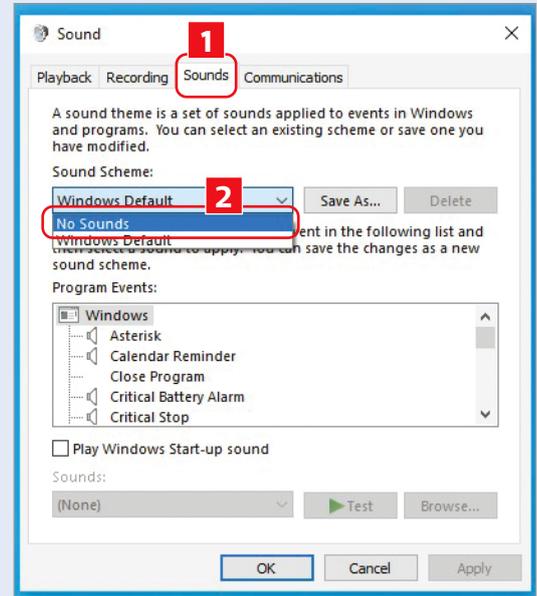
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Turn off sound effects on your PC

Sound effects are common in Windows, with distinct tones playing as you use different areas of the operating system. You can turn off these sounds if you don't like them, though the process depends whether you're using Windows 10 or 11.

In Windows 10, right-click the speaker icon in the system tray followed by Sounds. In the box that opens, select the Sounds tab (1 in our screenshot), then under the Sound Scheme dropdown menu choose No Sounds (2). Click Apply, then OK, and OK once more.

In Windows 11, right-click the speaker icon in the system tray then click 'Open volume mixer'. The speaker you're using should be listed next to 'Output device'. Click the



speaker icon next to 'System sounds' so that it shows a speaker with a cross next to it.

the top-right 'Learn more' button followed by 'Install now'. If you haven't downloaded PowerToys, do so from the Microsoft Store: www.snipca.com/50668. Next, open 'Advanced Paste' on the left and check that Enable Advanced Paste is set to On (1 in our screenshot below).

In our example, we typed THIS IS COPIED TEXT in Word as upper case, bold, italicised and underlined (2). We copied it then tapped Enter to start a new line. We then pressed Windows key+Shift+V to open the Advanced Paste box, and selected 'Paste as plain text' (3).

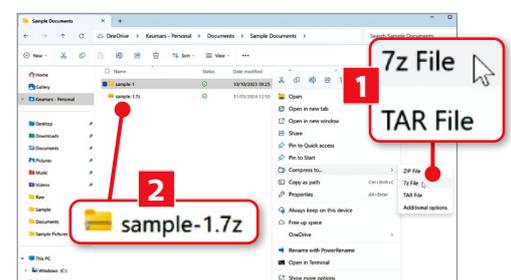
The result was printed on the new line as 'This is copied text' (4), without any formatting.

WINDOWS 11 INSIDER

Compress TAR and 7z files

Microsoft has finally added support for compressing files in the **TAR** and **7z** formats, though for now you'll need to be a Windows Insider to do so. It's part of the Preview Build 22635.3640 for Windows 11, released in May – see Microsoft's blog for details: www.snipca.com/50677.

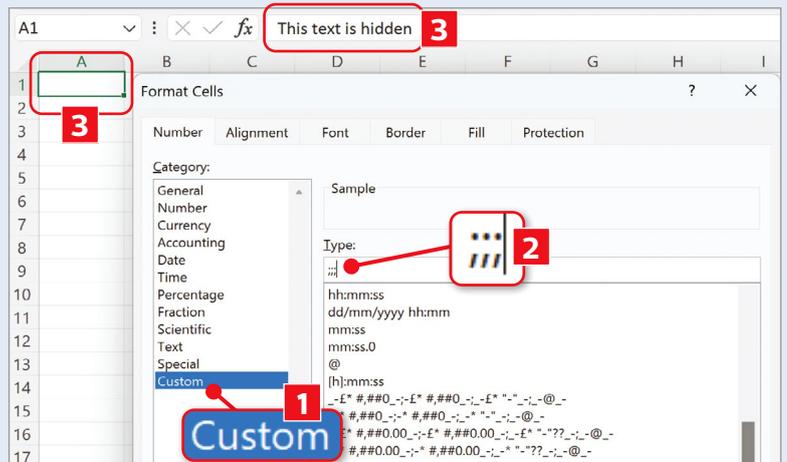
Right-click a folder in File Explorer, then click 'Compress to...' followed by 'ZIP File' (which was previously the only option), '7z File' or 'TAR File' (1 in our screenshot below). The compressed file will now appear in your folder (2).



MICROSOFT EXCEL

Hide the content of cells

X When working in Excel, you may want to keep the content of your cells hidden. This could be handy if you're taking notes or making quick calculations that might clutter your spreadsheet. Right-click a cell then click 'Format Cells...'. Now click Custom (1 in our screenshot) from the 'Category:' list, then in the 'Type:' field type ;;; (2) (three semicolons). Click OK. In our example, the text in A1 is hidden (3), but you can still see it in the function box at the top.



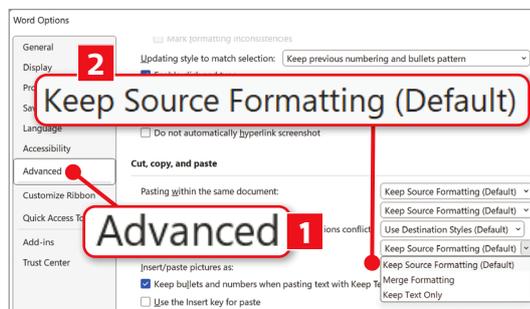
MICROSOFT OUTLOOK

Fix bug that stops you replying to emails

O Microsoft has suggested a temporary fix for a bug in the old version of Outlook that was preventing users from replying to encrypted emails. It showed the error message, 'Microsoft Outlook was not able to create a message with restricted permission'.

First, search for Command Prompt on your computer then click 'Run as administrator'. Now type `cd %programfiles%\Common Files\Microsoft Shared\ClickToRun` (1 in our screenshot below), then press Enter. Next, type `officec2rclient.exe /update user updatetoversion=16.0.17231.20236` (2) then press Enter. This will return Outlook to the previous version that didn't have this bug (3). You can cut and paste these commands from Microsoft's site: www.snipca.com/50634.

As well as this fix, Microsoft recommends upgrading to the new version of Outlook – though there are plenty of reasons why you might not want to do that (see page 62).



down to the 'Cut, copy, and paste' options. Click the dropdown menu next to 'Pasting from other programs:' and choose 'Keep Source Formatting' (2). Note that the update hasn't taken effect on our version of Microsoft Word yet, so 'Keep Source Formatting' still appears as the default. Finally, click OK.

MICROSOFT WORD

Keep website formatting when pasting

W Microsoft is rolling out an update that makes 'Merge Formatting' the default option when you copy and paste from an external source, such as a website. This means the content you paste will change to reflect the formatting (such as the font, size and text colour) you're using in Word.

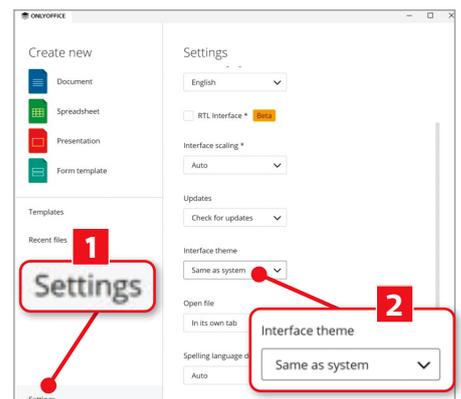
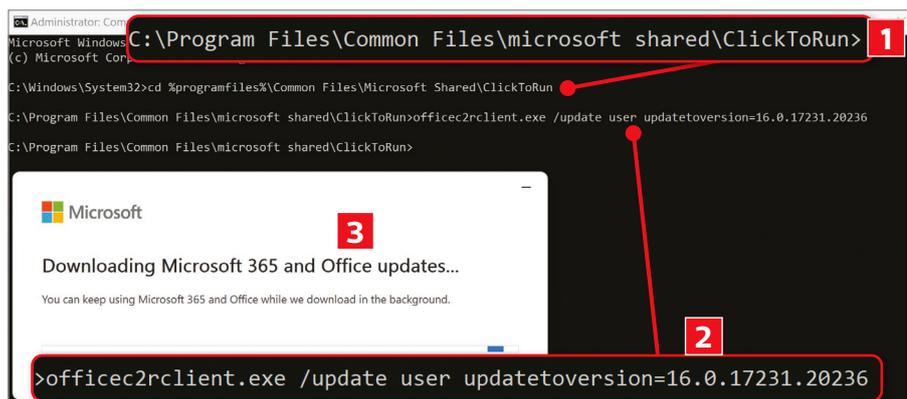
If you don't want this, you can go back to the previous option and keep the original formatting of the text you're pasting. Click 'File' at the top, then Options. Now click Advanced on the left (1 in our screenshot above) then scroll

ONLYOFFICE

Set your theme to match Windows

O OnlyOffice added a **dark mode** to version 6.3, released in 2021. You can also set OnlyOffice to mirror the theme you've chosen in Windows. This means if you're using Windows in dark mode, OnlyOffice will also operate in dark mode – or light mode if you've chosen that for Windows.

To activate this, click Settings (1 in our screenshot below) then under the 'Interface theme' option click the menu and choose 'Same as system' (2). Here you can also choose between several light and dark themes for OnlyOffice, or import your own. Click Apply when done.



In The Club



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

Create a wiki site using Notion

A wiki is a website that invited users can add content to. This makes them a convenient and engaging way of presenting club news or reaction to a recent event. One of the easiest ways to run a wiki is with the help of Notion (www.notion.so), which we covered in Issue 670 as a way of managing your club's finances. It makes everything simple – no technical or design skills required.

Choose a template, icon and cover

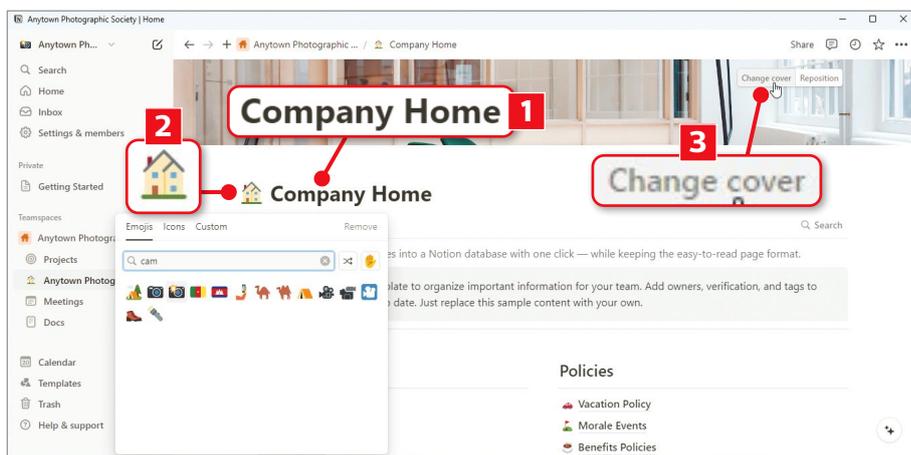
First, create a Notion account at www.notion.so/signup. When asked how you plan to use Notion, choose 'For my team' and click Continue. Next, enter your club's name and pick an icon before clicking Continue again.

You'll be prompted to invite other people to join what Notion calls your teamspace. The free plan lets you share it with up to two additional members, who can create and edit pages as required. You can also invite up to 10 guests to work on specific pages.

Once you've entered email addresses, click 'Invite and Take me to Notion', then click 'No thanks, continue to Free'. Now download the free Notion program (www.notion.so/download), then launch it and sign in.

Click 'Wiki' on the left, under Teamspace. Select one of the four templates and you'll see a preview on the right. They're all business focused, but you can easily change them. For a general wiki covering all aspects of your club, click Company Home, followed by 'Get started'. This will open the template in the central pane.

Your first job is to update the 'Company Home' page, so click that heading, then type a replacement name (1 in our screenshot above right). Once done, click the icon to choose a different one (2). Next, place the mouse cursor on the image at the top of the page to reveal two options: click 'Change cover' (3) to



Type a name for your wiki, then choose an icon followed by a cover

choose a different cover, which can be a plain colour or gradient, or you can upload a photo.

Add text using content blocks

The rest of the page is made up of text, headings and links. These are formed from content blocks, which are easy to create and edit, like on WordPress sites. Rather than design a page from scratch, you assemble it using these blocks.

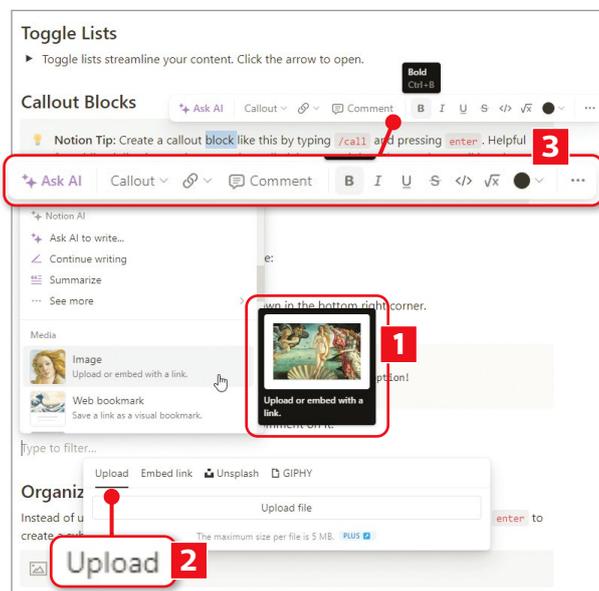
Next, click the 'Getting Started' link under Team, then scroll down and read

the instructions on creating pages from different types of blocks. To see which blocks are available, roll your mouse over one of the paragraphs on the page to reveal two small grey icons on the left: a plus sign (+) and two columns of three dots. Click the plus sign to see different content block types. Roll your mouse over one to see a preview (1 in our screenshot below left).

After selecting a block, Notion will guide you to add the required content, such as adding text, embedding a video or, as in our example, uploading a photo (2).

Editing an existing block is easy too: roll your mouse over the block that begins 'Convert all those scattered pages' and click inside to edit the text. To change the text's formatting, select a block of text to bring up a floating toolbar (3), where you'll see options to change its colour and style. Click '...' at the end for more options, including an option to delete the block.

To invite a guest to work on a page, click Share. Finally, when your wiki is ready to share publicly, navigate to its home page and click Share again. Switch to the Publish tab and click 'Publish to web' to generate a web link you can share.



Use Notion's content blocks to create a wiki with text, videos and images

What's All the Fuss About...



Disappearing web pages

Millions of links no longer work, leading to 'digital decay'

What are they?

Pages that have vanished from the internet. Around 38 per cent of all pages that existed in 2013 are no longer available, while a quarter of all pages that were published at some point since then have also disappeared. Even eight per cent of pages that were online last year have gone.

Who discovered all that?

Analysts at the Pew Research Center in the US, who looked at a sample of nearly one million pages (see www.snipca.com/50740). They found that clicking many links on important websites such as news sources, government and Wikipedia served up error messages such as '404 Page Not Found' (see our main screenshot).

What does that mean?

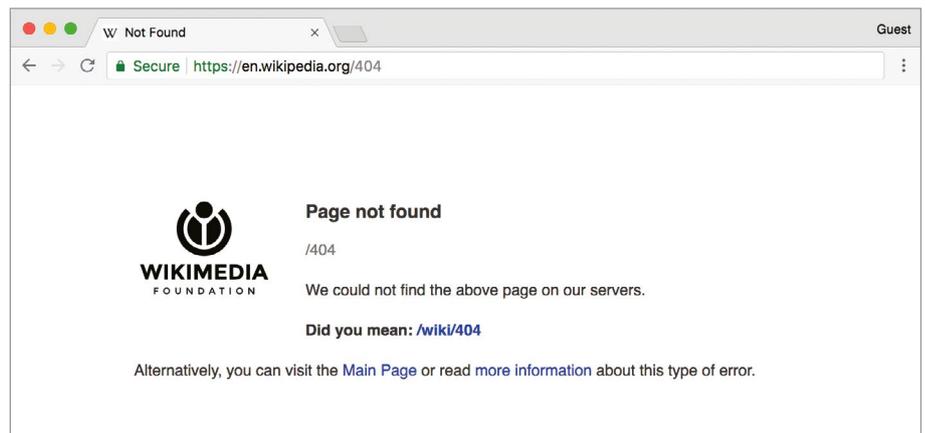
It appears when the server can't find the website you're looking for and is a sign that the page either doesn't exist or has been moved to a different URL. In total, Pew judged a page to have been removed if it showed one of nine error messages, including '204 No Content' and '502 Bad Gateway' (visit www.snipca.com/50747 and scroll down to see all of them).

What kind of web pages are missing?

Pew looked at 500,000 US government sites, 21 per cent of which had at least one broken link. Across 2,063 news sites, it was 23 per cent. And across 50,000 English-language Wikipedia pages, it was 54 per cent. That's a lot of pages that have kicked the bucket, shuffled off this mortal coil, run down the curtain and joined the choir invisible. The problem is even worse on X (formerly Twitter). Of 4.8 million tweets Pew studied from 8 March to 27 April 2023, almost a fifth (18 per cent) had gone missing by 15 June.

Does that really matter?

Perhaps not in the case of X. We



doubt most of those departed messages actually said anything interesting. More than half (60 per cent) of the tweets vanished because the accounts had been closed, suggesting the messages were never meant to be preserved for posterity. But it's much more concerning that pages containing news, opinion, government advice and general information aren't accessible. Pew called this trend "digital decay".

Why are they disappearing?

Pew doesn't give any concrete reasons, but it could be because a site changes the system for displaying content and doesn't keep the links live. Or, more simply, the website might have gone bust and deleted all its articles.

Is there any way I can see these pages?

Yes, the Internet Archive runs a kind of digital museum called the Wayback Machine. Since launching in 1996 it has saved over 866 billion web pages. It works by scanning (or 'crawling') the web for pages and downloading all information that's publically available. It hasn't saved every page because of restrictions imposed by some, but it's the only place you'll find a page that's otherwise unavailable.

How do I use it?

Visit www.snipca.com/50748 and type the name of a site. It works best if you type the domain suffix, such as .co.uk or .com. Searching for bbc.co.uk (1 in our screenshot below left), for example, shows that the Wayback Machine has saved pages from the BBC over 410,000 times since 1996 (2). Just choose a year (3) and click a circle on the day you want to revisit, followed by a time the web page was saved (4). The bigger the circle, the more pages were saved on that day. Blue circles and links mean the pages were saved successfully, so stick to those.

But what if that link disappears?

It shouldn't, but you may want to take a screenshot just in case.



Wayback Machine has saved over 410,000 BBC web pages since it launched in 1996

Ditch Google for...

BRAVE

Stop being tracked online by switching to a browser and search engine that respect and protect your privacy. **Robert Irvine** explains everything you need to know about Brave



WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Delete browsing data automatically when you leave a website
- Block more trackers and annoyances by enabling extra filters
- Hide your IP address from all the websites you visit
- Remove clutter from web pages to make them easier to read
- Make unlimited free video calls without being spied on
- Search the web privately without your queries being stored
- Search within websites using 'bangs'

Despite earning around \$80 billion in the first three months (www.snipca.com/50695), Google hasn't had a great start to 2024.

Its Chrome browser has suffered several serious security flaws, it was ordered by the courts to stop tracking users via its **Incognito mode**, and a new **AI** feature in its search results was accused of providing nonsensical and dangerous advice (Google says some of the evidence was faked: www.snipca.com/50696).

While Google gets steadily worse, another company with a browser and search engine is going from strength to strength, and now boasts nearly 79 million users worldwide. Brave (www.brave.com) offers the best way to browse the web

privately without being pestered by ads, trackers and other annoyances or sacrificing speed, features and innovation.

Like Chrome and other Chromium browsers, Brave lets you sync your browsing data between its desktop and mobile versions; store passwords, payment-card details and contact info; translate foreign text into English (and vice versa); and install extensions from the Chrome Web Store. But Brave has lots of other handy tools you may not have discovered yet.

In this feature, we reveal everything you never knew Brave could do, in both its browser and its privacy-focused search engine. We explain why it's faster, smarter and safer than Google, and will never share or sell your private data.

STRENGTHEN BRAVE'S PRIVACY & SECURITY SETTINGS

Configure Brave's Shields to block all hidden trackers

Unlike Chrome and Edge, Brave automatically blocks “the creepy stuff that tries to track you across the web”, without you needing to install any privacy extensions. It applies this protection through its powerful Shields system, which by default is set to block trackers and ads, third-party **cookies** that follow you from site to site, and **fingerprinting**, which allows websites to identify you from the software and device you're using.

To tweak these settings and activate further 'shields' for the site you're currently visiting (and on future visits), click the Brave Shields (lion-head) button to the right of the browser's address bar, then the down arrow next to 'Advanced controls' (1 in our screenshot above right). Click the dropdown menus next to 'Block trackers and ads', 'Block fingerprinting' and 'Block third-party cookies' to choose between standard and aggressive blocking, though applying the latter may stop some sites working properly.

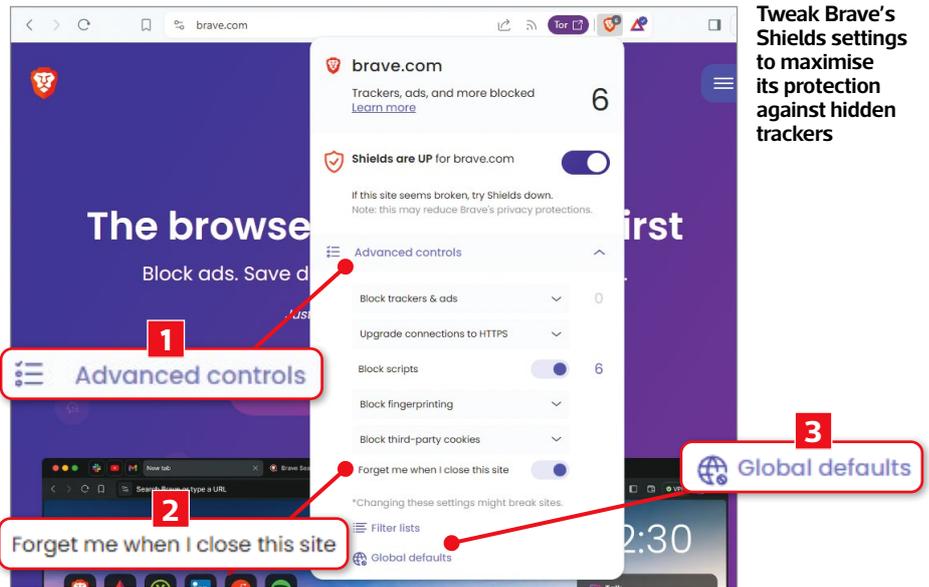
You can also switch on the options to block tracking scripts and to 'Forget me when I close this site' (2). As we explained in our Cover Feature in Issue 683 (page 53), the second option logs you out of the current website and deletes all its cookies and other stored data when you close its browser tab, so it won't remember you.

For extra security, Brave automatically uses a website's **HTTPS** connection to ensure that your data is always encrypted – a feature that Chrome and Edge have since copied. If this stops you accessing a site, click the menu next to 'Upgrade connections to HTTPS' and select 'Don't upgrade HTTP connection'.

To apply your preferred privacy settings to all the sites you visit in Brave, click 'Global defaults' at the bottom of the Shields panel (3), and adjust the options accordingly. As well as those mentioned above, there are settings for 'Social media blocking', which let you block embedded content from Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) and LinkedIn that companies can use to track you online.

Block more online annoyances using content filters

With aggressive blocking enabled, Brave's Shields will block nearly all trackers and ads, as well as online annoyances such as cookie-consent pop-ups. The browser

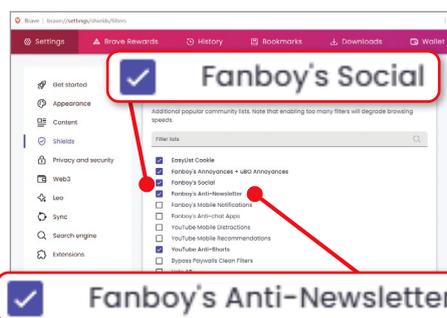


Tweak Brave's Shields settings to maximise its protection against hidden trackers

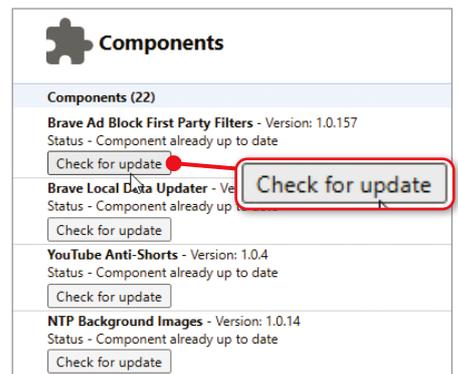
can even block adverts on YouTube, and bypass that site's ongoing crackdown against ad-blocking tools (see page 9).

Shields provides its protection using content filters, which are constantly updated lists of tracking **domains**, advertising servers and common nuisances. You can activate additional filters to block even more annoyances, though Brave warns that enabling too many can slow your browsing speed. Either click the 'Filter lists' option near the bottom of the Shields panel, or type <brave://settings/shields/filters> into the browser's address bar and press Enter.

Two of these extra filters, EasyList Cookie and Fanboy's Annoyances, are enabled by default. These are also available in the excellent content blocker uBlock Origin (www.snipca.com/50113) – an extension that all Chrome users should install but Brave users can live without. Click 'Show full list' and tick any additional filters you want to apply, such as blocking social-media **widgets**, newsletter sign-up pop-ups (see screenshot below) and YouTube Shorts.



Brave offers additional content filters for blocking more online annoyances



Update Brave's filters if it stops blocking ads and annoyances

You can also add custom filter lists by pasting their URLs into the box below. Click 'Save changes' and relaunch Brave to activate the new filters.

To view all the filters Brave is using – including those built into Shields – type <brave://components> into the address bar and press Enter to load the secret Components page. If Brave stops blocking a certain type of content, such as ads in YouTube videos, click the 'Check for update' button next to the filters that have stopped working (see screenshot above).

Browse the web privately using Brave's Tor mode

Google recently admitted that Chrome's Incognito mode does little to protect your privacy, especially from Google itself. Brave's basic private mode suffers from some of the same issues, as the company warns when it says “your activity could still be visible to your internet service provider, passive network observers or

your employer". To combat this, it provides an enhanced private mode that uses the Tor network.

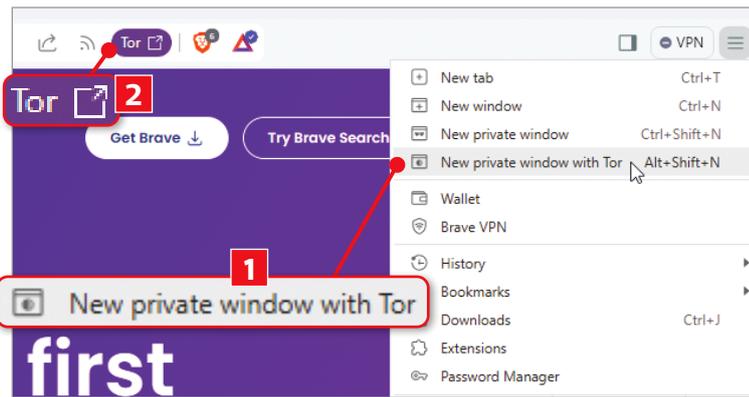
This not only stops your PC storing details of your browsing activities, but also hides your IP address so websites can't identify you and 'network observers' can't see which sites you visit. Press Alt+Shift+N to open a private Tor window or click the menu button and choose 'New private window with Tor' (1 in our screenshot right). Brave will then connect to the Tor network and let you browse the web more privately.

Last year, Brave improved its Tor mode so that it automatically loads the onion versions of sites when they're available, without you needing to type a 56-character onion address. When you're in standard browsing mode and you visit a site with an onion version (including Brave's own website), a purple Tor button appears in the address bar (2). Click this to open the site in a private Tor window.

Note that sites load more slowly in Tor mode and that, unlike Tor Browser, your internet connection isn't routed through an encrypted circuit of 'relays'. If you want to be completely anonymous, use that browser instead.

Avoid 'bounce tracking' and stop Google spying

Brave's 'Privacy and security' settings, which you can access by typing <brave://settings/security> into its address bar, include the same options you'll find in Chrome and other Chromium browsers. For example, you can activate 'Secure DNS' so it's harder for snoopers to see

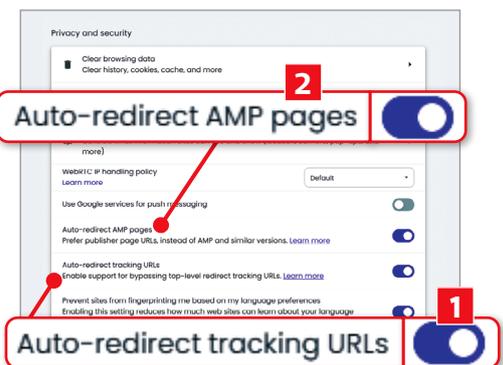


Switch to Brave's private Tor mode to hide your IP address from websites

which sites you visit, and turn on Safe Browsing to protect against malicious URLs, downloads and extensions (Brave uses its own server for this rather than Google's). You can also review and revoke permissions you've granted to sites. However, Brave has some extra privacy settings too. These should be enabled by default, but it's worth double-checking.

The most notable one is the 'Auto-redirect tracking URLs' option (1 in our screenshot right) which protects you against 'bounce tracking', a sneaky technique that directs you through a tracking server when you click a link on a web page or in an email, before you reach your intended destination. Brave maintains its own list of bounce-tracking URLs, drawing on sources such as the tracker-stripping extension ClearURLs (see Issue 683, page 52). You can also remove tracking elements from links you copy and paste by choosing 'Copy clean link' in the right-click menu.

Another important privacy setting, 'Auto-redirect AMP pages' (2), stops



Ensure these two privacy settings are enabled to beat sneaky tracking

Google redirecting you to 'accelerated mobile pages' (AMP) versions of websites when you click links in its search results. AMP is supposed to make content load quickly and more consistently across desktop and mobile devices, but it also lets Google track which sites you visit. By 'de-AMPing' the web, Brave lets you access pages directly without Google spying on you.

Privacy settings you can disable

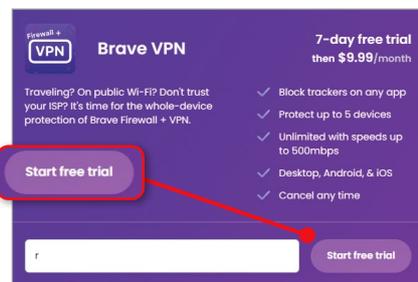
The 'Privacy and security' setting 'Send a "Do Not Track" request...' is disabled by default, which you may consider strange in a privacy-focused browser. That's because Brave regards the option as ineffective, stating that "many websites will still collect and use your browsing data". Instead it uses Global Privacy Control (<https://globalprivacycontrol.org>) to tell sites not to share or sell your browsing information, which adheres more closely to GDPR regulations. There's no harm in enabling 'Do Not Track', but it's not essential and won't do much.

The 'Privacy and security' page also includes 'Data collection' settings, which share usage and diagnostic data with Brave. Although this data is collected anonymously to help the company improve the browser's performance and features, you can disable all three options if you'd rather not share anything.

Should you pay for Brave's VPN?

Last year, Brave added a VPN and firewall to its desktop browser (the feature was already available in its mobile app). Unlike the VPNs in Edge and Opera, which are really proxies, Brave's tool encrypts everything you do online across your entire device – not just within the browser.

Although the VPN is integrated with Brave and has a dedicated button in the top-right corner, it's provided by a third-party company called Guardian. It costs more than most rival services, at £97.99 per year or £9.99 per month. There's a seven-day free trial (see screenshot) but you need to enter your payment-card details. The service covers up to five devices but only has servers in 13 countries and offers limited functionality.



In contrast, Proton VPN's Plus plan costs €59.88 (£51) a year, protects up to 10 devices and has more than 5,000 servers in 91 countries. It also has a free plan.

We don't begrudge Brave for trying to make money, but its VPN is overpriced and underwhelming. We advise right-clicking its toolbar button and choosing 'Hide...'

MASTER BRAVE'S BEST BROWSING TOOLS

Switch between pages more easily using vertical tabs

One useful feature you get in Brave but not in Chrome is 'vertical tabs', which displays your tabs in a panel on the left-hand side of the browser. This prevents tabs from shrinking when you open new ones, so you can always view their full titles and switch between them more easily. It also requires less mouse movement than clicking the tab bar across the top.

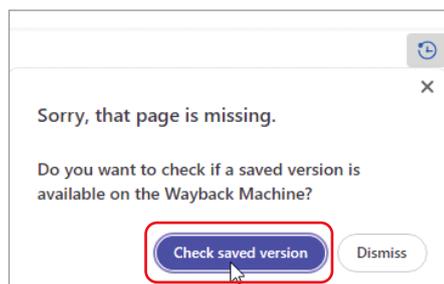
To activate vertical tabs, simply right-click a tab and choose 'Use vertical tabs'. Hide the vertical-tabs panel by clicking the 'Minimise tabs' button in the top-left corner, and click it again to reopen. To open a new vertical tab, either click the New Tab button at the bottom of the panel or press Ctrl+T. You can switch back to horizontal tabs by right-clicking a tab and unticking 'Use vertical tabs'.

Vertical tabs aren't exclusive to Brave – Edge introduced them in 2020 and Firefox plans to do so later this year – but Brave recently added the option to move them to the right, if you find that more convenient. Click Brave's three-line menu button, select Settings then Appearance, and switch on 'Use vertical tabs' (1 in our screenshot above right). Choose 'Show on the right' (2) to relocate the panel to the right-hand side.

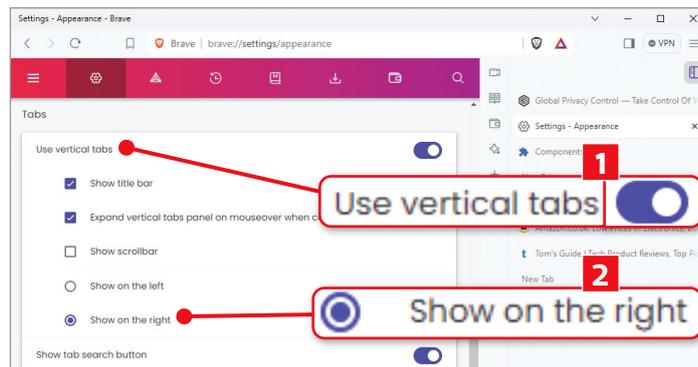
Access pages that have vanished from the web

The Internet Archive's Wayback Machine tool lets you view pages that have disappeared from the web, either through its website or its browser extension (www.snipca.com/50662). Brave saves you having to install this add-on by offering a built-in Wayback Machine option.

When you encounter a page that no longer exists, and shows a 404 'page not found' error code, you'll see a clock icon in the browser's address bar. Click this and Brave will confirm the page is missing and ask if you want to check for



View missing web pages using Brave's Wayback Machine option



Brave's vertical tabs can now be displayed on the right-hand side

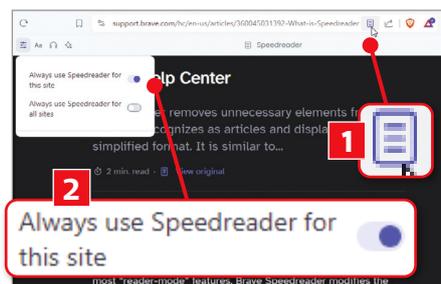
a saved version on the Wayback Machine. Select 'Check saved version' (see screenshot below left) to look for and load a **cached** copy of the page.

Make pages easier to read using 'Speedreader'

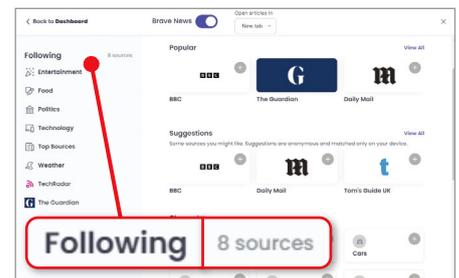
Most browsers now offer a 'reader mode', which makes web pages easier to read (and print) by removing everything except the core text. Brave's version is called Speedreader and works faster than other reading modes – especially Chrome's version, which opens pages in a squashed sidebar – by modifying content before it loads, rather than after. Speedreader also lets you customise the size, font and layout of the text, and switch between light, sepia and dark themes depending on your visual needs.

To use the mode, open an online article and click the Speedreader icon in the browser's address bar (1 in our screenshot below). Brave will strip the clutter from the web page to make it easier to read. Click the 'Appearance settings' (Aa) button to adjust how the page looks, or the 'Text-to-speech' (headphones) button to hear the content read aloud.

To always use Speedreader to view articles on the current site, click the Tune Speedreader button and select 'Always use Speedreader for this site' (2). To display *all* web pages in reading mode, choose 'Always use speedreader for all sites'.



Brave's Speedreader mode simplifies web pages so you can focus on the core text



Customise your Brave News feed by adding sites that you want to follow

Follow your favourite websites in Brave News

The Brave News feed that appears on the browser's New Tab page was initially a mix of random stories from 'major media outlets', like the similar (and rather irritating) feature in Edge. It has since been redesigned to adopt a more personalised approach that lets you choose which topics and sources to include, and subscribe to the **RSS** feeds of your favourite sites.

Click the Customize button in the bottom-right corner, select Brave News and ensure the option is switched on. Browse the selection of popular sources, which include the BBC, Guardian and Daily Mail; suggested sites, which are anonymously based on your browsing history; and category channels, which span everything from business and cars to weather and world news.

Click the plus signs next to entries you're interested in to add them to your Following feed (see screenshot above), then reload the page to read the latest headlines. You can choose whether to open stories in the current tab or a new one.

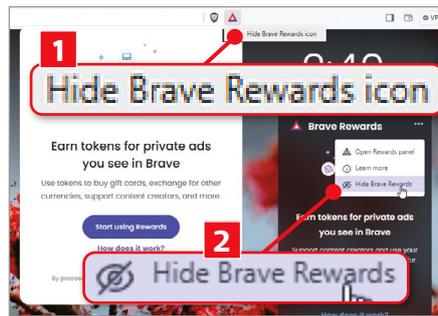
When you visit a website that has an RSS feed, you'll see a Manage Subscriptions button in Brave's address bar. Click this and select Follow next to the feed you want to subscribe to – there may be more than one – to include its content in your Brave News feed.

HIDE BRAVE REWARDS & BRAVE WALLET

Although Brave does a brilliant job of blocking ads across the web, it also has its own advertising system, called Brave Rewards (www.snipca.com/50676). Represented in the browser's toolbar by a triangle icon, Brave Rewards lets you earn tokens – called Basic Attention Tokens (BATs) – by viewing ads. These appear on Brave's New Tab page, in Brave Search results (see page 56), in your Brave News feed and in **push notifications** on your phone or tablet – but never on web pages in place of the ads Brave has blocked.

The BATs you earn can be exchanged for cash and **cryptocurrency**, used to buy gift cards and enter sweepstakes through Brave's Tap network, and donated to websites and content creators to support their upkeep. You can specify which type of ads you're happy to see, and Brave promises that it will never use your private data to personalise their content.

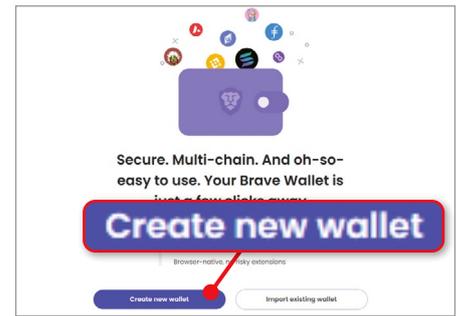
If that still sounds hypocritical – ads are ads, after all, and Brave is supposed to block them – the good news is that Brave



You can hide and ignore Brave Rewards if you don't want to watch its ads

Rewards is entirely optional and disabled by default. To hide the feature from your toolbar, right-click the triangle icon and choose 'Hide Brave Rewards icon' (1 in our screenshot above). To remove its card from your New Tab page, click the three dots in its top-right corner and select 'Hide Brave Rewards' (2).

Similarly, unless you trade cryptocurrency such as Bitcoin, you can live without the Brave Wallet feature. This is a secure digital wallet for storing crypto and **NFTs** in the desktop and mobile browser, without



Brave Wallet lets you manage cryptocurrency within the browser

needing to install a dedicated extension or app. Brave used to promote Wallet on its New Tab page, but it's now disabled by default and restricted to buttons on the toolbar and sidebar. You can remove these Wallet icons by right-clicking them and choosing Hide or Remove.

If you do dabble in cryptocurrency, clicking the Wallet icon will open the 'onboarding' page where you can create a new wallet (see screenshot above) or import an existing one. See www.snipca.com/50678 for more about Brave Wallet.

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

Upgrade to **Windows 11 Pro** for just **£49.99!**

Your PC almost certainly came with Windows 11 Home. But did you know it's easy to upgrade to **Windows 11 Pro** to get advanced features like BitLocker drive encryption?

There's need to install a new version of Windows – just take your new Professional key, go to System, Activate, then select 'Change Product Key'.

To upgrade, visit www.snipca.com/50563 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 **2 July, 2024**. It's a lifetime licence for one computer.



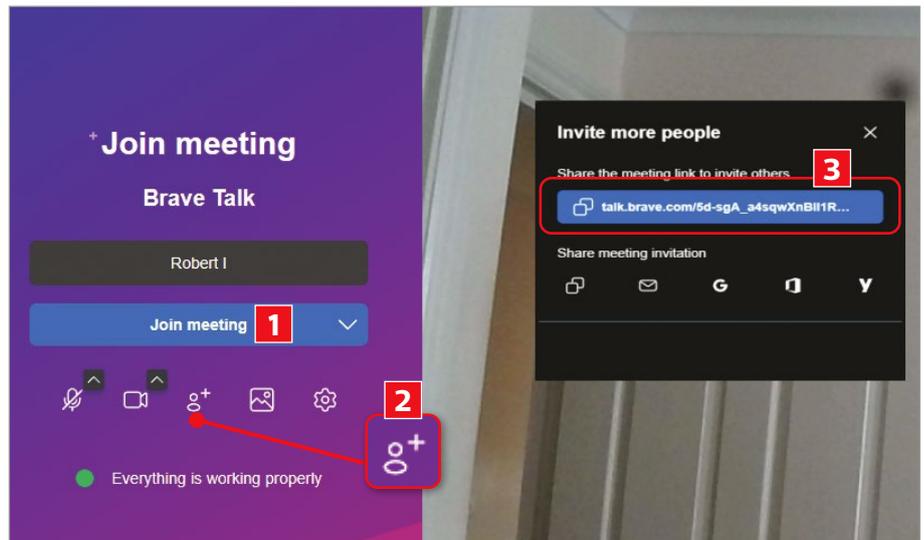
MASTER BRAVE'S PRIVATE CHAT & AI TOOLS

Make private video calls using Brave Talk

Brave's free video-conferencing tool, Brave Talk, lets you hold private video calls with up to four other people. It works directly in the browser, with no software to install, no account to sign into, and no tracking or data collection. There's no limit on the length of calls or the number you can make for free, though if you want to chat to more than four people you'll need a Brave Talk Premium subscription costing \$7 (£5.50) a month.

To start a Brave Talk call, either click the camera icon in the right-hand sidebar or in the bottom-right corner of the New Tab page, or visit <https://talk.brave.com> and click 'Start free call'. Grant Brave permission to access your camera and microphone, then enter your name and click either the blue 'Join meeting' button (1 in our screenshot above right) or the 'Invite people' icon (2) to share a link to the meeting with other people (3) – they can use any browser to join.

If you click the blue 'Join meeting' button, you can add people by clicking the Participants icon at the bottom, followed by Invite Someone in the top right. Brave Talk includes standard video-call features such as screen sharing, virtual backgrounds and moderator controls, and can be integrated with Google Calendar and Proton Calendar using the 'Brave Talk for Calendars' extension (www.snipca.com/50669).



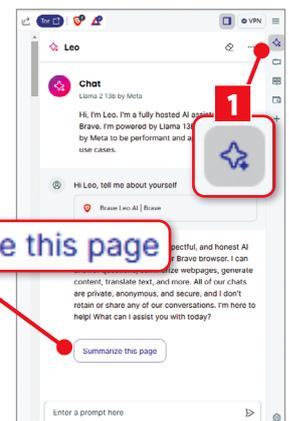
Brave Talk lets you hold private video calls with up to four people for free

Chat with Brave's new AI assistant Leo

The most notable feature to be added to Brave in the past year is undoubtedly its AI assistant, Leo. Introduced last November, the chatbot is a more private rival to Microsoft Copilot and Google Gemini, which doesn't collect or share any information that can be linked to you – such as your IP address – or store your queries for training purposes.

To try Leo, either click its button in Brave's sidebar (1 in our screenshot right), click the 'Show sidebar' button if it's currently hidden or type a query in

Brave's AI assistant Leo responds to your queries without sharing your data



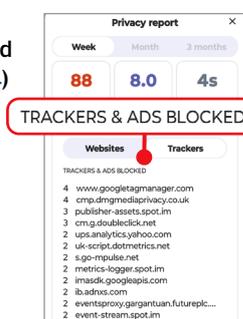
Summarize this page

Browse privately on your phone and tablet

Brave's free apps for Android (www.snipca.com/50673) and iOS (www.snipca.com/50674) offer the same features and protection as the desktop browser, including AI tool Leo and the optional VPN and firewall. Some of its tools are actually more beneficial on mobile devices, especially when compared with Chrome.

For example, blocking ads and trackers conserves data and battery life, your screen won't be obstructed by pop-ups and cookie-consent banners, and the app's night mode reduces eye strain when you're browsing in bed.

The mobile app also expands the Privacy Stats feature on Brave's New Tab page. As well as showing the number of



ads and trackers the browser has blocked, it tells you their domains, so you can identify the worst offenders.

On Android, tap the Privacy Stats card and choose 'Turn on privacy reports' to monitor trackers and ads over the last week, month and three months (see screenshot). On iOS, the option is called Privacy Hub.

Brave's iOS app has an extra feature called Brave Playlist, which lets you save audio and video content from YouTube, Vimeo, SoundCloud and other sites to an offline playlist. Long-press the title of a stream and choose 'Add to Brave Playlist', then access your playlist by tapping the three-dot menu in the top-right corner.

the browser's address bar and select 'Ask Leo'. This opens a side panel, where – after clicking 'Accept and begin' the first time you use Leo – you can start chatting to the AI assistant.

As well as asking Leo to look up information online, you can get it to summarise web pages (2), PDFs, Google Drive documents and even YouTube videos (provided they have transcripts). Leo will respond to and suggest follow-up questions and – like other AI chatbots – generate content based on your text prompts, including poems, stories and jokes.

Brave recently added the useful ability to access Leo from the right-click menu. Highlight a section of text on a web page, then right-click and choose an action from the 'Leo AI tools' sub-menu. After a certain number of responses, you may be prompted to subscribe to Leo's Premium plan, priced \$15 (£11.80) a month or switch to its free version, which uses a less advanced AI model.

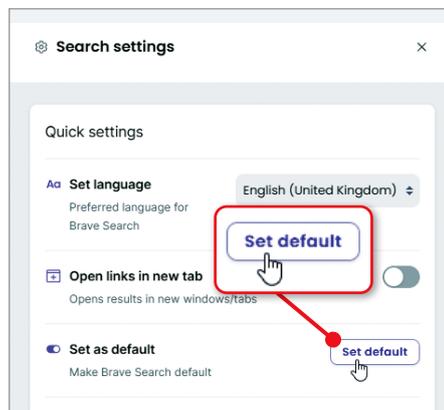
DITCH GOOGLE FOR BRAVE SEARCH

Set Brave Search as your default search engine

Brave launched its privacy-focused search engine, Brave Search, in 2021 and – unsurprisingly – made it the default search engine in its browser. This means any search queries you type into Brave’s address bar are automatically handled by Brave Search. If anyone has changed this to Google or another non-private option, go to <brave://settings/search> and set Brave as the default search engine for both normal and private windows.

Unlike Google and Bing, Brave Search doesn’t collect information about you, the things you search for or the links you click. It doesn’t censor or influence results using ‘secret algorithms’, and its ads are clearly labelled and ‘private by default’ (which means it doesn’t share your data with advertisers).

You can use Brave Search in any browser by visiting <https://search.brave.com>. To set it as your default search engine in Chrome, Edge or Firefox, click the cog in the top-right corner, select ‘Set default’ (see screenshot below) and



Set Brave Search as your default search engine in any web browser

follow Brave’s instructions for that browser. In Chrome, for example, you may need to create a shortcut for Brave Search in your ‘Search engine’ settings.

Switch off Brave Search’s local results

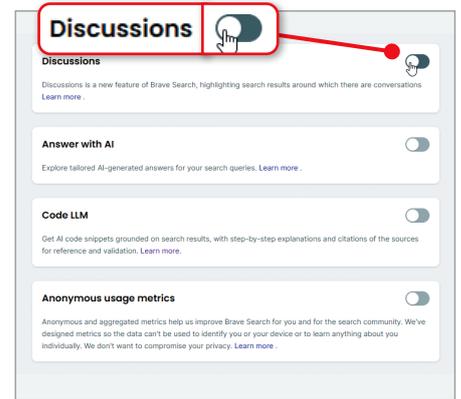
By default, Brave Search displays ‘anonymous’ local results for your searches so that if, for example, you search for **NHS dentists**, it will show a map of nearby dental surgeries above a list of relevant web pages. Brave says it uses your IP address to provide this information, but “without sharing that IP address and without storing it”.

If that doesn’t reassure you, and you’d rather be completely anonymous than reveal your (approximate) whereabouts, you can disable the feature. Either click your detected location and switch off ‘Anonymous local results’ (1 in our screenshot bottom left), or click the Settings cog, select ‘Show more’ and disable it there. You can turn the option back on when you need to find something in your area.

Alternatively, click ‘Revert to global’ at the top of the page (2) to hide local results in Brave Search without disabling the option altogether.

Remove clutter from Brave Search results

Like Google and other search engines, Brave Search’s results page offers extra features you may find more distracting than useful. These include Discussions, which are “conversations related to the query”, sourced mainly from social forum Reddit; ‘Answer with AI’, which provides AI-generated responses to your queries; and ‘featured snippets’, which



Remove ‘Discussions’ and other clutter from Brave’s search results

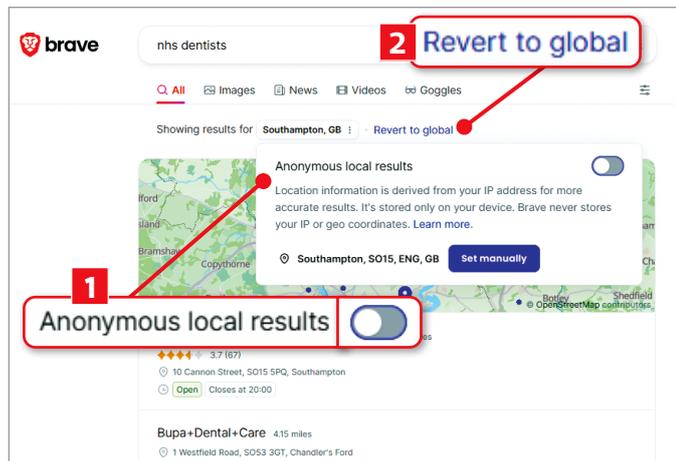
extract relevant information from web pages to save you having to click through to them.

Unlike Google, which makes it difficult to remove this clutter without installing an extension (see Browser Tips on page 42), Brave Search lets you easily hide its unwanted extras. Simply click the Settings cog in the top-right corner, choose ‘Show more’ and disable all the options you’d prefer not to see (see screenshot above). When you search again, your results will include less clutter.

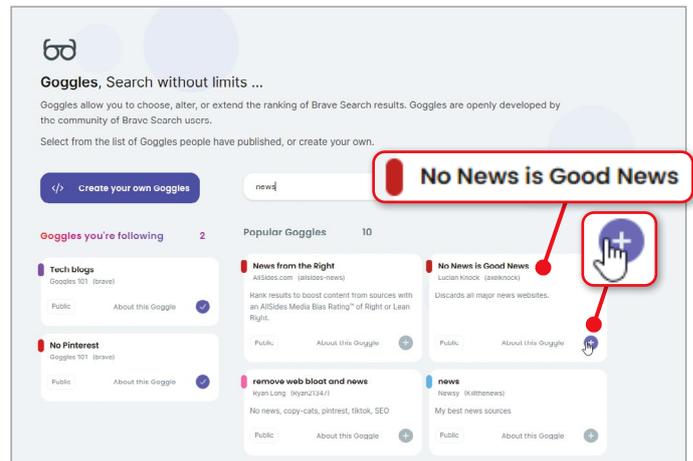
The only exceptions are Brave Search’s adverts, which appear at the top of the results page. If you want to remove these, you’ll need to upgrade to Brave Search Premium for \$3 (£2.36) a month (see www.snipca.com/50686).

Tailor your Brave Search results using Goggles

Google is notorious for manipulating your search results based on your perceived interests. This prioritises certain sites over others, and means you may not see some useful pages that



Turn off Brave Search’s local results to stop it using your IP address



Brave Search’s Goggles feature lets you personalise your results

Google's algorithms deem less suitable for you – a technique known as trapping you in a 'filter bubble'.

In contrast, Brave Search "does not have any hidden algorithms that alter search results to favour any specific domains, political leanings or any other factors" (www.snipca.com/50687). Instead, it lets you tailor your results to show the most relevant pages using a feature called Goggles.

To start using Goggles, carry out a search on Brave Search and click the Goggles tab on the results page. This will display suggested 'Goggles' you can click to apply to your search query, such as 'News from the left', 'News from the right' and 'No News is Good News', which hides stories from dozens of major news outlets including the BBC, Daily Mail and Guardian (www.snipca.com/50703). Click 'Discover more' to see the full set of Goggles, search for additional filters created by the Brave community and choose those you want to apply to your future searches – click the plus sign next to a Goggle to 'follow' it (see screenshot below left).

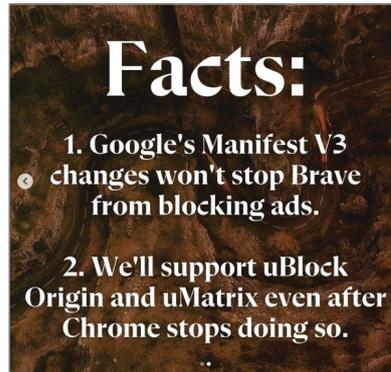
Fall back on Google only when necessary

Brave Search initially incorporated results from Google and Bing, but since last year it has relied entirely on its own independent search index. The company says this ensures its users' privacy without sacrificing quality, but you can still use those search engines if Brave doesn't find

Will Google stop Brave blocking ads?

Despite widespread opposition and numerous delays, Google is pressing ahead with its plan to stop supporting Manifest V2 extensions in Chrome and other Chromium browsers. It has now begun rolling out its new Manifest V3 system, which will reduce the effectiveness of many ad blockers by restricting the number of rules they can use.

Thankfully, Brave has confirmed that Google's changes will not prevent



it from blocking ads, and says it will continue to support ad-blocking extensions such as uBlock Origin even after Chrome stops doing so (see www.snipca.com/50694 and screenshot).

Because the browser is based on Chromium code, it

will eventually switch from Manifest V2 to V3, but the reliability of its Shields feature and extra filters (see page 51) means it won't start letting ads and trackers slip through.

what you're looking for.

Scroll down the results page for a web, news or video search and you'll see a 'Find elsewhere' section with options for searching through Google and Bing. However, be aware that clicking these will make your searches less private, even with Brave's Shields enabled.

A better idea is to go into Brave Search's Settings and switch on Google Fallback Mixing. This feature sources results from Google anonymously, so they can't be tied to you, when you need 'more depth' than Brave Search's smaller (but more

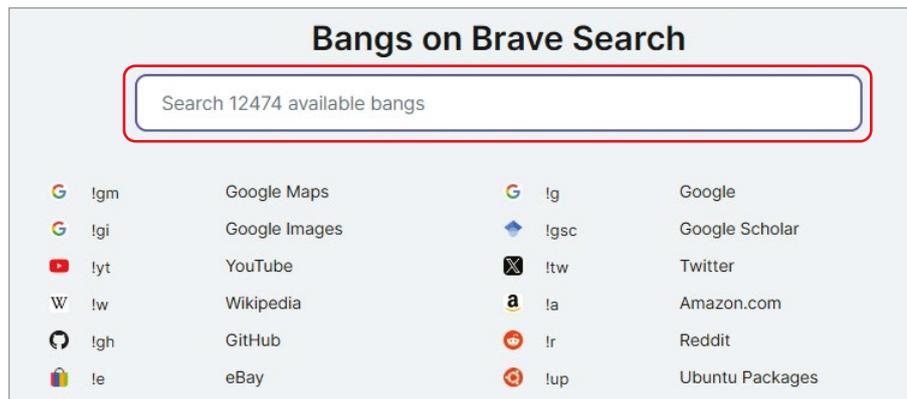
private) search index. See www.snipca.com/50689 to learn more about Google Fallback Mixing.

Search specific websites using 'bangs'

Although Brave Search provides an alternative to the similarly privacy-preserving DuckDuckGo (<https://duckduckgo.com>), it incorporates the rival search engine's handy 'bangs' feature. This lets you search specific sites directly from the Brave Search website or Brave's address bar.

Bangs are essentially shortcuts that you type before your search queries, which consist of an exclamation mark followed by a site's first letter or a keyword – for example, **!auk** to search Amazon.co.uk, **!w** for Wikipedia), **!e** for eBay, **!iplayer** for BBC iPlayer and **!yt** for YouTube. The results open in the corresponding website rather than Brave Search, which means they aren't anonymous and your data may be tracked by third parties.

Brave now supports more than 12,400 bangs – almost as many as DuckDuckGo. See www.snipca.com/50690 to search the full list (see screenshot left). **ca**



Search within thousands of websites using Brave Search's 'bangs'

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Restore faded colours – avoid 'flare'
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STOP USING GOOGLE MAPS
It now looks simply AWFUL – here's what we like instead
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fire tv NVIDIA SHIELD Roku G androidtv

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FAKE!
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So you can run ANY app on it – including from the Google Play Store **page 35**

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Don't Bin Your Old TABLET

Save money on new gadgets by repurposing an ageing Android tablet or iPad. Robert Irvine reveals six creative uses for your old device



Recent research found that tablets are less likely to be traded in than phones – around 67 per cent of iPad owners hang on to their old device (www.snipca.com/50741). Rather than leave your tablet gathering dust in a drawer, you can repurpose it to give it a new lease of life.

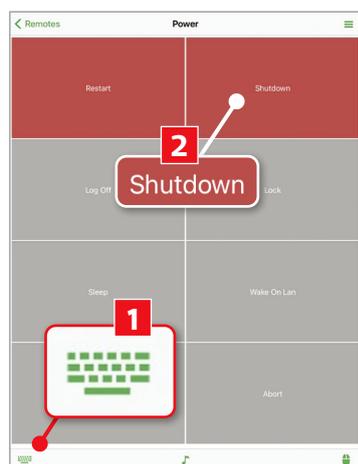
Create a wireless trackpad for your PC

The large screen on an old tablet makes it ideal for using as a wireless trackpad and keyboard, letting you control your PC from the other side of the room.

Install the app Unified Remote on your Android tablet (www.snipca.com/50704) or iPad (www.snipca.com/50705), and its Windows server on your desktop PC (www.snipca.com/50706). Allow the app to find and connect to devices on your network, and you'll be able to operate your computer from your tablet.

The free version of Unified Remote has a trackpad-style feature called Basic Input, which lets you move the cursor around on your PC screen – tap with one finger to left-click, two fingers to right-click, drag and drop items, and pinch to zoom in and out. You can also use

Unified Remote turns your tablet into a wireless mouse and keyboard for your PC



its keyboard to type text (1 in our screenshot below), its File Manager to browse folders on your PC and its Power function to restart, shut down and lock your computer 2.

Upgrading to the Pro version for £4.99 unlocks over 100 extra remote controls for specific programs and services, including YouTube, Netflix, Chrome, Firefox and VLC.

Turn your tablet into a virtual TV remote

Most manufacturers of smart TVs and streaming sticks offer virtual remote apps you can use instead of a physical remote control. These can prove handy when the latter goes astray or its batteries run out, and make typing search queries and account details much easier.

With a spare tablet, you can install virtual remote apps for all the streaming devices in your home, and control everything you watch in one place. This won't interfere with other tasks – as might happen when using your phone as a remote – and it won't get lost down the side of your sofa.

For example, you can use the Amazon Fire TV app to operate your Fire TV device from your Android tablet (www.snipca.com/50710) or iPad (www.snipca.com/50711, pictured above right). You can



Turn your tablet into a TV remote that won't get lost down the side of the sofa

also use the Google TV app (www.snipca.com/50712) to control and cast content to your Android/Google TV or Chromecast; and the Roku app (www.snipca.com/50713) to do likewise on your Roku TV or stick.

Alternatively, to save you installing multiple apps on your tablet, use a universal remote that works with all the main brands, such as All TV Remote Control for Android (www.snipca.com/50715) and Universal Remote TV for iOS (www.snipca.com/50714). Be warned that these unofficial tools tend to display lots of ads, which you need to pay to remove.

Extend your monitor to a second display

A good-sized old tablet – preferably 10in or bigger – lets you add a second display to your PC without paying for – or having to make the space for – a new monitor. This means you can extend your Windows desktop to show, for example, programs you’re using on your main screen and folders you’re browsing on the tablet screen.

The best free tool for this task is Spacedesk (www.spacedesk.net), which makes turning an Android tablet or iPad into a second monitor impressively straightforward. Install its software on your PC and its app on your tablet, then connect the devices via USB or Wi-Fi to move seamlessly between the two screens. See our How To feature in Issue 682 (page 35 – get it from www.snipca.com/50727) for a step-by-step guide to using Spacedesk.

Turn your tablet into a digital photo frame

Converting an old tablet into a digital photo frame displays pictures in a slideshow for everyone to enjoy. With Google Photos installed on your Android tablet – get it from www.snipca.com/50732 – simply open a photo, tap the three-dot menu in the top-right corner and select Slideshow. This will cycle through all the images in the current album. For the best results create a dedicated album of your favourite pictures.

Similarly, on an old iPad, open an album in the Photos app, tap the three-dot button in the top-right corner and select Slideshow. Use the Options button in the bottom right to adjust the background music and transition speed.

To more closely replicate a digital photo frame, install the free app Fotoo (www.snipca.com/50733) on your Android tablet (it’s also available for Amazon Fire tablets – www.snipca.com/50734). This displays pictures stored on your device and in online-storage services such as OneDrive, Google Drive and Google



Fotoo turns your tablet into a digital photo frame complete with the date and time

Wipe your tablet before donating it

If you plan to pass on your old tablet to a friend or family member, or donate it to a charity such as the British Heart Foundation (www.snipca.com/50739), it’s first essential to ensure all your personal data has been wiped.

On an Android tablet, open the Settings app, select Accounts, then Accounts Backup or ‘Passwords & accounts’. Press each of the listed accounts, tap ‘Remove account’ and confirm. Next, go to the System screen in Settings, press Reset or ‘Reset options’

and choose ‘Erase all data (factory reset)’. Press ‘Erase all data’ or ‘Erase everything’ to completely wipe your tablet.

To erase an iPad, first tap your Apple ID in the Settings app, select Find My and switch off the ‘Find my iPad’ option. Then go to www.icloud.com/find in your PC browser and remove the iPad from your account. Finally, tap Reset or ‘Transfer and Reset’ in the General section of the Settings app and choose ‘Erase All Content and Settings’.

Photos, offers a choice of transition styles and (optionally) includes information like the date and location of each shot. It can also show the current time and date (see screenshot below left), but some features – such as music and unlimited skips – are restricted to its paid-for version.

For iPads, try the similar app Digital Photo Frame Slideshows (www.snipca.com/50735).

Harness its power for scientific research

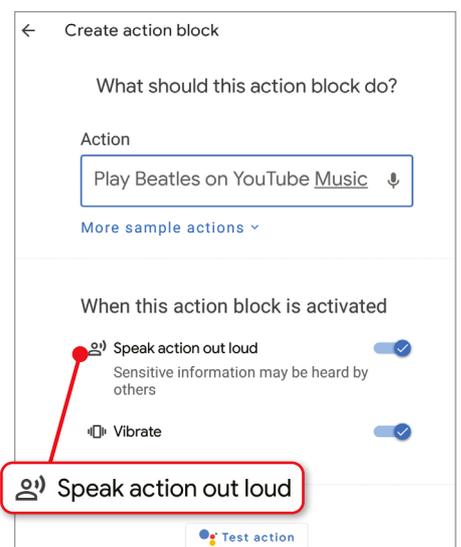
There are lots of ‘citizen science’ projects that harness the memory and processing power of your devices to help advance scientific research – usually by analysing large sets of data. You can use your old tablet to participate in these projects, without them hogging the system resources and battery power required for everyday activities.

The Zooniverse app for Android (www.snipca.com/50719) and iOS (www.snipca.com/50720) lets you join several volunteer-powered projects on your tablet. Its mobile-friendly tasks currently include searching for ‘brown-dwarf’ stars, pulsars and cosmic explosions. With Vodafone’s DreamLab app (www.snipca.com/50723), your Wi-Fi-enabled tablet can aid research into cancer, Covid-19 and tropical cyclones.

Convert your tablet into a smart-home hub

Rather than splash out on an Amazon Echo Show or Google Nest Hub, you can simply convert your old tablet into a multifunctional smart screen. Like those devices, this will let you access your favourite online services and control other smart gadgets.

Install Google’s free Action Blocks app (www.snipca.com/50737) on your old Android tablet to add large, smart



Use Action Blocks to transform your old Android tablet into a smart hub

display-style buttons to its home screen. Options include ‘Video call’, ‘Play music’, ‘Play video’, ‘Set alarm’ and ‘Lights on/Turn off lights’ (if you have a smart bulb or smart plug connected to your Wi-Fi network). These buttons use Google Assistant, so can be operated using voice commands as well as the tablet’s touchscreen (see screenshot above).

On an Amazon Fire tablet from 2018 or later, you can use the Device Dashboard option in the bottom-left corner of the screen to access controls for your Alexa-powered smart-home devices.

You can control smart devices on an old iPad through Apple’s Home app (www.snipca.com/50738), provided they’re HomeKit- or Matter-enabled (see list of devices at www.snipca.com/50753) and connected to your iCloud account. Open the Settings app, select iCloud and ensure Home is switched on under Apps Using iCloud. Then tap Home and select ‘Use this iPad as a Home Hub’. **ca**

Switch from the new Outlook



Microsoft has revamped its email tool, but it's significantly worse than the existing version. **Daniel Booth** explains why it's so bad and what you could switch to

We're always sceptical of knee-jerk reactions to changes in software and hardware, especially if they seem excessively negative. There are countless examples of new features and technology being instantly dismissed as awful or pointless, only for users to gradually accept and then eventually like them. But we're fairly sure that our initial unfavourable reaction to the new Outlook – available in both Windows 10 and 11 – will hang around no matter how long we end up using it.

Microsoft launched it in 2023 as an app on its Store (www.snipca.com/50772), and started to give those using the previous version (which it calls 'Classic' Outlook) the chance to switch by clicking the 'Try the new Outlook' button at the top right. Its aim is to replace all the confusing options in Windows, including the Mail and Calendar apps, with one single tool – and we approve of this plan. Microsoft should have simplified its email

options years ago. But what it's come up with is a mess.

So what's wrong with it? First, the sloppy design (pictured below). It looks like a website rather than a Windows tool, which isn't surprising because Microsoft based it on the online version of Outlook. There are some basic design flaws throughout, such as having 'Empty inbox' and 'Mark all as read' next to each other when you right-click the Inbox folder. Such extreme options shouldn't be neighbours.

Second, it lacks tools that are standard in rivals, like a unified inbox for multiple accounts. This omission means you have to switch between different inbox views if you have more than one account.

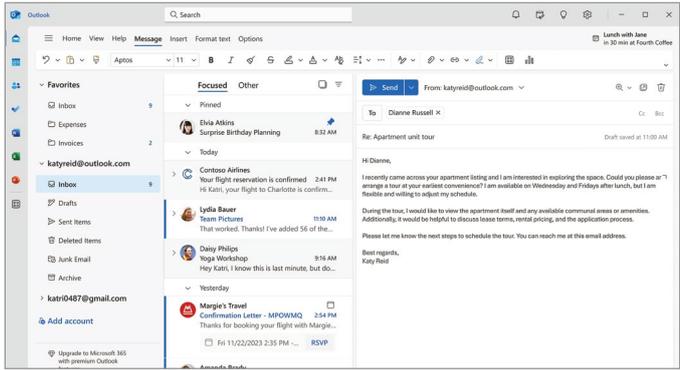
Third, it's just really slow. Rather than loading the inbox straight away it shows an animation of an envelope opening. The existing Mail app opens a whole second faster, and consumes much less RAM (you'll see this in Task Manager if you run them both at the same time).

Once it's loaded, email notifications take longer to show, while clicking them opens the inbox rather than the message that's just arrived.

Thankfully, you don't have to use the new Outlook. Microsoft will make it the default option on computers from late 2024, but there are plenty of alternatives that are better.

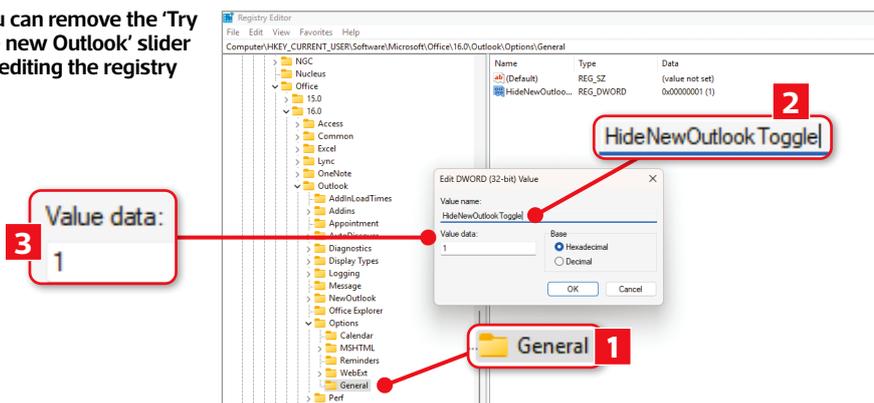
Switch back to the old Outlook

To be fair to Microsoft, it hasn't made the new Outlook compulsory. It has committed to supporting the old 'Classic' version until "at least 2029" (see www.snipca.com/50756). That means it will exist and receive security updates for five more years, but we doubt whether Microsoft will add many more tools during that time. Still, if you like Outlook as it is, you might as well keep using it.

You can also remove the 'Try the new Outlook' slider through the Windows registry. Search for and open 'regedit' in Windows, then navigate to `HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Software\Microsoft\Office\16.0\Outlook\Options`. Alternatively, copy this from our Pastebin account at www.snipca.com/50761 and type it into the registry's address bar at the top. Now click Options and look for a General folder. If it's not there, create it by right-clicking Options, then clicking New followed by Key. Name the folder General (in our screenshot above right). Next, click the General folder, then right-click on the blank space in the centre pane, followed by New, 'DWORD (32-bit Value)'.


Microsoft's new Outlook looks more like an online tool than a downloadable program

You can remove the 'Try the new Outlook' slider by editing the registry



Now type `HideNewOutlookToggle` to replace 'New Value #1'. Double-click this and under 'Value data', change 0 to 1. Finally, restart your computer.

If you've already switched to the new Outlook, just click the top-right 'New Outlook' slider to go back.

Switch to encrypted webmail

Many people online have cited the launch of the new Outlook as a reason to finally make the leap to a different email tool. Which service will suit you will depend on your priority.

For maximum privacy, we recommend Proton Mail, which uses a level of encryption that means it's unable to see what you've sent, nor hand it over to anyone else. The online version (<https://proton.me/mail>) is free, though the desktop edition costs from \$3.99 a month (£3.12).

When you create an account you have the option to start forwarding any emails that arrive in your Gmail inbox. To do the same for Outlook emails, click the top-right Settings cog in Outlook followed by Email on the left. Now click Forwarding, then the 'Enable forwarding' slider. Type your new Proton email address – or another service you're switching to – then click Save at the bottom right.

You can also transfer your existing Outlook emails, contacts and calendar into Proton Mail. Click the top-right settings cog in Proton, then 'All settings'. Now click 'Import via Easy Switch'



Type the email address you want to forward your Outlook emails to

(in our screenshot below), then select the Outlook button (Gmail and Yahoo are also options). You'll see that emails, contacts and calendar are all ticked. Untick any you don't want to import, then click 'Start import'. You'll now need to sign into your Outlook account.

When you see the 'Customize and confirm' screen, click the small 'Customize' link to choose whether you want to import all emails, or only those from the past month, three months or 12 months. Click the pencil icon to change what this batch of emails is called when you import them, and untick any folders you don't want to import.



Select what you want to import from Outlook then click 'Start import'



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

Get more storage with Thunderbird

Proton Mail is easy to use and extremely secure, but because it's an online service the amount of emails you can store in it will be less than with an email client that you download to your computer. The free version of Proton gives you 1GB of storage and lets you send 150 emails a day.

Switch to the Thunderbird client and your storage is limited only by how much space is on your hard drive. Bear in mind though that if you set up IMAP to store emails online you might face a limit from the webmail provider. Also, if you have a FAT32 drive, rather than the more modern exFAT, you could have a restriction of 4GB.

Switching from Outlook is easy because Thunderbird will recognise the correct server settings when you first log in. You should also turn on encryption to maximise privacy. First, click the three-line menu at the top-right corner of the main Thunderbird interface, then choose Account Settings, followed by 'End-to-End Encryption'. Next, click 'Add Key', select 'Create a new OpenPGP key' and click Continue. This key will encrypt your email.

Now choose your email address in the Identity menu, select 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 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. Now click the Encrypt button then write and send your email. Your public encryption key will automatically be attached. Only the recipient will be able to decrypt and read the message. [ca](#)

Why not switch to Gmail?

Gmail is better designed than the new Outlook, but there are plenty of reasons to choose other email services if you're thinking of switching. For one, it collects data on how you use Gmail, including when you send emails and to whom.

Also, it uses Transport Layer Security (TLS) to encrypt emails, which isn't as strong as the encryption used by Proton. And last year it introduced adverts between messages in some inboxes, adding to the existing ads at the top of the page.

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

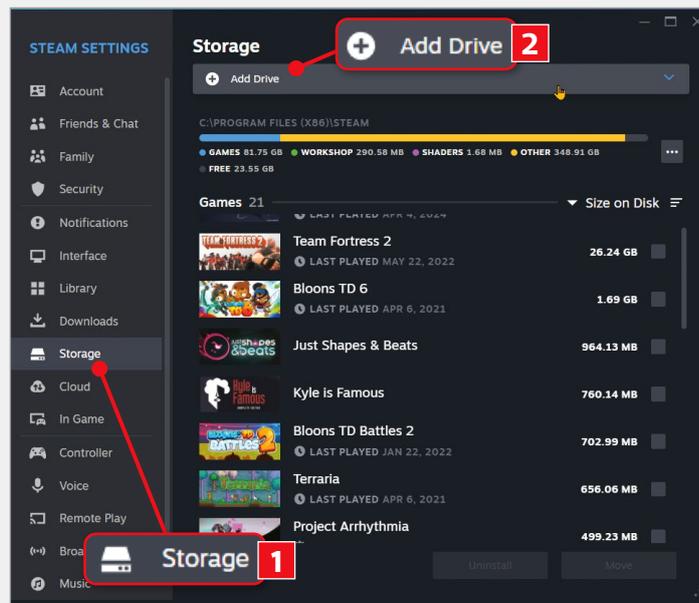
Why can't I extend my C drive?

Q I'm trying to increase the size of my C drive. Recently, I had to upgrade my Elite Dangerous Odyssey game with an update that was 30GB. I managed to complete the installation by deleting parts of the game I didn't use. The size of my C drive is 237GB, while the size of my D drive is 540GB plus 391GB labelled as Unallocated. This is because I was able to shrink the space on D, which I was hoping to transfer to C. However, while the Shrink Volume and Extend Volume options are available when right-clicking the D drive, only Shrink Volume is available on C.

I run Windows 11 and the upgrades have been using up drive space that might have otherwise be available. Do you have any advice that would enable me to expand the size of the C drive? I've attached a picture of my Disk Management screen.

Piers Cardon

A There are a few points we need to explore here. First, it's important to understand the difference between physical drives and drive partitions. The Disk Management screenshot that you sent shows your PC has two physical drives – Disk 0 and Disk 1. This means your PC literally has



To move Steam games from one drive to another, first click the Storage tab and choose Add Drive in the dropdown menu...

two different drives inside. Each physical drive can be divided into several 'logical partitions', which we tend to think of and use as drive letters (like C and D) in Windows. Currently, your C partition is on Disk 0 and your D partition is on Disk 1. This is a fairly common setup.

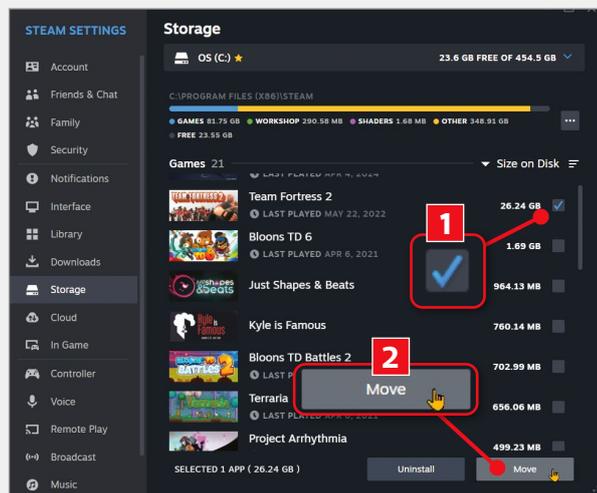
Extending any partition requires free space on the physical drive into which the partition can extend. Your physical Disk 1 now has 391GB of unallocated space, so extending the D partition into that is possible. However, remember that the C partition is on Disk 0, and all the space on that physical drive is already spoken for. Some of it is reserved for recovery partitions but the rest is your 'C drive' – so there's nowhere for an extended C partition to grow.

Now, it's technically possible to 'merge'

physical drives to act as one, and thus 'span' a single logical partition across multiple drives – but not with your current setup, with Windows stored on Disk 0 as the boot drive. We're talking about a RAID setup, but you wouldn't be able to integrate your existing boot drive or C partition into this.

Fortunately, we think there's a much simpler solution available to you. You didn't say where you'd bought Elite Dangerous Odyssey but apps for most the big-name game stores have options to manage storage. The biggest is Steam, so it's quite likely you're using that – and this store lets you move games around drives very easily.

First, open the Steam menu, then choose Settings, followed by the Storage tab (1 in our screenshot above). Then, under Storage, click to open the dropdown menu and then choose Add Drive (2). Select D as the new drive then click Add. Next, back in the Storage tab, tick any games you want to move to D (1 in our screenshot left). Finally, click Move (2), choose drive D in the dropdown menu and then click Move to have Steam do the job.



...then tick any games you want to move and click Move

How do I stop these phone scammers using my number?

Q I fear I've become the victim of a telephone scam. I have no specific details, but the perpetrator is seemingly using my phone number as a means of identification. I know this because when those people targeted by the scammer don't answer the scam call (perhaps letting it go to their voicemail) they then call my number, which presumably has been logged on their device as the source of the missed call. I'm therefore receiving calls from confused victims.

Mostly, these people are understanding when I explain the situation, but some have been abusive. I generally tell them not to return calls to unrecognised numbers. Can you suggest any way to stop or control this scam, or ways to stop the call-backs I'm receiving? How can scammers use other people's phone numbers without their permission?

Brian Moulton

A Simply put, you are a victim of phone-number spoofing. For organised scammers it is scarily

easy to make calls that appear to be from a different number. This is done to add 'legitimacy' to the outgoing call, as part of a series of tactics intended to reel in an unsuspecting recipient.

Sadly, there is nothing you can do to stop the perpetrator doing this in the first instance. However, the people behind such scams do tend to change spoofed numbers frequently, simply because victims begin to recognise the digits and get wise to the fact that the incoming call is a con. So, your phone number will probably be discarded soon.

Those curious (or foolish) enough to have called you back are getting sensible advice from yourself – don't call back unrecognised numbers. You could report it to Action Fraud at www.actionfraud.police.uk. This is operated by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, which is part



To stop calls from unrecognised numbers on an iPhone switch on Silence Unknown Callers in Settings

of the City of London Police, so you'll be given a crime reference number. However, despite the organisation's name, don't expect any real action: really, you'll just be contributing to the UK's wider intelligence about ongoing scams and any subsequent public communications about them.

You could also use your smartphone or service provider's features to stop calls from unknown numbers.

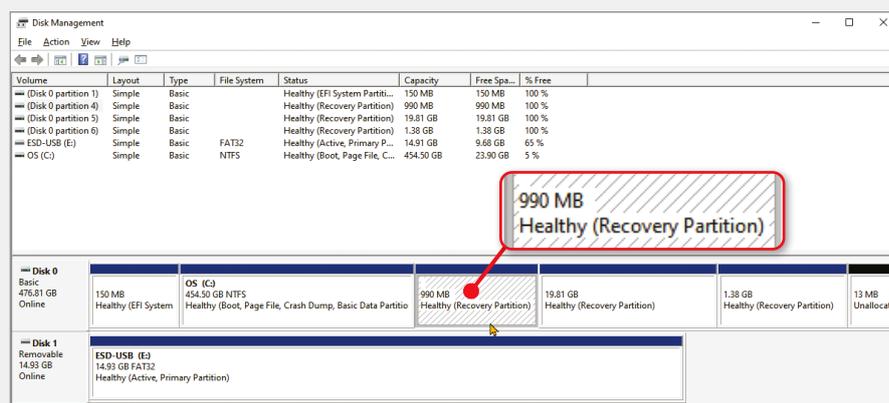
On an iPhone, for example, tap Settings followed by Phone, then tap Silence Unknown Callers (see screenshot) and tap the slider to its On position. And on a landline from BT consider making use of its Call Protect features (read BT's guide at www.snipca.com/50435).

Can I remove these unknown partitions?

Q I have a 1TB M.1 drive that's formatted with the NTFS file system. When looking at it in Disk Management it shows as being divided into four partitions. One, which is 930GB, I recognise as my C drive. The other partitions are 99MB (marked as Healthy and an EFI System Partition) and two others at 450MB and 647MB respectively, and both marked as Healthy and Recovery Partition (see screenshot). Is it possible to remove any of these partitions to recover space on the C drive?

Robert Lindsay

A It's possible to do almost anything you want to your computer. Whether you should is a whole other matter – and that's very much the case here. While we don't know anything else about your PC, we're pretty confident that,



Recovery Partitions are created by the manufacturer to restore your PC in the event of a problem

while unknown to you, these three partitions are all important. Or at least, they could be one day.

The EFI partition is what your PC will call on should you ever need to access its UEFI BIOS, while the other two partitions have probably been put there by the manufacturer to get your computer back

up and running, or possibly reverted to its factory condition, should something go wrong. Between them, they occupy a little over a gigabyte. That's about a tenth of one per cent of your drive's total one-terabyte capacity – a tiny amount. In short, we strongly recommend you leave them alone.

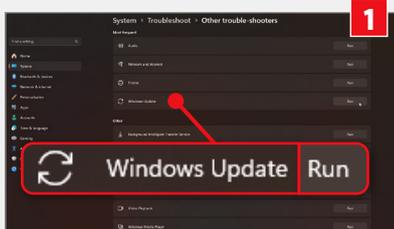
Why can't I update to W11 version 23H2?

Q My PC is currently running Windows 11 version 21H2. I have tried several times to update to version 23H2 but every time the update fails and shows an '0XC1900101' error message. My PC also struggles to restart when I prompt it to.

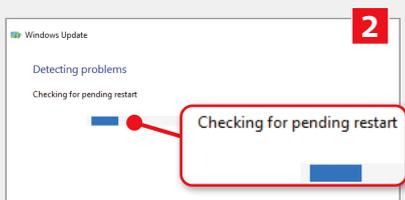
Alan Broadfoot

A These types of error message are typical of Microsoft and very unhelpful. In the first instance we'd suggest running the Windows Update troubleshooter, by clicking Start, Settings, System, then Troubleshoot followed by 'Other troubleshooters'. Then, next to Windows Update, click Run (see screenshot 1).

If this doesn't move things along, you can force a manual upgrade by downloading Microsoft's free Windows 11 media-creation tool from www.snipca.com/50436. Follow the prompts to install it on a USB stick and then restart your PC with this inserted, then follow the prompts to perform the upgrade. We think that getting the latest version of Windows 11 on to your system will also resolve your occasional restart issues 2.



In your 'Other trouble shooters' settings, run Windows Update



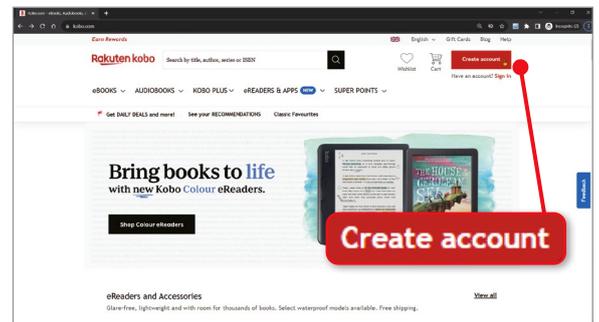
The latest version of Windows 11 should also resolve your restart problems

Why can't I register our Kobo Libra 2?

Q I bought my partner a Kobo Libra 2 ebook reader on your recommendation (reviewed in Issue 624). She has tried to register it using her Hotmail account but it will not recognise it. She has used the Hotmail address for many years and is still doing so. She arranges my *Computeractive* subscription and is generally good with tech, but this has defeated her. Can you help?

Clive Andrews

A We wonder if your partner may have registered for a Kobo account in the past? We ask because a Kobo device like the Libra



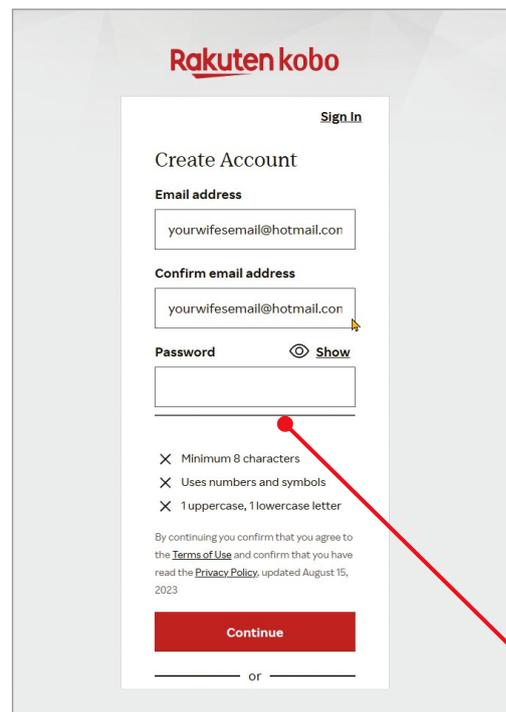
If you don't already have one, create a Kobo account at Kobo's website

won't allow a new registration using an existing email address: your partner would need to log in using her existing credentials.

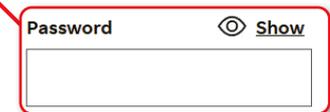
If she doesn't have an existing Kobo account or if she can't remember her previous Kobo credentials, use a PC or

other device to connect to the Kobo website at www.kobo.com. Here, click the 'Create account' button (see screenshot above) before setting up a new account – and then use those credentials to log into her new Libra 2. Or, if she's forgotten the password to an old account, first click the 'Sign in' link followed by 'Forgot password?'.

Now tap in your wife's Hotmail address and click Submit. The Kobo website will send a password-reset link to your wife's Hotmail account. When she clicks this, she'll be able to create a new password (see screenshot left) – and she should then be able to use this to log into her Libra 2, choosing the 'Sign in with your account' option during setup.



Create a new password to register your Kobo Libra 2 ebook reader



Q: Why is my Ethernet slowing than my Wi-Fi?

A: Issue 669, page 65 – find it on our 2023 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/48860



Can I fit an SSD into my old Toshiba laptop?

Q I have a Toshiba Satellite Pro C50-A-1K9 laptop that I bought off a friend a few years ago. It's running very slowly, so another friend said to get a Crucial MX500 SSD (pictured right). So I phoned a company called Micron and asked if it was compatible with my laptop, but the man I talked to said he wasn't sure, and to phone Toshiba. On the internet I found what I thought was a UK number for Toshiba, but I just seemed to get the runaround, and no clear indication how to contact the company. So, could you tell me, will the MX500 SSD be fine in my machine?

Brian Scothern

A Toshiba exited the PC market entirely in 2020, and had been winding down its interests for years before that. What remains of the consumer side of the brand in the UK is really just a remnant – so we're not surprised you struggled to find any



The Crucial MX500 SSD is compatible with the Toshiba Satellite Pro C50-A-1K9 laptop

Use a USB-to-SATA cable to clone your old hard drive to a new SSD



useful customer support for your 10-year-old laptop. However, according to Crucial's own compatibility checker (www.snipca.com/50437) it seems that the MX500 SSD should work with your laptop. Crucial is the consumer brand name used by Micron, incidentally.

If you want to start afresh you can just swap out the SSD for the existing hard drive and then reinstall Windows.

However, if you prefer to clone your existing drive, you'd need to first connect the MX500 externally, using a USB-to-SATA cable like the StarTech cord (around £10 from www.snipca.com/50438, pictured above). Then, use a free tool like HDClone X.5 (www.snipca.com/50500), to clone the contents of the hard drive on to your new SSD before swapping the drives internally.

Where can I get drivers for old HP printer?

Q I have an old HP LaserJet 5000DN A3 printer that has served me well. Recently, after a Windows 10 update to my Honor laptop, it seems the drivers have disappeared. I have tried the HP website, but there doesn't seem to be any listing for my printer model. Where can I download the necessary drivers and how do I load them?

Tim Bull

A Your printer model is over two decades old, so it's not surprising that HP has removed all dedicated support from its website. Equally, it's frustrating when an otherwise perfectly good piece of hardware is consigned to the history books by the manufacturer – especially when just a little guidance from the company might have been enough to get you back on track.

We say that because we believe your printer model *will* work with HP's

The screenshot shows the HP Support website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'Explore', 'Shop', and 'Support', along with a search bar and a 'Sign in' button. Below the navigation, there are tabs for 'Support Home', 'Products', 'Software and Drivers', 'Diagnostics', 'Contact Us', 'Business Support', and 'My HP Account'. The main content area is titled 'Welcome to Software and Drivers for HP Universal Print Driver for Windows'. It shows the detected operating system as 'Windows 10 (64-bit)'. Under the heading 'Select your software and drivers below:', there is a list of software options. The first option is 'HP Universal Print Driver for Windows PCL6 (64-bit)', which is highlighted with a red box. To the right of this option is a 'Download' button, also highlighted with a red box. Below this, there are two more options: 'HP Universal Print Driver for Windows PostScript (64-bit)' and 'HP Universal Print Driver for Windows PCL6 (64-bit)', both with their respective version numbers, file sizes, and release dates.

Download HP's Universal Printer Driver package to get your old HP printer working again

Universal Printer Driver package. It's possible that control over certain aspects of your specific model might be a bit restricted compared with the dedicated driver you had before, but we think this should at least get basic printing functionality up and running in modern versions of Windows – though obviously

we can offer no guarantees.

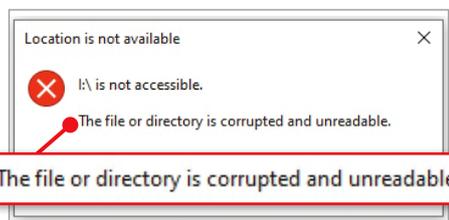
To get the package, simply visit the Universal Printer Driver page on HP's support site at www.snipca.com/50440, and click the Download button for the PCL6 version of the driver (see screenshot) – because that's typically the best option for home users.

Can I repair my corrupted USB stick?

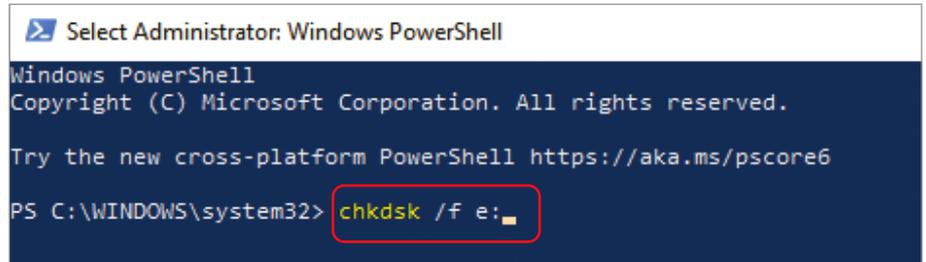
Q I've been using USB sticks since USB 1.1, way back in the early 2000s. For the first time, after using many types of USB, I have one that has – according to the error message displayed by Windows – suffered a corrupt file or directory (see screenshot below). Is it possible to repair and restore this?

Glyn Foster

A Yes, it's possible – likely even. Sadly, occasional file or folder (directory) corruption is a fact of



USB sticks and external hard drives can be prone to corrupted files and directories



Use this Check Disk command to find and fix any corrupted files and folders on your PC

life when using PCs. It's most likely to occur on devices like USB sticks and external hard drives, which can be absent-mindedly disconnected mid-operation.

With this in mind Microsoft has for decades included with its operating systems a tool dedicated to dealing with corrupted volumes – called Check Disk, or CHKDSK for short. It's a **command-line** tool, so not exactly easy to find or use. That said, it is quick and relatively simple – when you know how.

First, press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu before choosing 'Windows PowerShell (Admin)'. This opens a PowerShell window and displays a command prompt. Here, you need to type **chkdsk /f x:** – replacing 'x:' with the drive letter of the affected USB stick (see screenshot above – our drive letter is e:). From the screenshot you sent, your USB stick seems to be 'i:', so the command to type is **chkdsk /f i:**. Press Enter and CHKDSK will find and fix any corrupted files and folders it finds.

What's eating my tablet battery when it's switched off?

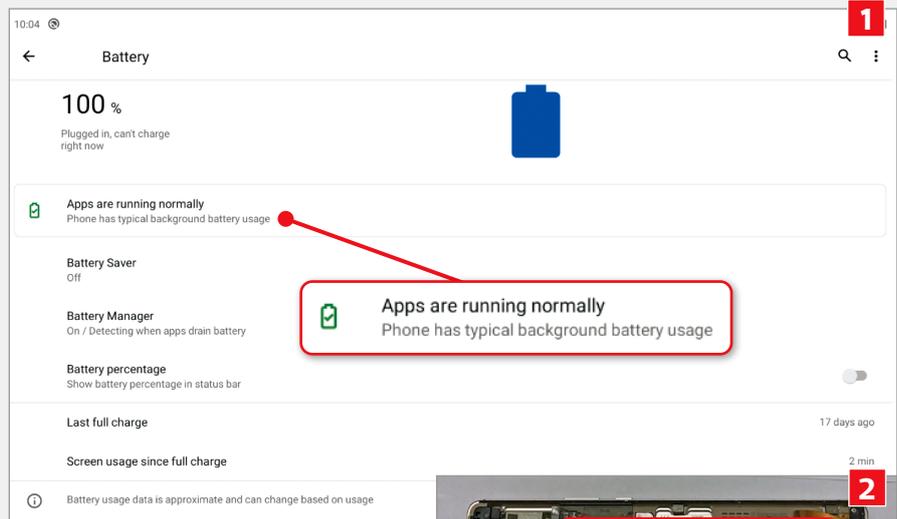
Q My wife has a Huawei tablet that's a few years old. At night when she closes it down she makes sure it's fully charged. But in the morning it always reads 82 per cent. What is using 18 per cent of the battery charge overnight when the tablet is switched off?

Michael Bourne

A You can see which apps or services have been using power via your tablet's Settings app (pictured right) – by tapping the Battery or Battery Usage option, depending on the Android version you have installed.

However, given the age of the tablet – and the fact it sounds like your wife is switching it off at night – this could be a failing battery. Rechargeable batteries have only a limited number of recharge cycles and when nearing their end they can start to exhibit behaviours like sudden, otherwise-unexplained capacity drops.

It might be possible to replace the battery yourself, with new cells often



Check which apps and services have been using power via your Android tablet's Battery settings

costing just a few pounds. We don't know which specific Huawei model you have, so we'd suggest visiting the excellent iFixit website, which maintains a series of illustrated guides for Huawei tablets at www.snipca.com/50439 (pictured right).



The iFixit website offers illustrated guides on replacing a battery in Huawei tablets



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

RTX and RTX LHR?

Q I'm not particularly confident carrying out hardware upgrades, but I was thinking about replacing the **graphics card** in my seven-year-old desktop PC, so I can play more modern games. It doesn't seem that difficult to do.

I've been looking at the huge choice of cards from Nvidia, which seems to be the only game in town. I don't want to pay through the nose for the latest models, so I've been looking at an RTX 3060 (pictured) or RTX 3070.

I note that some are called RTX LHR, rather than just plain RTX. After a little research I learned that this suggests lower performance levels, but only for **crypto-mining**. Is this true? If so, why? And would it also affect games? Could you explain the difference? Basically, I'm wondering if I should avoid LHR cards, which tend to be cheaper.

Malcolm Stannard

A This is both true and not. The LHR label stands for 'Lite Hash Rate', and it indicates that the

performance of a card could be limited by a special 'lock' in Nvidia's **drivers**. It's also true that this was designed to prevent the cards being used primarily for the creation (or 'mining') of **cryptocurrencies**, like Bitcoin.

This, in turn, was intended to deal with a shortage of RTX 3000-series cards caused by people buying them primarily for crypto-mining, rather than to play games. The LHR lock was not designed to limit performance when playing games, and was never used in that way.

However, all this is now academic, because a change in market conditions a year or so ago prompted Nvidia to remove the LHR lock from its drivers. So, whether or not a card is labelled as LHR, crypto-mining performance will no longer be restricted by Nvidia, in any way.



LHR graphics cards like the RTX 3060 are perfectly fine for playing games

In short, if you fancy an RTX 3060 or 3070 and have found that LHR models are being sold more cheaply, then you should seriously consider one for your PC.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Can my printer scan all my documents?

Q I have several thousand printed documents, such as letters and sheets of paper with various bits of information on them. I'd like to create some space by scanning these into my computer and then throwing out the originals.

I have an Epson XP-6100 multifunction printer (pictured), and I'd like to know if it would cope with scanning my substantial paper trail – or would I need a dedicated, standalone scanner?

I remember reading somewhere that multifunction machines like mine can't cope with a large volume of work.

Ruth Whitehouse

A Only Epson's design engineers could offer any qualified insight into the expected lifespan of its products, and we doubt even they could provide anything more than some wide-ranging guesswork.

We don't know specifically what you

read but it probably said that multifunction machines aimed at domestic users are not designed for non-stop operation.

That's probably true, but doesn't necessarily mean that your particular device wouldn't happily work for extended periods of time. However, it is also true that industrial-grade strength isn't a design priority for machines intended for home use.

Moreover, a device like yours is likely to operate (much) more slowly than one designed for high-volume scanning. Epson doesn't specify the scan speeds but such a machine will typically take up to a minute to scan an A4 page in colour.

With that in mind, we'd say that it's just as likely that your enthusiasm for scanning thousands of pages at such sluggish speeds would wane before your device's scanning components stopped working.



Epson's XP-6100 multifunction printer is too slow for high-volume scans

Next Issue

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- Why can't I connect to 5GHz Wi-Fi?
- Can I clone just my apps?
- Where's my Recycle Bin gone?
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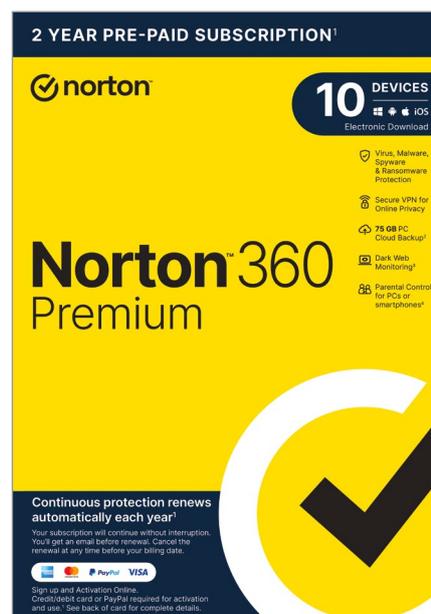
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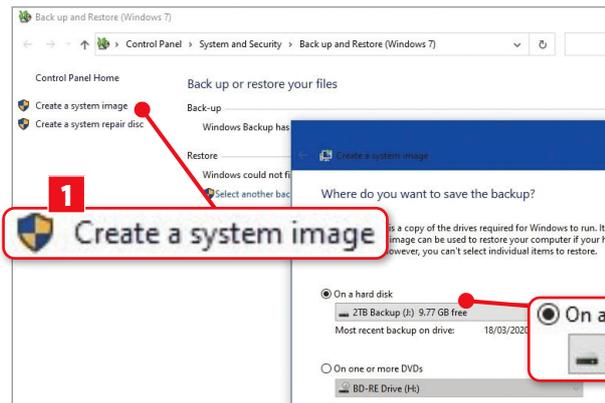
Should you be cautious about wiping WINDOWS.OLD folder?

Q In Issue 681's Cover Feature on removing junk safely, you mentioned the WINDOWS.OLD directory (page 53), which is created after a re-installation. I'd counsel caution in deleting this until you're happy with your new Windows installation and programs. Recently, before reinstalling Windows 10, I made backups of as many system settings and program configurations/profiles as I could think of. I found some of these couldn't be pasted back into the equivalent directories of the new Windows. Instead, I had to copy and paste them from the OLD directory. Do you agree with this approach?

Russell Greene

A The WINDOWS.OLD folder is created whenever you reinstall or upgrade Windows. It contains files that let you roll back to your previous operating system for up to 10 days, after which the WINDOWS.OLD folder should be deleted automatically. So, you're right to be cautious – deleting the WINDOWS.OLD folder too soon could prevent you from rolling back your system. That's why we made it clear that you should only consider deleting the WINDOWS.OLD folder manually if you're happy with your Windows 11 upgrade (or Windows 10 re-installation), or if the folder hasn't been deleted automatically.

We also recommended taking the precaution of creating a **system restore point** before making any changes, and sending junk items to the recycle bin before deleting them permanently, just in case you need them later. But if you're reinstalling Windows or upgrading to a newer version of the OS, we'd advise going one step further and making a **system image** backup before you proceed. That way, you'll always be able to restore your PC to how it was before your upgrade or reinstallation, even beyond Microsoft's 10-day cut-off.



Click 'Create a system image' in Windows, then select your external drive

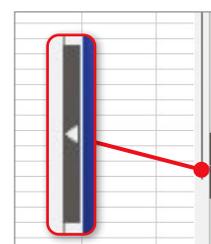
Creating a system image can be done with most backup tools, but you can also do this in Windows itself. Plug in an external hard drive, then click Start, type **control panel** and press Enter. In the Control Panel window, make sure 'View by' (top right) is set to Category, then click 'Back up and Restore (Windows 7)' under 'System and Security'. Here, click 'Create a system image' (1 in our screenshot above), select your external drive from the 'On a hard disk' menu (2) and follow the instructions.

Did you make an error in Macrorit advice?

Q In Issue 681's 'Should I Pay For' on Macrorit Partition Expert Pro (page 19) you said you can create a **bootable** version of the program on a USB stick for free. But when I try this, it takes you to the website to upgrade to the paid-for version. Did you make an error?

Roy Smith

A The free version of Macrorit Partition Expert Pro is a portable program, so you can run it from a USB drive. But, as you point out, the option to create a bootable USB drive is only available if you've paid for the Pro version upgrade. Apologies for this error. For a free bootable partition manager, try GParted



If you don't see the Styles pane, look for this dark grey tab with a left-pointing arrow

(<https://gparted.org>). The tool's website explains how to create a bootable disk – click the 'Live CD/USB' tab at the top of the home page to find out more.

Where is Styles pane in LibreOffice Calc?

Q In Issue 681 (page 68) you explained how to change the default font in LibreOffice Calc. I can click Styles and Manage Styles, as you explain, but where is the Styles pane? All I get is a column of icons down the left, none of which is labelled Styles, Cell Styles or Default.

Dave Rhodes

A The Styles pane should appear on the right side of Calc when you click Styles, then Manage Styles. If you can't see it, the program window might be too small to accommodate the pane, so Calc hasn't expanded it fully. Assuming this is the case, click Styles, then Manage Styles as we advise, then look for a small dark grey tab in the middle of the right-hand program window frame. There's a little left-pointing arrow on it (see screenshot left).

Clicking this will expand the Styles pane and provide access to the options we referred to.

Jargon **Buster**

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

720p A resolution of high-definition video: 1280x720 pixels.

7z A format for compressing files into an archive format.

AAC Advanced Audio Coding. A type of music file.

AES-256bit Advanced Encryption Standard. A form of encryption based on a key length of 256 bits.

AI Artificial intelligence. Intelligence demonstrated by a machine rather than a human being.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen. Traditional PC screens are 4:3. Widescreen displays are 16:9 or 16:10.

Augmented reality Lets you view the real world on a screen and add virtual elements.

Authenticator An app that generates time-sensitive codes for two-factor authentication.

AVI A type of video file known as a container format, as it can hold many types of audio and video.

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

BIOS Basic Input-Output System. Software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Bootable Describes a device or disc with system files on it so it can be used to start up your computer.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users.

Client A program that acts as an interface between PC and server.

Code Programming languages used to create software.

Command line A way to control a PC by typing instructions.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country.

Cryptomining Using vast amounts of computing power to create units of digital currency.

Dark mode Showing white text on a black background.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DDR5 The newest, fastest type of computer memory.

Diagnostic data Info that companies collect about how you use software.

DLNA A technology that enables devices to communicate with each other and display media files.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

dpi Dots per inch. A measure of printed image quality.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

E Ink Electrophoretic ink. A special type of ink used to display content in electronic devices.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

EXE A program file designed to run in Windows.

exFAT Microsoft's file system for USB sticks and SD cards.

EXIF A method for storing extra info inside digital photo files.

FAT32 An old system used for formatting hard drives.

Fingerprinting A tracking method used by websites to identify you from the device and software you're using.

FLAC A type of digital audio file that can be created from CD.

Frame rate The number of still images, or frames, shown per second to create a moving image.

FTTP A fibre optic-based way of delivering very fast broadband.

GDPR General Data Protection Regulation. 2018 EU law strengthening people's privacy.

GHz Gigahertz. A measure of how many instructions a chip can process per second.

GPU A chip designed to create 3D graphics.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HDR Screen technology that improves the range of luminance between the darkest and brightest parts.

HTTPS The secure version of HTTP, the technology that sends data between your browser and the web.

IMAP Internet Message Access Protocol. A method for email that lets the user manage messages stored on a remote server.

Incognito mode A browser mode in Chrome that doesn't save your internet history.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

ISO file A type of image file that contains all data from a CD or DVD.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

Layers Image-editing programs let users create multiple layers that can be re-ordered or hidden.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

Licence key A unique serial number issued by software companies that must be typed in before a program will launch for the first time.

Manifest V2 Second version of the software that runs Chrome browser extensions.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

MicroUSB A miniature version of USB.

MKV Matroska. An open-source type of video file that can contain audio, video and subtitles.

Modifier key A special key on a keyboard that temporarily changes the normal action of another key when pressed together.

MOV A video file that can be played using Apple's Quicktime software.

NFT Non-fungible token. A way of recording who owns a digital asset, such as an artwork or a meme.

OCR The process by which printed text is scanned and converted into documents that can be edited.

OLED A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Onion address URLs for websites on the dark web.

PAC A unique code that lets users retain their mobile-phone number when switching operators.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions.

Passive radiator A simple speaker device that increases bass.

Passkey A method for signing into accounts by typing a one-off code, fingerprint or facial recognition rather than a password.

Pixel-binning The process of combining data from four pixels into one.

Plain text Text in a document that doesn't contain any formatting.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software.

ppi Pixels per inch. Measure of screen resolution.

Proxy server A computer that sits between your computer and the internet and filters the connection.

Push notification A message from an app that appears even when you're not using it.

QR code A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAID System for storing data and backing up hard drives.

RAM Used for data storage while a PC is switched on.

Read To access data saved on a computer.

Refresh rate The number of times per second the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Refurbished A second-hand device that has been repaired by its manufacturer

RSS A simple format for distributing news headlines and other content from the web.

SATA Serial ATA. An interface for connecting hard drives and optical discs to a computer.

SD card A type of memory card.

Sideload To install apps without using the official Android store.

SIM-only A phone package in which you pay only for the data, calls and texts.

Speaker driver Cone-shaped part of the speaker that converts audio signals into sound waves.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

Steam A service for streaming computer games.

System image A backup of your operating system drivers, PC's settings, programs and files.

System restore point System files stored at a given time to which Windows can revert.

TAR A format for archiving files and directories.

TLS A technology for keeping data secure when sent over the web.

Tor Browser A web browser designed for anonymous surfing.

TPM A chip that allows hardware to perform security-related tasks.

Troll A person who writes deliberately offensive or insulting comments online.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user.

UEFI A modern replacement for the BIOS.

UHD Ultra High Definition.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A new connector that's reversible.

VA Vertical Alignment. A form of LCDs in which the liquid crystals naturally align vertically between the panes of glass.

Virtual machine A software-based PC running inside another PC.

VoIP The routing of voice conversations over the internet.

WAV file An audio file used for recording music and other audio to disk.

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

Write Save data to a hard drive.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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Easy when you **Know How**



Intrigued by a time-saving addition to his favourite free image viewer, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Extract text from screenshots

I'm often grateful that the tools of my trade are all programs installed on my laptop, rather than big heavy objects I'd have to lug around in a van. For example, the versatile free image viewer IrfanView (www.irfanview.com) is my equivalent of a combi-drill or angle grinder, allowing me to capture and edit screenshots for the articles I write.



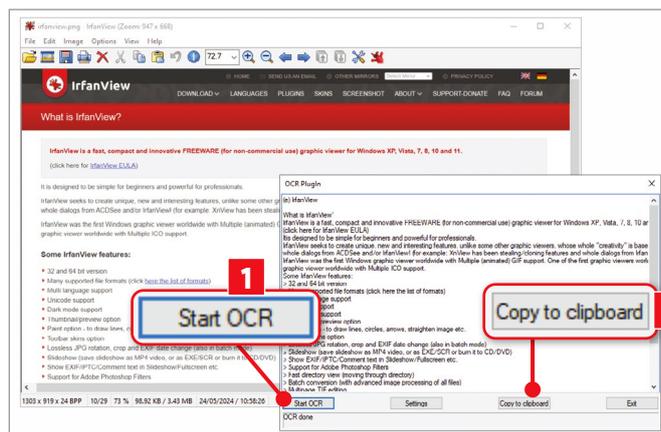
The versatile tool
IrfanView is my
equivalent of a combi-
drill or angle grinder



So I was interested to learn that the latest version of IrfanView (4.67, www.snipca.com/50615) has a new **plug-in** that uses **OCR** to extract text from images. As I often need to type the contents of screenshots, such as the names and descriptions of settings in software and apps, this sounded like a useful time-saving addition. It has non-work benefits too, such as copying text from photos of documents, manuals and menus.

To try this intriguing new feature, I downloaded the latest IrfanView-64 PlugIns pack from www.snipca.com/50609, choosing the **EXE** installer rather than the **ZIP** to avoid faffing around with that type of extraction. I double-clicked the setup file and installed the Plugins pack in the C:\Program Files\IrfanView folder. I then launched IrfanView, clicked the Help menu and chose Installed Plugins.

This opened a box listing all the



Robert successfully installed IrfanView's new OCR plug-in to extract text from images

plug-ins I now had access to, including tools for burning DVDs, converting image files into PDFs and reading fax documents, just in case I receive any delayed communications from the 1990s. But the only plug-in I was interested in was 'OCR.dll - OCR using Tesseract OCR', which I cleverly deduced was the new OCR option. This was already enabled, so I returned to the main program to start extracting.

I opened a screenshot in IrfanView, clicked the Options menu and chose 'Start OCR...(Plugin)'. This displayed the plug-in's window, but when I clicked the 'Start OCR' button, IrfanView told me I needed to set the OCR engine first. I clicked the Settings button to do this, only to find I was missing a crucial file called 'Tesseract.exe', which powers IrfanView's new OCR capabilities.

This requirement was indeed mentioned on IrfanView's Plugins page (www.snipca.com/50613), so I followed the link to Tesseract's GitHub repository and downloaded the **64bit** installer (www.snipca.com/50614). Running this triggered a Microsoft Defender SmartScreen warning, but I clicked 'More info' then 'Run anyway' and installed the Tesseract-OCR file in the IrfanView Plugins folder.

By this point, you may be thinking 'why didn't he just use [name of simple OCR tool]?'. But that would be like

buying a microwavable ready meal, rather than making my own dinner using fresh ingredients. Getting the best results sometimes requires a bit more effort.

That was my hope, anyway, as I went back to the plug-in window, clicked Settings, chose 'Retrieve Tesseract location from System registry' and clicked OK. This time, when I clicked the 'Start OCR' button (1 in our screenshot), IrfanView instantly extracted all the text from the screenshot and presented the content in a line-by-line list.

The results weren't perfect, or rather they were too good, because they included text that wasn't visible in the screenshot, such as a euro symbol and a random 'if'. But I was easily able to delete the unwanted lines before I clicked the button to copy the text to my clipboard (2), so I could paste it into a document.

The OCR plug-in worked equally well on other screenshots, again with a bit of extra gobbledygook that was easily removed, and on scans of documents such as my council-tax bill. I also realised I could launch it by pressing F9 on my keyboard, saving me a couple of clicks.

Thanks to IrfanView, I'll never need to type out the contents of screenshots again, let alone manhandle an angle grinder and risk losing a finger.

 Need help with installing and using IrfanView's new OCR plug-in? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

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