



BEAT AMAZON'S DELIVERY FEES
You'll save £££s every month
p60

NEVER USE THIS PC-CLEANING TOOL
We did – and regretted it page 21

WHY YOU MUST DELETE ALL YOUR MESSAGES

Free up space and stay private



p62

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Computer

active

Ring's sun protection – page 26

Learn something new in every issue

Best FREE APPS For Your VIDEOS MUSIC & PHOTOS



▶ Make them look and sound **AMAZING** on your phone and tablet – we use all 30!

p50

PLUS



TURN OFF ANNOYING TOOLS IN WINDOWS p38

WATCH AMERICAN CHANNELS ON YOUR SMART TV



How we tricked Google to do it! p74



FOR THE

GAMERS AND THE CREATORS



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I thought I looked so cool with my Nokia N90 phone back in 2006. It had a flip-out screen for recording video (see www.snipca.com/51389), making me feel like a cross between Buck Rogers and Steven Spielberg. In reality, it was an expensive monstrosity, soon to be outshone by every phone made in the next few years.

I remembered that unfortunate purchase while reading Robert Irvine's Cover Feature on the best free apps for your videos, music and photos. I was happy back then to capture a grainy 30-second clip. Now you

can record at 4K, add special effects and enhance using AI.

Similarly, music apps have improved to let you remove background noise and fade tracks, while photo apps now have a range of lenses and advanced filters. We've come a long way since the first photo ever taken by a phone (it's an interesting story: www.snipca.com/51388).

Let me know which apps you like, and if we've overlooked any of your favourites.

Daniel Booth

editor@computeractive.co.uk

Callouts on the magazine cover:

- p60: BEAT AMAZON'S DELIVERY FEES
- p21: NEVER USE THIS PC-CLEANING TOOL
- p62: WHY YOU MUST DELETE ALL YOUR MESSAGES
- p50: Best FREE APPS For Your VIDEOS MUSIC & PHOTOS
- p38: TURN OFF ANNOYING TOOLS IN WINDOWS
- p74: WATCH AMERICAN CHANNELS ON YOUR SMART TV

THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

1,151
Number of times scams impersonating Martin Lewis were reported to Action Fraud – p9

£138
Price of TCL's new smart TV with Amazon Fire TV – p29

22635.3930
Build of Windows 11 that has a new Category view in the Start menu – p49



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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Win a Majority Bluetooth MP3 Player

The image shows two side-by-side screenshots of a mobile phone subscription plan. The left screenshot, labeled 'BEFORE', shows a monthly subscription price of £30.00. The right screenshot, labeled 'AFTER', shows the price increasing to £31.50 on 1 April 2025 and then to £33.00 on 1 April 2026. A red circle with 'p10' is in the bottom right corner.

Inflation-linked rises take a hike

The image shows the Geekom A8 tiny PC, a small silver device with a black side panel. A red badge with 'Computeractive RECOMMENDED' and five stars is overlaid on the image. A red circle with 'p22' is in the top left corner.

Geekom A8

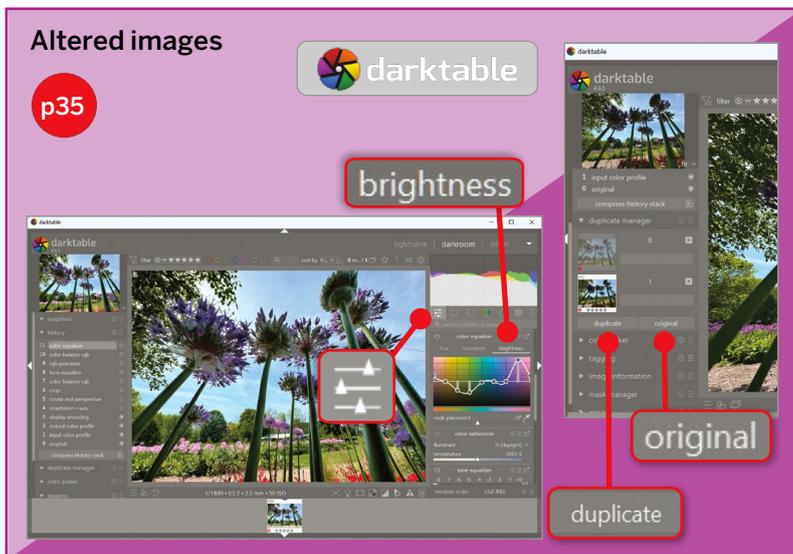
The image shows the Asus Zenbook 14 OLED UX3405 laptop, a dark blue device with a large screen. A red badge with 'Computeractive RECOMMENDED' and five stars is overlaid on the image. A red circle with 'p23' is in the top left corner.

Asus Zenbook 14 OLED UX3405

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Best FREE APPS For Your VIDEOS MUSIC & PHOTOS

► Make them look and sound AMAZING on your phone and tablet – we use all 30!

COVER FEATURE P50

BEAT AMAZON'S DELIVERY FEES

Package deals **p60**

Scammers target public with 'CrowdStrike outage' emails

Security experts have warned the public that scammers are exploiting the global IT meltdown that happened on Friday 19 July.

They said people should be alert to phone calls and emails claiming to offer help, and websites designed to offer fixes or updates.

The attacks could continue for months even after things return to normal, as scammers take advantage of public uncertainty.

Computer systems around the world stopped working when an update from US cybersecurity company CrowdStrike crashed 8.5 million computers

running Windows, leaving them unable to restart.

It led to the biggest IT outage in history, disrupting airlines, banks, GP surgeries, hotels, hospitals, shops, stock markets, trains, TV stations and more.

Emergency services were also affected, while government websites were knocked offline. Microsoft said it "worked around the clock" to help people affected.

Scammers responded within hours to send emails claiming to be from 'CrowdStrike Support' or 'CrowdStrike Security', with some containing a ZIP file named 'crowdstrike-hotfix.zip'.

CrowdStrike boss George Kurtz said he knew scammers "try to exploit events like

this". He urged people to make sure they were speaking to official representatives from the company before downloading fixes, and said the only place to find these would be the company's support site (www.snipca.com/51434).

Fake websites and 'cyberattack' hoax

US security firm Secureworks said there had been a sharp rise in the number of URLs registered using names similar to CrowdStrike, as scammers create fake websites hoping to attract people looking for assistance and information (see www.snipca.com/51438 for list of fake web



addresses).

Some of these fraudulent sites ask for Bitcoin or PayPal payments to download updates, while there have been reports of fraudsters phoning people claiming to have secret information that the outage was actually caused by a cyberattack.

The UK's National Cyber Security Centre also issued a warning, saying "an increase in phishing referencing this outage has already been observed, as opportunistic malicious actors seek to take advantage of the situation" (www.snipca.com/51435).

CrowdStrike apologised for the disruption, saying it understood the "gravity and impact of the situation".

"We quickly identified the issue and deployed a fix, allowing us to focus diligently on restoring customer systems as our highest priority," Kurtz said (www.snipca.com/51433).

WHAT WE THINK

Scammers were the only people happy about this IT meltdown. They pounce on news events that impact millions of people, as we repeatedly saw during the Covid pandemic. Most of the affected machines were run by businesses and organisations, so fraudsters will probably target those primarily. But they'll also try to exploit ongoing public confusion about the causes and consequences of the outage. Ignore phone calls or emails claiming to be from CrowdStrike or Microsoft, and never give anyone you don't completely trust remote control of your computer.

WERE YOU AFFECTED BY THE OUTAGE?

What you told us by email, X and Facebook

Thankfully, nothing too serious. Just made sure I had lots of change because my local Wetherspoon wasn't taking card payments.

Simon Grenville

Couldn't transfer money from my bank.

George Hill

Had flight from Edinburgh to London cancelled. Tried to book a train, but they were cancelled too.

Mick Bradley

I was due to go to Brighton, but seeing that the trains were delayed, and that shops would be unable to take any payments, I cancelled it.

Gavin Green

Unable to order repeat medication.

Derek Johnson

Web pages unavailable, unable to save documents, and email delays.

Sandie Forshaw



You'll like this... Openreach has named the next 92 locations to switch from copper to digital (www.snipca.com/51431)



but not this... Scammers are saying Elon Musk will reveal "insights" on Trump shooting (www.snipca.com/51423)

Use What3Words to share your location, say emergency services

Emergency services are asking people to download the What3Words phone app over the summer holidays so they can be found should they get into trouble.

What3Words works by dividing the world into three-metre squares and giving each a unique combination of three random words.

For example, Stonehenge visitor centre is 'trifling.branch.fresh', the Angel of the North statue is 'penned.handicaps.nearly', and the Giant's Causeway is 'operation.races.carriage'.

Quoting these words to the emergency services can pinpoint your location more accurately when you're in a remote area, or you can't see which street you're on.

To use the app, install it by searching on the Google Play or Apple App stores, or by clicking the links at www.snipca.com/51370.

[snipca.com/51370](http://www.snipca.com/51370).

Open it, allow it to access your device's location, then create an account. It will recognise where you are (1 in our screenshot), and show the three-word code for that location at the top (2).

You can also swipe to see other areas on the map, and tap any square to see the code.

South East Coast Ambulance Service encouraged people to use it, saying it can prove "extremely useful".

A spokesperson said: "As we move into school summer holidays, when more people will be outside hopefully enjoying some sun, we urge people to plan and prepare for their journeys and days out, especially when they may be in unfamiliar locations."



The AA also wants people to use it. Chris Wood, AA Patrol of the Year, said it can provide peace of mind if "your car breaks down on a road with no markers to describe your surroundings".

How do you use What3Words? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Transfer photos from Google to Apple iCloud without downloading

You can now transfer all your photos from Google Photos to Apple iCloud without having to download them first.

The two companies worked together as part of the Data Transfer Initiative (DTI), which is a non-profit organisation helping people transfer data between rival services.

Apple introduced its tool for moving photos to Google in 2021, but it's taken until now for Google to follow suit.

The process, which works through Google Takeout, copies your files to Apple rather than physically moving them. This means you can check they've all arrived

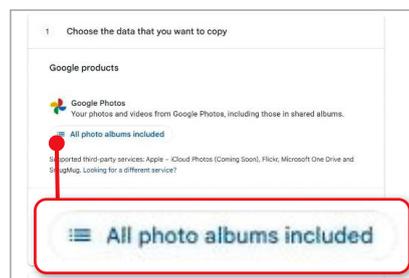
before deleting them from Google.

Both companies released instructions for using the new tool – Apple at www.snipca.com/51398 and Google at www.snipca.com/51399.

By default, all your photo albums will be transferred (see screenshot), but you can also limit this to specific albums.

If you don't see 'iCloud Photos' in the 'Select the third-party service...' dropdown menu, you may have to wait for the option to become available in the UK.

Google says transfer time could be anything from



several hours to a few days, depending on how many photos you're copying. But however long it takes, it'll almost definitely be quicker and easier than downloading and moving them yourself.

Apple says it will spot any duplicate photos during the transfer and let you merge them individually or as a batch.

IN BRIEF

PLAY YOUTUBE APP ON EE TV BOXES

EE has finally added the YouTube app to its TV Box Pro and TV Box Mini (pictured below), years after it appeared on rival devices. It sits in the Featured Apps menu, alongside streaming services including Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV+. It was already available to EE customers signed up to the Apple TV 4K bundle.



USE MICROSOFT DESIGNER WINDOWS APP

Microsoft has released its Designer tool as a downloadable app for Windows, Android and iOS. Sign in with a Microsoft account and you can use it to create designs such as posters, flyers and postcards from scratch, or by asking it to generate AI images. Previously, it was available online only at www.snipca.com/51426. Read Microsoft's blog for more details (www.snipca.com/51400) and download it from www.snipca.com/51401.

TOMORROW'S WORLD



Scientists at San Diego University reckon one way to make us less scared of robots is to teach them to dance like humans, and give us high fives. They trained them using videos of people to show "the potential for robots to coexist in harmony with humans". Nice idea, but



we think it makes them look even creepier. Judge for yourself at www.snipca.com/51379.

IN BRIEF

UK FALLS TO 35TH IN WEB-SPEED TABLE

The UK has dropped one place to 35th in the global broadband speed table, according to research from comparison site Cable.co.uk. Its 'Worldwide broadband speed league' study for 2024 found the UK has an average download speed of 110.99Mbps, up from 93.62Mbps last year – faster than Australia, Germany and Ireland, but slower than France, Spain and the US. Iceland has the fastest at 279.55Mbps. For full results visit www.snipca.com/51344.

PLAY XBOX GAMES ON FIRE TV STICKS

Amazon has added the Xbox app to Fire TV Sticks, letting you stream games to your TV without having to buy an Xbox gaming console. However, it's available only on the 4K and 4K Max sticks, not earlier versions. You'll also need a Bluetooth-enabled wireless controller and an Xbox Game Pass Ultimate membership. Read more at www.snipca.com/51316.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!



Disaster has struck everyone too lazy to tie their own shoelaces. Nike has stopped making its range of Adapt basketball shoes (pictured), which could lace themselves through a phone app.



The mystery is why anyone was prepared to spend \$350 (£270) on a pair in the first place.

Kaspersky leaves US and lays off staff

Russian antivirus company Kaspersky is planning to close its US-based division and lay off around 50 staff, after sales of its software were banned by the Biden administration.

It said it had made the “sad and difficult decision” because “business opportunities in the country are no longer viable”.

The move follows US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo claiming that Moscow’s influence over Kaspersky posed a major risk to US infrastructure and public safety.

She said the Kremlin has shown it’s willing to exploit Russian companies to “collect and weaponise the personal information of Americans”.

Sales of Kaspersky were banned on 20 July, while from 29 September it will be prevented from updating existing software.

The company, whose global headquarters are in Moscow,



has always strongly denied that it’s under the influence of Russian authorities.

Kaspersky initially said it intended to explore “all legally available options” to fight the ban. It said it thought the decision was based on “present geopolitical and theoretical concerns” rather than any genuine fears about the “integrity” of its software.

But it has since said it plans to “gradually wind down its US operations and eliminate US-based positions”.

Its US website features a ‘thank you’ to customers

(pictured), saying it has always tried to remain “independent, transparent and expertly managed”.

The UK Government stopped using Kaspersky in 2017 following advice from the National Cyber Security Centre, but has never warned the public against running the software.

Computeractive’s Software Store stopped selling Kaspersky in 2022 following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

• **National security trumps right to use Kaspersky** – Letters, page 13

Microsoft updates Windows to stop hackers exploiting Internet Explorer

Microsoft has released an update for Windows 10 and 11 to fix a flaw that lets hackers use Internet Explorer (IE) to install malware on victims’ computers.

The attack begins with an email that asks you to download an attachment. Clicking the files it contains prompts IE to download malware as a .url file, which makes the browser think you’re opening a safe PDF.

Microsoft has declared IE “retired and out-of-support” and has disabled it on computers, but technically it’s



still part of Windows. This means hackers can continue to use it to launch attacks.

Because IE no longer receives updates, hackers can cause more damage than exploiting supported browsers like Chrome and Edge. For example, they could hack IE

to gain remote access to your computer.

The flaw, called CVE-2024-38112, was spotted by Israeli security firm Check Point (www.snipca.com/51347). It gave details to Microsoft on 16 May and then worked “closely” with the

company on a solution.

This led to Microsoft releasing an update to fix the flaw as part of July’s ‘Patch Tuesday’ batch of security updates, released on 9 July. These updates are automatically installed on computers.

Money expert Martin Lewis is scammers' favourite celebrity

Martin Lewis was impersonated in more UK scams than any other public figure in 2022 and 2023, according to his website MoneySavingExpert.

It analysed scams reported by the public to Action Fraud, and found that Lewis was mentioned in 1,151 – around 32 per cent of the total.

Second was US singer Taylor Swift, followed by Tesla

founder Elon Musk, while Holly Willoughby and Jeremy Clarkson also appeared in the top 10 (see box below left).

Other figures making up the top 20 included Phillip Schofield, Rod Stewart and Rishi Sunak.

Scammers use photos of Lewis and made-up quotes in adverts that endorse investment schemes, often involving **cryptocurrency**.

In one scam, fraudsters created a fake video of Martin Lewis promoting a fake investment scheme run by Musk (www.snipca.com/51336, pictured).

He appeared to say: "Musk's new project opens up great investment opportunities for British citizens."

MoneySavingExpert said the same figures are likely to appear prominently in scams in 2024.



It added that recent feedback from users suggests scams featuring the TV presenter James May will enter the top 20 for this year.

Lewis said: "If someone is on this list, they're likely tried and tested by scammers, and therefore will keep reappearing."

He advised people to "double and triple check" an advert if it contains one of the figures on the list.

Lewis added that "if it's an ad with me in, it's always a scam, as I don't do adverts". To see the full top 20 visit www.snipca.com/51334.

TOP 10 SCAMS

- 1 Martin Lewis
- 2 Taylor Swift
- 3 Elon Musk
- 4 Adele (pictured)
- 5 Holly Willoughby
- 6 Jeremy Clarkson
- 7 Mark Zuckerberg
- 8 Johnny Depp
- 9 Keanu Reeves
- 10 Ed Sheeran



Microsoft to axe support for Windows 11 21H2 and 22H2

Microsoft has reminded users that it will stop supporting version 21H2 and 22H2 of Windows 11 on 8 October, meaning it won't release any further monthly security updates.

It issued a '90-day warning' on 8 July on its 'Windows message center' page (www.snipca.com/51332).

Version 21H2 was the first of the operating system, released in October 2021. It was followed a year later by 22H2 – the first major update.

Microsoft has already ended support for 21H2 Home and Pro, so the new deadline in October applies to Education and Enterprise editions.

However, for 22H2 the

October deadline applies to Home and Pro editions. Anyone still running it should try to install version 23H2, which was released on 31 October and will be supported until November 2025.

Since February, Microsoft has been automatically updating "eligible" computers to 23H2. These are machines that are running an unsupported version, such as 21H2, or a version that Microsoft will soon stop updating.

If you haven't installed it yet, press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click Windows Update at the bottom. Turn on the option to

Get the latest updates as soon as they're available



'Get the latest updates as soon as they're available' (1 in our screenshot), then click 'Check for updates' above 2. Once the update is available, you'll see the option to 'Download and Install'.

To find out which version of Windows you're running, type **about your PC** then click Open. Now look for the 'Version' number under the 'Windows specifications' heading.

Microsoft is expected to release version 24H2 in the autumn.

IN BRIEF

PLUSNET TO RAISE PRICES BY £3 A MONTH

Plusnet will increase prices by £3 a month from next March after adopting the same pricing policy as



parent company BT. Previously it raised prices by the rate of inflation plus 3.9 per cent, but Ofcom has banned this practice. It affects all new contracts signed after 10 July.

VODAFONE LAUNCHES 2.2Gbps BROADBAND

Vodafone has launched its fastest-ever broadband package, at 2.2Gbps. Priced £70 a month, the Pro II Broadband deal comes with the



Wi-Fi 6E Ultra Hub router and 4G backup to keep you online if your Wi-Fi connection fails. There are also speeds of 1.6Gbps and 1.8Gbps available – visit Vodafone's site for more details: www.snipca.com/51257.

GET UNLIMITED DATA ON SKY MOBILE

Sky Mobile has launched its first-ever 4G and 5G package with unlimited data. It costs £25 a month when bought as part of a phone package, or £40 per month as a SIM-only deal – though this is currently discounted to £35 (www.snipca.com/51320). Previously, Sky Mobile's biggest plan was 100GB a month for £30.

Will Ofcom's inflation-linked ban lead to higher prices?

Customers on cheaper deals fear they'll end up paying more

BT was largely applauded when in 2019 it linked broadband price rises to the rate of inflation. Industry analysts praised it for being straight with customers, saying it would mean lower increases following above-inflation rises of up to six per cent in previous years.

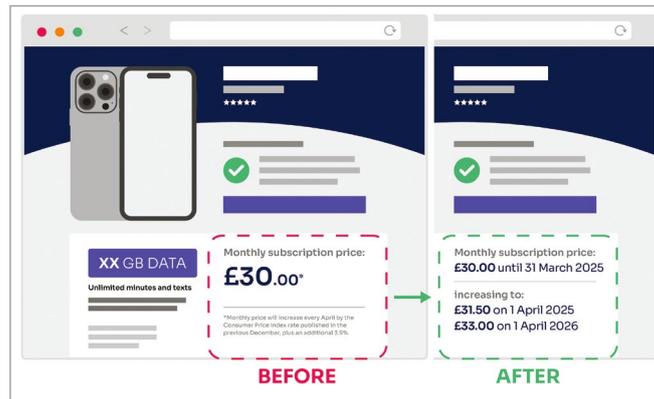
But that policy lasted just one year. In September 2020, BT revised it to add 3.9 per cent on top of inflation. Many thought that was sneaky, especially in the middle of a global pandemic, but with inflation below one per cent it didn't seem too drastic.

“The trade-off is greater price transparency against the potential for bigger increases”

We know what happened next – rampant inflation, fuelled first by the economic disruption caused by the Covid lockdowns, then Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It meant that in 2022 BT raised prices by 9.3 per cent (based on 5.4-per-cent inflation); by 14.4 per cent in 2023 (10.5-per-cent inflation); and by 7.9 per cent in 2024 (four-per-cent inflation).

Most other providers followed suit, leading to huge price increases all round. It's estimated that by April 2024 around 60 per cent of broadband and mobile customers were on contracts with inflation-linked price rises.

Consumer groups argued



these increases were unfair both because they were significantly above inflation, and also because customers didn't know when they

this would work, showing examples of contracts before and after (pictured). The contract on the right clearly states that you'll be paying £30 a month until 31 March 2025, after which prices increase to £31.50.

Ofcom said this will end years of inflation-linked increases which left customers “without sufficient certainty and clarity about the prices they will pay”.

But while many consumers have welcomed this change, others are worried that it could lead to higher price increases for cheaper deals. Many firms, including BT, Vodafone and Plusnet (see page 9) have already said they'll raise broadband prices next spring by a flat £3, and mobile prices by £1-£2.

Proportionally, flat price increases have a bigger impact the cheaper you go. For example, a £3 increase on Plusnet's Full Fibre 74 plan would take the price to £27.99 – a rise of 12 per cent. The same increase on its 900 plan, taking it to £47.99, is just 6.6 per cent more.

That £3 increase might

THE FACTS

- Ofcom has confirmed it will ban mid-contract price rises linked to inflation
- Some companies have responded by saying they'll increase prices by a flat £3 next year
- This could lead to higher increases for cheap packages than if prices were still linked to inflation

become the industry standard, but there's nothing to stop other firms like Sky or Virgin Media O2 announcing bigger rises. Companies liked the financial protection of linking to inflation. Without that, they might try to compensate by writing higher increases into contracts.

All of which underlines that Ofcom's decision is designed to make price rises *clearer* and more predictable, not necessarily smaller.

Inflation currently stands at two per cent. Under the old policy, prices would be set to rise by 5.9 per cent next spring – smaller increases than Plusnet customers on those plans mentioned above will actually end up paying.

As with all industry regulation, there are trade-offs. Here, it's greater price transparency against the risk of bigger increases, benefitting some, harming others. Those who want Ofcom to go further and ban mid-contract rises completely should bear that in mind.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Fake celebrity pages on Facebook

What's the threat?

Scammers are creating fake Facebook pages for celebrities to steal money from unsuspecting fans. In one recent example, a woman from Felixstowe, Suffolk, lost money after a page asked her to buy two £100 Apple gift cards to become an “official fan” of US actor Kevin Costner.

Eileen Leeks, 63, told the BBC that the page said she'd have a chance of meeting Costner if she bought the gift cards. She was then told she had been scammed and would actually have to buy a VIP membership card for over £1,000 to meet him. “I thought you're joking – he's a millionaire,” she said.

She later received a video call from someone who claimed to be Costner. However, the caller said: “This is Kevin Costner and you have been scammed”. The scammers then posed as his

management team and told Eileen that people were impersonating his face and voice.

How can you stay safe?

Genuine celebrity pages on Facebook are marked with a blue tick ‘badge’ to the right of the person's name.

You can see this in the screenshot (right) of the official page of Kevin Costner and Modern West (www.snipca.com/51281), which is the country rock band founded by the actor.

However, Facebook does say that not all public figures have a blue badge, so they'll be absent on some legitimate pages. Facebook warns about the tricks



scammers play, such as asking you to buy gift cards, or send money in a bank transfer or through Messenger (see www.snipca.com/51280).

Be aware that scammers also impersonate accounts on Instagram and X (formerly Twitter), but both also use a blue tick badge to verify genuine pages.

New tools | EE's Scam Guard

In Issue 688's Cover Feature we explained how developers are using AI to improve the accuracy of their security tools. The latest company to do this is EE, which has launched a service that analyses “every aspect” of a phone call to detect if it's “suspicious”.

Called ‘Scam Guard’, it's available to EE customers for an extra £1 a month and will show the warnings ‘Likely Nuisance’ and ‘Suspected Scam’ (pictured). It also has ‘Dark Web Monitoring’, which alerts you if your personal information – like bank-card details and email address – appears for sale on the [dark web](#).

EE already uses AI to thwart some dodgy calls, but Scam Guard appears to



use more advanced technology to identify scams.

If you're an EE customer, we'd advise trying it for a few months to see what difference it makes. It works on a 30-day rolling contact, so you don't have to commit long term. It's also easy to cancel. Read the full details at www.snipca.com/51289.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers



'Invalid' Amazon Prime payment

I signed up to Amazon Prime last year because the savings I'd make from delivery would easily outstrip the £95 annual cost. So when I received an email saying my payment details were “invalid”, I took notice. But then I noticed something odd.

It claimed my annual membership was due for renewal, but I knew that couldn't be correct because I initially signed up in November last year. The email read: “To update the default payment method or choose a new one for your membership, please click on the button below and follow the on-screen instructions”. It came from the ‘Amazon Prime Team’.

Dean Potter



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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Is it safe to run Windows 10 offline?

✉ In Issue 688 (page 6) you said there won't be a safe way of running Windows 10 once Microsoft pulls the plug next year. But I seem to recall you saying that people running Windows 7 could keep using it after support ended as long as they didn't go online. Won't the same be true of Windows 10? After all, if I never go online, I won't be exposing myself to anything nasty that could infect my machine.



Mark Hallsworth

CA SAYS It's true that by keeping your Windows 10 computer entirely offline, you won't be at risk of being infected by malware from the web – though you could inadvertently infect yourself if you plug a hacked USB stick into your computer. You'll be able to safely use all your installed programs, though not update them. And of course, if you don't eventually buy a Windows 11 PC, you won't be able to browse the web at all. We'll explore all your options in detail as Microsoft's October 2025 deadline approaches.

Chatbots give me quick and accurate answers

✉ Online chatbots aren't as bad as James Gordon claims (Star Letter, Issue 688). I've used several in the past couple of months to check basic details, such as addresses, opening hours and so on, and they've given me quick and accurate answers. James compares them unfavourably to outsourced customer support in other countries, but they're actually more like automated phone lines that give you information you might need without having to speak to someone.

I agree with James that companies should be forced by law to display a

contact phone number on their home page. But in my experience you're more likely to get stuck in a long queue when phoning than when talking to a chatbot.

Gavin Welby

Why are all our tools getting worse?

✉ Something really very strange is happening to a lot of popular tools. One by one, the companies making them are removing the features that people love. First, I read – astonished – that the BBC had stopped downloads from the iPlayer to PC. I still don't understand why.

A few months later, I read that Netflix is doing the same. Again, it made no sense to me. And then in Issue 688 (page 7) you reported that Freesat was axing the ability to record remotely via its app (pictured below). Happily, this time it gave a clear and comprehensive reason: it was caused by a "change to our internal systems". Well, thanks for that Freesat!

What's going on? Why, despite the supposed progress of AI and hyper-fast broadband speeds, despite 8K resolutions and more reliable Wi-Fi, are apps actually getting worse? Why do all these services now have fewer features than a year ago?

I was wondering if *Computeractive* has any insight into this. From my perspective,

it looks like tech companies are following each other in offering less, and simply hoping customers don't mind.

Warren Ramsey

✉ Four months ago, I ditched Sky and bought a Freesat box. The main reason was the option to record shows remotely through the phone app. That's £230 down the drain. Think I'll sell it to CeX, recoup some of my losses, and go back to Sky. I'll obviously never trust Freesat again. Decisions like this must mean the service is in terminal decline.

Ryan Butcher

CA SAYS We agree that Freesat citing 'change' as an excuse for axing the Remote Record feature was so vague as to be almost insulting. It suggests the real reason is something they don't want to admit, such as a decision to gradually wind down the service – as Ryan suspects.

Everyone TV, the company that owns Freesat and Freeview, also runs the new streaming service Freely. It needs to give viewers an incentive to switch to this. It wouldn't be the first time a company has removed popular features from an existing service to encourage customers to upgrade to a new one. Freeview users may now be wondering whether it'll be next to suffer. We'll let you know if it loses any much-loved features.



What's the Issue...?

✉ When did you explain about the risks of using credit cards online?

Barry Halliwell

CA SAYS In Issue 665, page 60.

✉ I'm keen to try Wintoys (www.snipca.com/50209) to fix some Windows problems. When was your Workshop on it?

Steve Perry

CA SAYS In Issue 663, page 38. Read it

and the feature above on our 2023 Back Issue CD: www.snipca.com/48860.

✉ I recall a review of a Hisense TV around £230 recently. Am I right?

Ian Turnbull

CA SAYS Yes, the 43in 43A6KTUK. We gave it four stars in Issue 677, page 29. Buy a back issue at www.snipca.com/51234.

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'AI' is too broad a term

✉ I enjoyed Issue 688's Cover Feature on the best AI tools to use, but the definition of AI seems so broad as to be rather meaningless. Can a single term really be used to cover the technology behind tools as diverse as photo editors, scam blockers and junk removers? Surely many of these programs are simply adding 'AI' to their name to benefit from the current hype?

Over time I think AI will only be used to describe tools like ChatGPT, which can create images, videos and music from what you type. That's the most impressive use of the technology.

Keith Ferry

National security trumps right to use Kaspersky

✉ I disagree with Przemyslaw Maziarz who says he should have the choice of using Kaspersky antivirus (Issue 688). Normally I'm all for consumer choice. It keeps prices down and stops companies becoming complacent. But national security trumps the right of consumers to buy what they want, and if our cyber-chiefs believe Kaspersky poses a threat to the UK's infrastructure then banning the product is the only decision they can make.

I might have more sympathy with Przemyslaw's view if Kaspersky was the only decent antivirus available, but there are plenty of products that are just as good, if not better. Switching to Bitdefender, McAfee, Norton or whoever isn't a difficult decision to make. It's just a matter of effectiveness, not taste. It's not like being denied your favourite breakfast cereal, chocolate bar or brand of beer.

Roger Halfon

My 1993 printer still works

✉ I read with interest recent letters from readers still using old printers made in 2001. Back in 1993, after presenting my case to my manager for the latest printer, he reluctantly let me purchase the HP LaserJet 4L (pictured right) for a princely sum. When I retired in 1995, he allowed me to take it with me.

For the following few years I stored it in a shed. Later, while looking for something else, I came across it again and found that Mr & Mrs Mouse had built a cosy winter home inside, on the printer mechanism. I quickly moved the printer to my kitchen, and removed the squatters. Like

STAR LETTER

Objecting to rural masts doesn't make you a NIMBY

✉ I was pleased to read that mobile coverage in rural areas is improving ('Question of the Fortnight', Issue 688), but we should be aware that not every inch of the countryside needs to be plastered with phone masts.

I live near Beacon Fell Country Park, north of Preston, Lancashire. Like many residents, I was horrified to read about plans by telecoms firm Cornerstone to erect a tower in the middle of this beautiful area. It would have been taller than the trees surrounding it, and some would have needed chopping down. Photos of the proposed mast showed no effort had been made to make it blend in with the environment.

Thankfully, locals campaigned against this, and Preston City Council rejected planning permission earlier this year. The irony is that mobile coverage in the area is pretty good anyway, as the planning officials acknowledged. I don't understand why people need to gawp at their phones while enjoying the countryside, but I accept that in an emergency you need a

Question of the Fortnight

Is mobile coverage in the countryside getting better?

A four-year scheme to boost rural signals is finally paying off

This is a continuing tale of four networks: MNOs, EE, O2 and 3. You probably use one of the four MNOs mobile network operators - EE, O2, Three and Vodafone. But if you live in the countryside you might be in the middle of a 4G signal not spot, or - not quite as bad - a 3G signal. However, since your mobile signal is, you should benefit from the new shared rural network (SRN).



THE FACTS

- Mobile networks had until the end of June to reach 88 per cent of the UK landmass, and are expected to hit 90 per cent by early 2027
- Virgin Media O2 and Vodafone have all hit the target, but Three was reportedly struggling and could be forced by Ofcom
- Around 70 per cent of the country will be covered by all

reliable signal. What's important to note is that objections to the mast weren't from so-called NIMBYs. We all realise that you need masts in urban areas to guarantee a signal, but these don't tend to be picturesque areas loved by thousands.

Also, as a society we have to be more appreciative of trade-offs. We don't always need to have the fastest signal everywhere, especially if it's at the cost of ruining a spectacular view, or chopping down trees. Apart from emergencies, no message is so urgent that it can't wait until you're in reach of an urban mast.

Ian Howard



The Star Letter writer wins a Computeractive mug!

Malcolm Johnson (Letters, Issue 688), I found and connected a USB-to-parallel cable - and to my surprise the printer burst into life.

Since then, I've used it for important correspondence and replaced the original cartridge only once. My only annoyance has been each time I upgrade my Windows version, I have a devil of a job



trying to find a driver.

Nigel Edwards

✉ I have an Epson Stylus Color 880 which was launched in August 2000. I got mine in 2001, and try to keep it going with a 'control code' to use with retro computers like my Sinclair QL. It has USB and parallel connectors. Windows 10 (don't know about Windows 11) has a driver for it, which is lucky as the original Windows 95 drivers no longer work. Replacement compatible ink cartridges cost only about a pound each.

Occasionally, all the LEDs flash an error, which is a maintenance request. This is to do with the waste ink tray and pad, which I think are controlled by a print counter. Replacing these would cost more than the value of the printer these days, so its days are probably numbered. But I'll keep it going as long as I can.

Dilwyn Jones



We stand up for your legal rights

Do I need to convince HP my printer is faulty?

Q Early in April 2024, I bought an HP Smart Tank 7005e all-in-one printer (pictured) directly from HP's website for £199.99. I have a massive project underway involving the printing of over 1,100 pages of mostly black-and-white web screenshots with a royal blue band. However, the band's colour is washed out and appears pink/lilac. Other colours are also washed out. HP is refusing to believe there's a problem. Can you help?

Alan Ingreby

A We'll try. While Alan admits he's been doing a lot of printing, the coloured ink tanks have not been heavily used. For them to produce faded colours in the first few pages suggests something is wrong.

It's impossible for us to know whether the fault is inherent, but HP should know better than to dismiss Alan's problem. Fewer than six months have passed since purchase, so it's up to HP to prove the fault *isn't* inherent. If it claims it's not, then presumably it thinks Alan has

damaged the printer somehow.

If Alan had contacted HP after six months, he would have had to prove the fault is inherent. This is often hard to do, and usually requires paying for an independent inspection.

We've told HP it should take his complaint more seriously. It must collect the printer, test it, and either reject his claim – giving a solid justification – or offer one of the following: refund, repair or replacement. It can only provide one repair or replacement, though.

If the first attempt fails, it must then refund Alan – and probably in full because he's had hardly any time using the printer.

CASE ONGOING

Can I get refund for undelivered goods?

Q In April, I ordered Family Tree Maker (FTM) 2024 from My History (www.my-history.co.uk). I received a free download of the 2019 version and agreed to wait for the 2024 edition, which would be sent on a DVD. But it has stopped selling FTM 2024 and has refused me a refund even though I've stopped using the 2019 version. Where do I go from here?

Dave Fisher

A Dave should tell My History that it's in breach of contract because the company can't supply goods that he's paid for in advance. It makes no difference that the deal came with a free download of five-year-old software. Legally, this counts as free, and wasn't what he paid for.

Naturally he'd prefer the 2024 edition because it will have new features, as listed by its manufacturer MacKiev at www.snipca.com/51255. Our investigation shows it initially gave April 2024 as a tentative release date. That's clearly not been met, but most retailers selling FTM are still taking pre-orders and showing that it's on sale soon. We'll update you when we know more.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Currys partially refunds forgotten insurance payments



Currys has given reader David Wirth a partial refund for insurance he forgot he was paying (see Issue 688).

He signed up for the company's Whatever Happens plan 10 years ago after buying an HP laptop, paying £7.99 a month. He estimated he has paid £800 since then, and was annoyed Currys hadn't reminded him he was still signed up to the scheme.

We took his case to Currys, which agreed to give him £462 back. It didn't have to

refund him in full, so we think this is a decent outcome. Companies must send customers reminders that their subscription is set to be renewed, but it would have been hard – if not impossible – for David to prove he *hadn't* received these from Currys.

Also, customers do bear some responsibility for checking their outgoings to make sure they're not paying for a subscription beyond the time they need it.

Currys told us that it doesn't have a set policy for such refunds, and instead

considers them case by case. It also said senior management have been told about customers complaining they weren't notified that their insurance subscription was set to be renewed.

Hopefully, there will be fewer cases like David's now that the Digital Markets and Consumers Act is law. This requires companies to send more regular reminders about subscription renewals, though the act can't be applied retrospectively to affect previous cases.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

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

Were you wrong to say you've got 14 days to return items?

Q When answering M Archer's question ('Can retailers refuse refund if an item has been opened?', Issue 687), you say customers have 14 days to return an item bought online under the Consumer Contract Regulations, regardless of whether there's anything wrong with it. This is wrong. In fact, you have 28 days in which to return them. Can you publish a correction?

Brian McGuckin

A Yes, we're happy to clarify. We said that you can "return most goods bought at a distance – ie online, over the phone or from a catalogue – for any reason for up to 14 days". Strictly speaking, we should have said you can *reject* goods within 14 days – ie, tell the retailer that you intend to return them.

The 14 days to examine and reject goods starts the day *after* you receive them, not the day of purchase – so this gives you 15 days in reality. Once you've informed the

retailer, you have a further 14 days to return them. So, the longest you can leave it to return an item is 29 days: 15 days after it arrives to tell the retailer, then a further 14 days to post.

Returning the item counts as posting it, not the retailer receiving it. If you post it towards the end of the 29-day period, it may arrive after 29 days. But you're covered as long as you've got proof you posted it within 29 days.



CASE CLOSED

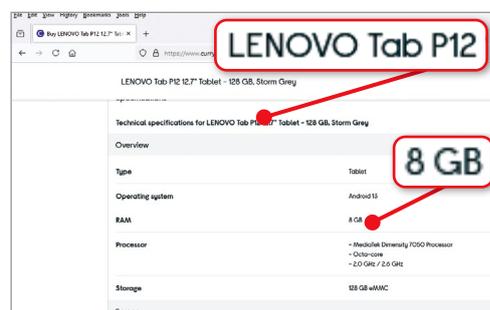
Does Currys owe me discount for wrong RAM?

Q I recently bought a Lenovo P12 tablet from Currys online for £249, then discovered it had only 4GB of RAM instead of the 8GB advertised. I asked for a discount, rather than return it for a refund, but Currys offered just 10 per cent. It also said the tablet wouldn't be covered by its warranty because it wasn't the model listed on my invoice. Can Currys really do this?

David Nicholls

and were told it doesn't sell an 8GB version of this Lenovo tablet – even though one does exist. Also, Currys' online price for the 4GB version is £349, not £249.

After revealing who we were and explaining David's case, the assistant wondered whether David was confusing the rear camera specifications (8MP, eight megapixels) with GB. We then went back to David, who sent us screenshots of the laptop's page on Currys' site. It does indeed show 8GB (pictured) and a price of £249. Currys has offered to refund



him, but he'd prefer a discount and keep the tablet. He's not entitled to this, but we'll ask Currys and let you know what it says.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Say it out loud: Quiet PC fixed my wife's machine quickly

Having been happy with my own computer that I'd bought

from Quiet PC, when it

came to upgrading my wife's machine I had no hesitation in ordering again from the company. Unfortunately, after eight months it went into a 'Creating automatic repair' loop that I couldn't resolve.

I contacted Quiet PC and they sent instructions as to how I should use the



recovery USB drive that came with the system. Sadly, that didn't work so they said I should send it back. Alas, I had junked the original box

and packaging, but Quiet PC sent a large box, complete with packaging, which arrived the next day. A day later they'd arranged for its collection, and it was back in my house

working fine a few days after that. I was really impressed with the speed at which my issue was resolved and the way I was kept updated about the repair.

Jeff Brown

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

Contact
Quiet PC

• Email & Phone info
www.quietpc.com/contact

Grow Your Family Tree



There are plenty of online records documenting followers of nonconformist religions. **Judith Batchelor** explains how to...

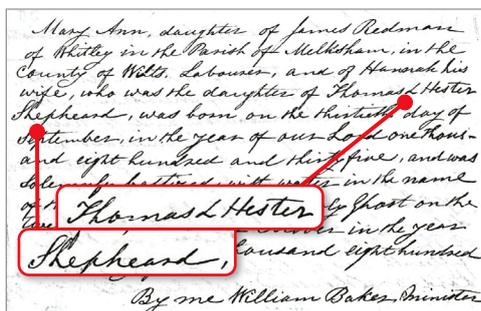
Find ancestors who were Methodists

Methodism was founded in the 1720s by John Wesley with the aim of reviving and reforming the Church of England. It became a separate nonconformist denomination when John Wesley died in 1791. Its popularity grew, especially among the working class, and throughout Wales and Cornwall, and included groups such as the Wesleyan Methodists, Primitive Methodists, United Methodists and Bible Christians.

Search births and baptisms

One of the most useful sources for researching Methodist ancestors is the Wesleyan Methodist Metropolitan Registry (<https://bmdregisters.co.uk>), which contains the records of over 10,000 births and baptisms in England and Wales. The Registry, which ran from 1818 to 1840, forms part of the National Archives series RG4 and RG5.

Type the name of your ancestor and select the Event type. The default option is All, but you can select 'Birth and Baptisms', 'Marriages and Banns', and 'Deaths and Burials'. Tick the 'Search only subject' box to limit the results for the name you entered – otherwise it will



also include parents and grandparents. You can search for free, but you'll have to buy five credits (for £2.50) to view the record.

A typical birth/baptism entry will include the names of the mother's parents, and sometimes witnesses to the birth. In the screenshot above, showing the 1835 baptism entry for my ancestor Mary Ann Rudman, her maternal grandparents are named as Thomas and Hester Shephard.

For a wider search of nonconformist records, including Methodists, visit TheGenealogist website: www.snipca.com/50852. Again, you can search for free, but you'll need to buy a subscription to see any records (for details see www.thegenealogist.co.uk/compare).

Methodist birth and baptism records usually contain the names of the baby's maternal grandparents

Find records in Ancestry and Findmypast

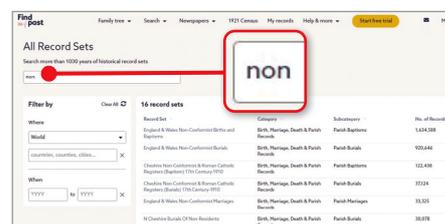
Both Ancestry and Findmypast have plenty of nonconformist records. Start at the former by typing **non-conformist** into its Card Catalogue

search menu (www.snipca.com/51184), which will bring up records for Lancashire, Tyne and Wear, Wiltshire, West Yorkshire, London and Manchester, among others. Search for **methodist** and you'll see records for Medway, Kent (1798-1932) and the Isle of Wight (1813-1937).

Searching for **methodist** on Findmypast's 'All Record Sets' page produces just one UK result, for Yorkshire Methodist Marriages. For more non-conformist collections, including in Ireland, just type **non** in the search box (see screenshot below).

Note that all Methodists would have married in the Church of England prior to July 1837 and most Methodists would have been buried in parish churchyards, since only a few places of worship had their own burial grounds.

If you get stuck, read Methodist Heritage's guide on researching your history: www.snipca.com/51183. You can also research Methodist people, chapels and much more at My Methodist History: www.mymethodisthistory.org.uk.



Search for 'non' in Findmypast to see all its non-conformist records

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

I'm looking for information on my grandfather Joseph Ford, who was a sapper in the Royal Engineers. His regimental number was 7262 and he was discharged in November 1920 at Chatham.

Richard Childs

You can find a lot of information on World War 1 soldiers in their service records, but around 60 per cent of these were destroyed in a bombing raid in 1940.

Sadly, it appears that your grandfather's records have not survived, but using his regimental number you can download his medal card from the National Archives website: www.snipca.com/50841.

To learn more about his wartime experiences, I would recommend you contact the Royal Engineers Museum in Gillingham: www.re-museum.co.uk.



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



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Best Free Software

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

IMAGE EDITOR

PhotoDemon 2024.7

www.snipca.com/51394

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



There are lots of excellent free image-editing programs for keen photographers who can't afford Adobe Photoshop, but some – such as GIMP – have so many options that they take a while to master. PhotoDemon provides the perfect balance between expert features and simplicity, with an intuitive interface that makes all its tools easy to access.

Version 2024.7 – the first to be named after its release date – expands and improves the program with several useful new features. These include the ability to import PDFs as images, so you can edit them in PhotoDemon. This lets you add annotations and highlights; change the background colour and transparency; crop and resize the document; and make other tweaks before printing or sharing it. However, you can't yet export images as PDFs – that option will be introduced in a future version.

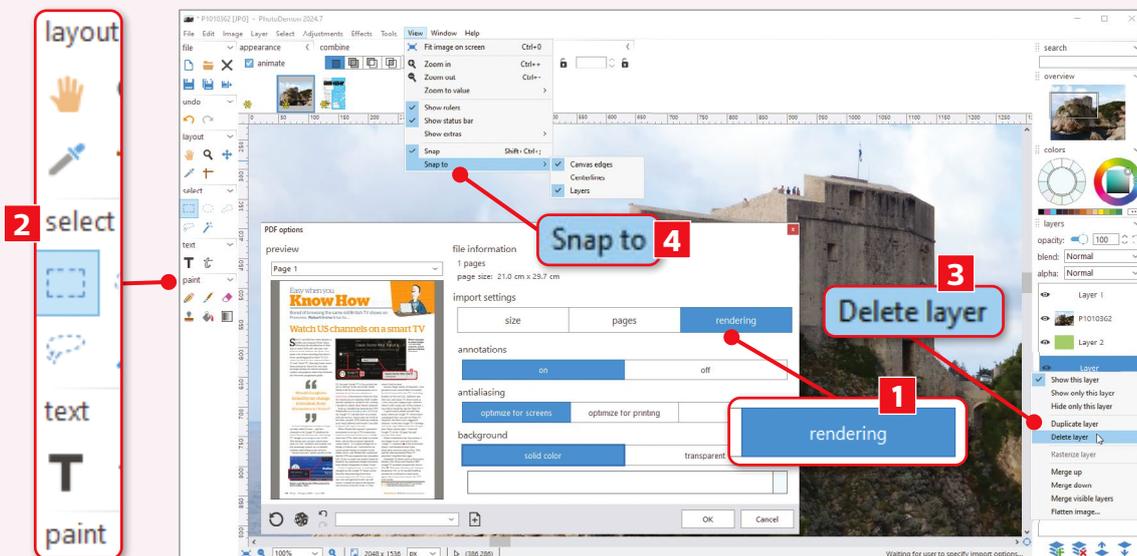
Unlike standard PDF editors, each change you make creates a separate layer, so you can quickly undo specific edits. A new right-click menu for the Layer toolbox makes

this even easier, by letting you show, hide and delete layers with a single click.

PhotoDemon has added 'magnetic snapping' for layers, which automatically aligns elements with other layers or the edge of the image canvas by 'snapping' them into place. It has also updated its Move tool to show you precise distances – in pixels – when you move a layer to a different position in the image.

Other changes include a smarter Save/'Save as' function, which now detects image file extensions, so you don't need to select a format manually, and an enhanced Export tool that lets you export individual layers. The developer has also added support for the **lossless JPEG-XL** format (.jxl), which they say may eventually replace traditional **JPEG** images as the most commonly used photo format.

PhotoDemon triggers a security warning from Microsoft Defender SmartScreen. It's completely safe to use, so just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.



1 PhotoDemon 2024.7 introduces the option to import and edit PDFs. You can adjust the page size, background transparency and rendering options before you open the PDF in the main program window to perform further edits.

2 The program's left-hand toolbar gives you instant access to PhotoDemon's layout, selection, text and paint tools. Many more options are available in its Adjustments and Effects menus, and can be applied to your images as individual layers.

3 Working with layers can be fiddly, so PhotoDemon's developer has added a 'long requested' right-click menu to its Layer box. This makes it easier to show, hide and delete specific layers; merge several into one; and flatten the overall image.

4 PhotoDemon's new 'magnetic snapping' feature automatically aligns different layers in images, so elements fit neatly into place. To use the feature, click the View menu, select 'Snap to' and choose to snap to the canvas edges or other layers.



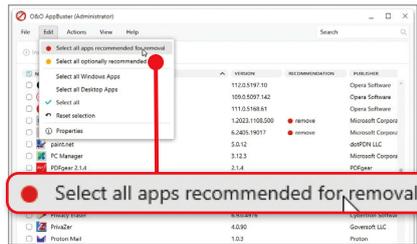
SOFTWARE UNINSTALLER

O&O AppBuster 1.4.1345

www.snipca.com/51374

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

O&O AppBuster is one of our favourite free tools for removing unwanted programs and apps, with a simpler and friendlier interface than rival uninstallers. The



latest version adds a Recommendation column, which is similar to the Recommended feature in O&O stablemate, ShutUp10++ (see our Workshop on page 38). This uses colour-coded labels to suggest which software you should get rid of – yellow for ‘optional’ and red for ‘remove’. To uninstall the latter recommendations, click the Edit menu, choose ‘Select all apps recommended for removal’ (see screenshot) and click Remove. O&O AppBuster now automatically detects new programs and apps you’ve installed since you last opened it, so you don’t need to manually refresh its list. It has also added support for PCs with ARM processors, starting with the next update to Windows 11 (24H2).

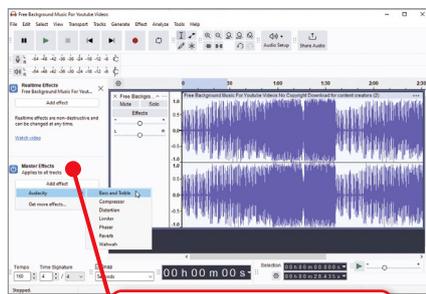
AUDIO EDITOR

Audacity 3.6

www.snipca.com/51375

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

This versatile free audio editor has been updated with yet more useful features for editing and enhancing audio files. The most notable additions are



Master Effects

‘master effects’, which are applied to a whole project rather than individual tracks. To use them, first open the Realtime Effects panel, either by choosing Add Realtime Effects in the Effect menu or by pressing E on your keyboard. Click ‘Add effect’ in the new Master Effects section (see screenshot) and choose one to apply, such as ‘Bass and Treble’, Distortion or Reverb. Select the effect to fine-tune its settings. Another handy new option lets you paste audio files directly into Audacity by pressing Ctrl+V, rather than opening them through the File menu. There’s also an improved dark theme, which you can switch to by going to Edit, then Preferences and selecting Interface.

SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Hasleo WinToUSB Professional

www.snipca.com/51381

Price: £28.95 **Free trial:** N/A

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

Hasleo WinToUSB lets you install a fully functional version of Windows on a USB stick, so you can carry it around with you and boot it on any PC. Unlike rival tools for this purpose, it’s straightforward to use and offers free and paid-for editions.

From the home screen, you can either clone your current Windows installation to a USB stick using ‘Windows To Go’ (see screenshot), download an official ISO file from Microsoft or use a system-image file from another source – such as one created using Hasleo’s own free Backup Suite (www.snipca.com/51384). Simply select the installation source and the destination drive (or the save location if you’re downloading an ISO), and specify other settings such as the partition scheme. You can even bypass Microsoft account and system requirements that would otherwise prevent you from installing Windows 11.

Both versions of WinToUSB offer these options, but the free one only supports the portable installation of Windows 10 and 11 Home. WinToUSB Professional also lets you clone and install Windows Pro, Education and Enterprise editions (provided you have valid product keys), which is essentially what you’re paying for.

Additionally, you can encrypt the USB installation using BitLocker and get free technical support, but for most home users those aren’t strong incentives to upgrade. In contrast, the free tool Rufus (www.snipca.com/51385) lets you install any Windows version from an ISO file, though it lacks WinToUSB’s cloning option.



OUR VERDICT: Don’t pay for it

The free version of Hasleo WinToUSB is all you need to create a bootable version of Windows 10 or 11 Home on a USB stick. To boot a Pro edition of Windows, use Rufus to install an ISO from Microsoft (www.snipca.com/51386).



What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

Can I remove scratches from negatives?

Q I've digitised hundreds of negatives from 35 years ago, but is there an AI-supported image software package that will remove scratches and enhance them? Nothing I've looked at does what I want.

Ken Nellist

A The best tool for this job is the full version of Photoshop (www.snipca.com/51068). You can download a seven-day trial to see how its powerful Photo Restoration tool works, but you'll be prompted to sign up with payment details for a subscription (£9.98 for the first three months, then £21.98 a month). Make sure you cancel before the trial expires.

Open your image in Photoshop, then open the Filter menu and choose 'Neural Filters...'. A new panel will open on the right – select Photo Restoration at the bottom (1 in our screenshot), then click the download button to get the latest version of this tool. Once done, switch on Photo Restoration to reveal three sliders – drag 'Scratch reduction' (2) to the right to start repairing damage. Also try the settings in the Adjustments menu (3). If any blemishes remain, use Photoshop's Spot Healing tool to manually remove them after clicking OK.

A decent Photoshop alternative is VanceAI (www.snipca.com/51069). It's easier to use, and you can try its photo-restoration tool for free without providing payment details. This trial gives you limited credits, though, after which you'll have to buy a licence – prices start at \$29.90 (£23.55) for a yearly licence. For full pricing details visit <https://vanceai.com/pricing>.



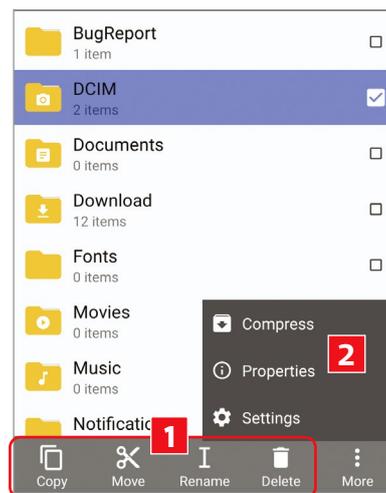
How can I manage files on my Honor tablet?

Q I bought an Honor Tab X9 tablet after reading your review (Issue 674, page 26). I'm struggling to manage files on it, so can you recommend a file manager that's similar to File Explorer in Windows?

Jim Benn

A Try the free Android app Cx File Explorer (www.snipca.com/51067), which is easy to use. On

the main screen you'll see your storage summary along with a 'Clean' button for removing data. Below are three tabs giving access to your storage. For a view that's similar to File Explorer, tap 'Main storage'. Now tap a folder to open it, or tap a box on the right to select it and bring up Copy, Move, Rename and Delete options (1 in our screenshot). Tap 'More' to see options for Compress and Properties (2). Search for files by tapping the three vertical dots at the top of the screen.



Can I make photos fade in and out within a slideshow?

Q Many moons ago, the site for our history group used Anyfade software to show photos fading in and out in a slideshow. This used Java, which has now been discontinued. What else can we use?



Stephen Fryer

A Give Hi Slider (www.hislider.com) a go. Import your photos then choose a template on the left (1) and a transition effect at the bottom right (2). Export your slideshows as HTML files to directly upload to your website, or as a plug-in for sites built using WordPress, Joomla or Drupal.

Named & Shamed



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

SOFTWARE WARNING!

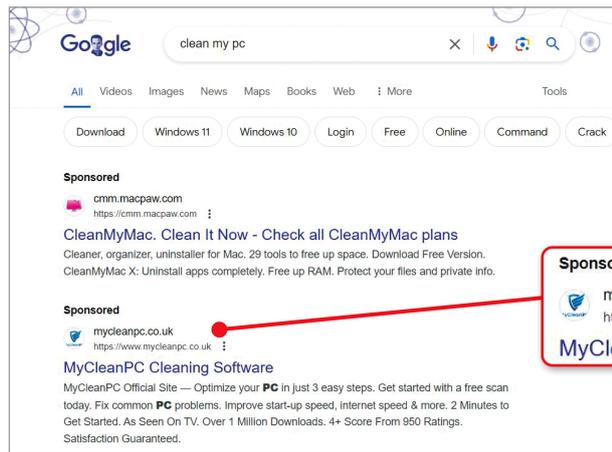
MyCleanPC's pop-ups and 'expert' chat windows

My first mistake was leaving my annual PC spring-clean so late this year that it became a *summer*-clean. My second was searching on Google for a program to do the job. Top of the results was an advert for a Mac cleaner – no use to me. Next was an ad for a Windows tool called MyCleanPC (see screenshot right), which sounded familiar – though I couldn't remember whether it was meant to be any good.



I took a chance and downloaded it – cue my third mistake. It buried my desktop under an avalanche of pop-ups, then opened a web page promoting a paid-for subscription (1 in our screenshot right). It also showed two chat windows in which “experts” Kevin and Pearl invited me to speak with them (2). Somehow it had already identified 2,848 trackers on my PC (3), which was odd because I hadn't even run a scan.

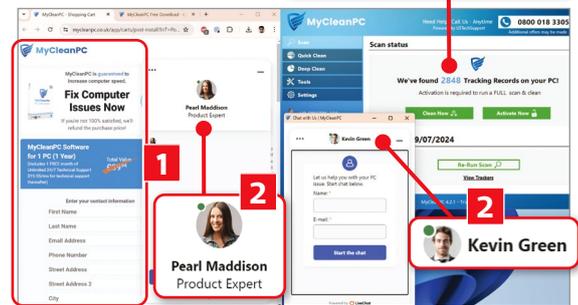
I then dipped into the Named & Shamed archives and saw that back in Issue 596 (early 2021) one of my predecessors Jonathan Parkyn warned that MyCleanPC was a waste of space.



MyCleanPC is one of the top 'sponsored' results on Google



Back then Jonathan found it via a standard search result on Google – ie, not an advert. Google has obviously struggled financially since then, making a mere \$305bn (£235bn) in 2023. Poor things. When times are this tough, you can't expect it to turn down money from advertisers, even when the tools are as infuriating and useless as MyCleanPC.



It nags you to upgrade, offers advice from “experts” and finds trackers before you've even scanned your PC

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?



WHAT THEY SAY

Audible www.snipca.com/51296 “A commuter stands on a subway platform, surrounded not by drab walls and concrete, but undulating deep-sea creatures. Elsewhere, a small dust cloud caused by a home improvement project becomes the breath of an ancient dragon. This is the power of imagination, an alchemy that happens when people listen to Audible.”

WHAT THEY MEAN

Apologies, for a moment there we forgot that we sell only audiobooks, not mind-altering drugs.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Heidi Bucknall

Most eBay sellers are content making a few bob flogging unwanted books, clothes or gadgets. Not so Heidi Bucknall. She organised charity trips for sick children to theme parks across the East Midlands, then sold the tickets online to the highest bidder.

The 32-year-old from Bestwood, Nottingham, made around £30,000 between 2015 and 2021, receiving



payments in a PayPal account belonging to one of her relatives. She was only caught when one of the companies donating the tickets spotted them for sale.

Bucknall is now serving two years and four months in jail.

The charity she worked for, PASIC (Parents Association for Seriously Ill Children), said it has put checks in place to avoid similar fraud in future.



MINI PC | £854 from Geekom www.snipca.com/51157

Geekom A8

Compact case

The A8 from Taiwanese firm Geekom is one of the smallest mini PCs we've seen recently. The case that houses it is 37x112x112mm (HxWxD), much smaller than the 62x130x125mm case of our current favourite mini PC, the Minisforum UM780XTX (£639 for the 64GB RAM version from www.snipca.com/48917 – see page 32).

Two versions of the Geekom A8 are available. The one we tested comes with an AMD Ryzen 9 8945HS processor and costs £854.05. The other has a less powerful Ryzen 7 8845HS, priced at £683.05. Both models are available from Geekom at www.snipca.com/51157 – select the model you want before clicking one of the 'Add to Basket' or Buy Now links.

“This truly tiny mini PC is fast and powerful, but can't dislodge our current favourite”

Both PCs come with 32GB of RAM (1 in our photo below) but the Ryzen 7 version has a 1TB SSD (2) while the Ryzen 9 version doubles this to 2TB. There's a slight difference in performance between the two processors but it's more marginal than it looks, as the 8945HS is essentially just a slightly faster version of the 8845HS.



If you don't mind the reduction in storage, we'd argue that you can safely opt for the Ryzen 7 version and expect similar performance to our Ryzen 9 test unit, as long as you're not regularly pushing the processor to its limits.

Having said that, the Ryzen 9's performance isn't exactly off the chart compared with the previous generation of processors, and we still consider the Minisforum UM780XTX to be better value. The 32GB/1TB version of the Minisforum has a Ryzen 7 7840HS processor, and that runs 10 per cent slower in benchmarks that push the processor to its limits, and three per cent slower in graphics benchmarks. However, it costs just £559, which is a saving of more than 20 per cent.

One downside of Geekom's smaller case is that it has less room for ports. The A8 has just two USB 3.0 ports and a headphone jack on the front, whereas the UM780XTX adds a handy USB-C port. Geekom makes up for this with two USB-C ports on the rear, but adds only one more USB 3.0 port and a USB 2.0 port, while its rival has two more USB 3.0 ports.

At least the Geekom has two HDMI ports, although the Minisforum arguably offers greater choice with one DisplayPort and one HDMI port, as well as two Ethernet ports compared with the Geekom's one. For anyone who'd rather use Wi-Fi, the

Geekom comes with Wi-Fi 6E as standard.

One other thing the Geekom mini PC has that the UM780XTX doesn't is an SD card slot on the left hand side (pictured above). If you want to add a little more storage or you have a digital camera and want to transfer photos by plugging in its memory card, this is a useful addition.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core AMD Ryzen 9 8945HS processor • 32GB RAM • Radeon 780M graphics • 2TB SSD • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.2 • 1x 2.5 Gigabit Ethernet port • 2x HDMI ports • 2x USB-C ports • 2x USB 3.0 ports • 1x USB 2.0 port • 1x SD card slot • Windows 11 Home • 37x112x112mm (HxWxD) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/51157

VERDICT A very small mini PC with a choice of powerful, up-to-date AMD processors, but it isn't quite enough to dislodge our current favourite mini PC (see below)



ALTERNATIVE Minisforum UM780XTX £649 Our current favourite mini PC isn't far off the performance of the A8 but comes with more RAM or a lower price, depending on which version you choose



LAPTOP | £1,300 from Asus www.snipca.com/51250

Asus Zenbook 14 OLED UX3405

A bold display

This isn't the first time we've seen a Zenbook 14 OLED from Asus. We tested the previous version of the laptop in Issue 665, when £1,199 would have bought you the same chassis and screen with an AMD Ryzen 7 processor. The price is now £1,300, so a little more expensive, but our review model came with an Intel Core Ultra 7 155H processor, 16GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD.



“A stunning OLED screen and decent performance make this laptop stand out”

If you want this specification, you'll have to select it from the Asus website (www.snipca.com/51047). Other options are available, including a Core Ultra 5 125H with a smaller 512GB SSD (£1,099.99) and a Core Ultra 9 185H with 32GB of RAM (£1,399.99).

Increases in processor speed tend to offer gradual performance improvements, but we could really see the difference the Ultra 7 makes over the older AMD processor in the previous Zenbook. **Benchmark** tests that push the processor to its limits were running 60 per cent faster.

Even so, this new laptop is a little slower than our current favourite, the Dell Inspiron 14 Plus, which costs £849 for a similar specification (available from Dell at www.snipca.com/51167).

RIGHT EDGE



LEFT EDGE



The main difference between the Inspiron and this Zenbook is the screen. Its **OLED** screen has a **refresh rate** of 120Hz and a resolution of 2880x1800 pixels. It can display 98 per cent of the **sRGB** standard colours and 99.5 per cent of the **DCI-P3** standard, which is excellent. In comparison, Dell's screen manages just 69.4 per cent of DCI-P3. The Zenbook's screen is wonderful, but it isn't worth the additional £450 this laptop costs over the price of the Dell.

OLED screens often take a heavy toll on a laptop's battery life, but the 75Wh battery in this model fares well. It kept the laptop going for 12 hours 21 minutes in our office benchmark test, which is less than the 15 hours achieved by our favourite Dell but more than enough to get you through a working day.

We liked the crisp feel of the keyboard's keys but not that it's slightly off centre. At least the cursor keys are separate from the main keyboard, which we found useful.

SPECIFICATIONS

Sixteen-core Intel Core Ultra 7 155H processor • 16GB of RAM • Intel Arc graphics • 14in 120Hz 2880x1800-pixel OLED screen • 1TB SSD • 2x USB-C ports • 1x USB 3.0 port • 1x HDMI port • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.3 • Windows 11 Home • 14.9x312x220mm (HxWxD) • 1.3kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/51250

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 capable laptop with a gorgeous screen, but it's not worth the extra you're paying over laptops without OLED technology



ALTERNATIVE Dell Inspiron 14 Plus £849 Its screen isn't quite so fabulous,

but otherwise it offers a similar specification for a lot less money



TABLET | From **£350** from Lenovo www.snipca.com/51181

Lenovo Tab P12 with Matte Display

Paper view

If the name of this tablet rings a bell, you might be remembering our review of the Lenovo Tab P12 Pro from Issue 636. That tablet is no longer available, but at the time it cost £750. At first glance this newer tablet doesn't look much different from the old model, with gently rounded corners and a 6.9mm thickness that matches that of the most affordable iPad. However, the new tablet has more up-to-date components and costs significantly less than the P12 Pro. Where it really veers away from its predecessor, however, is the screen.

“An amazing screen with a paper-like quality, but the performance lets this tablet down”

Describing the screen as Matte doesn't do it justice, because its attraction goes way beyond a lack of a glossy finish. The screen looks just like paper, and can soak up light in a similar way to an **E Ink** screen. If you're worried that this might mean drab colours and poor response times, we can reassure you. Set to Vivid mode, the screen covers 92 per cent of the **DCI-P3** colour standard, which makes photos and videos as bright and vivid as you'd expect from a typical tablet with a glossy screen.

Lenovo doesn't quote response times, but we had no trouble streaming sport and playing basic games, aided by a



resolution of 2944x1840 pixels. It's worth digging around in the display settings, too, where you'll find a Reading Mode that tweaks colours and contrast to make reading more comfortable for long periods. Our only concern is that it's not the best tablet to use in sunny conditions. When we rushed out to view the screen under a rare moment of bright summer sunlight, we struggled to make out its contents.

Anyone hoping for a paper-like writing experience will be disappointed, too, because the included Lenovo Tab Pen Plus feels exactly the same against the screen as on any other tablet. In fact, the pen's only notable feature is that it attaches securely to the rear of the tablet using magnets, although it still charges separately via its USB-C slot.

The most affordable version of the tablet on Lenovo's website comes without a power adapter or case, so choose carefully from the options when buying. We'd be most tempted by the version that comes with a clip-on keyboard (as pictured below – the connector sits at the tablet's base), even though it pushes the price up to £448.

The device's twin speakers are perfect for watching films thanks to their support for Dolby Atmos effects. They're fine for listening to music, too, but lack the bass and detail that really brings tracks to life.

The processor is an eight-core MediaTek Dimensity 7050, which is supported by just 8GB of **RAM** and 128GB of storage. That's fine for running Android 13 and performing the everyday tasks most people require of a tablet, and although 128GB of storage may sound

limiting, there is a **microSD card** slot available so you can add more. However, the weakness of the processor shows when viewing complicated web pages or playing games.

In **benchmarks** that test the speed of the processor under pressure, it ran at half the speed of our current Buy It! favourite Android tablet, the Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 (£679 from www.snipca.com/50039, see page 30). Its performance in games was even worse, with our benchmark tests showing the Tab P12 running at only 14 per cent of the Tab S9's blistering gaming speed. Battery life is another weak point, lasting a little over six hours in our video-playback test.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core MediaTek Dimensity 7050 processor • Mali-G68 graphics • 8GB RAM • 12.7in 2944x1840-pixel resolution 60Hz LTPS touchscreen • 128GB storage • 8-megapixel rear camera • 13-megapixel front camera • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.1 • USB-C port • Android 13 • 293x191x6.9mm (HxWxD) • 615g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/51181

VERDICT An Android tablet with a desirable paper-like look to the screen, but it's let down by lacklustre performance



ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 £679 A slightly smaller and more expensive tablet, but it's better able to run all the apps you might want to throw at it



PRINTER | £300 from Amazon www.snipca.com/51219

HP LaserJet Pro 3202dw

Read the small print

This HP model is smaller than most laser printers we've come across. Compared with the Brother HL-L8240CDW (£274 from www.snipca.com/50350, reviewed in Issue 684), for example, it's a tad taller but has a significantly smaller footprint, so will fit nicely into a confined space on your desk. The extra height has been put to good use with a larger paper tray that holds up to 250 sheets of A4 – rather than the HL-L8240CDW's 150 sheets.

“Produces high-quality mono and vibrant colour prints at a reasonable cost”

The LaserJet Pro can connect to your home network via Wi-Fi or Ethernet cable, letting you print from any device. Alternatively, you can simply connect it to your PC via USB if you prefer. It has all the features you might want for a home office, including double-sided printing and the ability to handle envelopes.

This is a traditional laser printer, whereas the Brother model uses LEDs to achieve similarly high-quality prints. It's a tad slower, with a quoted print speed of 26 pages per minute (ppm) rather than the Brother's 30ppm. That's still faster than a typical inkjet, such as our current favourite, the Epson EcoTank ET-2830 (£200 from www.snipca.com/50202, reviewed in Issue 676 – see page 33), which manages just 12ppm.

Out of the box, you'll get a set of introductory cartridges, which won't get you very far. They'll print around 600 mono pages and 500 colour – after that

SPECIFICATIONS

2in screen • Colour and black toner cartridges pre-installed • 250-sheet main tray • 600x600dpi print quality • Auto-duplex • USB, Ethernet or Wi-Fi connection • 254x390x419mm (HxWxD) • 13.8kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/51219



you'll need to buy your own.

The highest-capacity cartridges available for this printer will churn out up to 3,200 mono pages and 2,500 colour. This works out at around 3.3p per page for black text and 14.5p for colour. That's pretty reasonable for a laser printer, which typically have higher running costs, especially for colour prints.

And the LaserJet Pro's mono printing costs work out cheaper than the HL-L8240CDW. That said, if you intend to print in bulk on a regular basis you'd be better off with an ink-tank inkjet from the likes of Canon or Epson. The EcoTank ET-2830, for example, does the job for around 0.5p per page.

Nevertheless, if quality is important to you, black text looks significantly sharper than anything an inkjet can produce. This is because the laser-fused toner doesn't bleed into paper in the same way. This means blacks are satisfyingly dark while colour documents are vibrant – though it isn't great at printing photographs.

VERDICT A solid laser printer for home office work that won't take up too much space, but it's best at printing mono pages



ALTERNATIVE Brother HL-L8240CDW £274

Lower price and faster at printing, but it's larger and the running costs are marginally more expensive



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Copilot+ PCs



What are they?

Copilot+ (www.snipca.com/51226) is a new initiative from Microsoft that specifies a PC configuration that's designed to get the most from new Windows features. A Copilot+ PC must have a processor with a built-in NPU (neural processing unit) that's capable of at least 40 TOPS (trillions of operations per second). It also needs at least 16GB RAM and a 256GB SSD.

How do they work?

An NPU is a separate core built into a processor that performs simple instructions at phenomenal speeds. It's a bit like how a GPU helps a processor by doing the hard work needed to render 3D graphics on screen – only here it's all about doing AI-based tasks.

What are the specs?

At the moment the only processor with an NPU powerful enough to qualify is the Qualcomm Snapdragon X Elite, which runs at 45 TOPS. This is a laptop processor, so all current Copilot+ computers are laptops, such as the Asus Vivobook S 15 OLED, reviewed in Issue 688 (pictured). Intel and AMD have announced that they will be launching compatible processors soon.

They come with a special version of Windows that has unique tools. These include a version of graphics editor Paint that can create high-quality images from either a written description or your own rough sketch.



Can I change it later?

No, you have to buy a Copilot+ PC to use the new Windows features, and you can't add them later if you upgrade individual components.

SECURITY CAMERA | £250 from Amazon www.snipca.com/51209

Ring Spotlight Cam Pro Solar

Sun protection

The biggest hassle when installing home-security cameras is getting power to them. Wired cameras usually need holes drilling in walls and cables running through them into the house, while wireless options need their batteries charging on a regular basis. The Ring Spotlight Cam Pro Solar doesn't fall into either of these two traps. Instead it's a bundle of the company's Spotlight Cam Pro (£200 from www.snipca.com/51224) and Solar Panel USB-C (£50 from www.snipca.com/51225).

“Battery is strong enough to work even during rainy days”

But is the solar panel powerful enough to keep the camera's battery charged? We found it to be fine having tested it for a couple of months, even during the many rainy days in June and July.

The two units are connected by a two-metre USB-C cable, which discreetly plugs in to the back of each, though the cable is still visible when the devices are

mounted in position.

The footage – day and night – is crystal clear. This is captured in 1080p resolution with HDR, which made it easy to identify the cause of any detected motion and provided a sharp live view at any time. Its lens has a 140-degree horizontal and 80-degree vertical field of view, and is incredibly sensitive.

The benefit of its colour night vision is not always guaranteed, however. It can only be activated when you turn on the camera's built-in lights, which operate for only 30 seconds before automatically switching off. At other times you're restricted to black-and-white footage.

As well as the light, the camera has a speaker, which can sound a siren-like noise in an emergency or let you talk with anyone nearby. The siren is piercing, measuring 92 decibels. However, conversations can be held at a more

SPECIFICATIONS

1080p resolution • Colour night vision • 140-degree horizontal, 80-degree vertical field of view • 2x 3000K spotlights • Remote-activated siren • Two-way talk • 144x81x78mm (camera), 205x169x12mm (solar panel - HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/51209



reasonable volume and work well.

All new Ring devices come with a free 30-day trial of Ring Protect, which grants access to recorded footage and lets you share and save videos. When the trial ends you either have to pay an ongoing basic price of £4.99 a month or lose all the videos saved. It's worth doing, but it's an ongoing cost that needs to be taken into consideration before you buy.

VERDICT A security camera that's easy to install and requires little in the way of running maintenance, but watch out for ongoing subscription costs



ALTERNATIVE Ring Outdoor Camera Solar £120 A cheaper solar-powered alternative for people who don't need spotlights or two-way communication



WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

Is your favourite desktop PC still worth buying?

Q I am planning to replace my ageing desktop PC and the Palicomp AMD Cobra (£400 from Palicomp at www.snipca.com/43515, pictured – see page 30) seems an absolute bargain and meets my budget. As it has been your favourite for some time, I was wondering – is it



still a decent option and can it be upgraded to Windows 12 if and when it arrives?

Neil Howells

A The Palicomp AMD Cobra was launched at the end of 2022, so it has been around for a while. Also, its AMD Ryzen 5 5600G processor is slower than AMD's latest chips, so the Cobra's performance will lag behind PCs launched this year. However, the latest processors rarely come in £400 desktop PCs, and the Cobra remains perfectly

capable of running standard Windows software. There's a small chance that a future version of Windows may require something this PC lacks, but that seems unlikely any time soon.

Bear in mind the Cobra doesn't have its own graphics card, so games won't run smoothly, and you'll need to add a Wi-Fi card when you buy if you want it to connect to your home network wirelessly.



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

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Carol Doyle, Surrey

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TRANSFORMED CONSERVATORY

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Mr and Mrs Davies Somerset

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Reviews

HEADSET | £100 from Argos www.snipca.com/51202

Turtle Beach Stealth 600 Gen 3

Talking heads

US company Turtle Beach has made a decent set of wireless headphones with a microphone, which you can use for listening to music, chatting to your family and gaming – all for an affordable price.

The list of features is impressive, including its huge 80-hour battery life. We didn't need to charge these headphones once while testing them, which is impressive.

Like most headphones, you can fiddle around with the settings using PC software or an app (depending on what you're connected to), but they're also well served by physical controls on the unit itself. These let you change the volume,

SPECIFICATIONS

50mm speaker drivers • Uni-directional microphone
• 80-hour battery life • Two-metre charging cable •
218x198x95mm • 301g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/51202

adjust the audio and swap between its two connection options – 2.4GHz Wi-Fi (using a supplied USB dongle) or Bluetooth 5.2.

Turtle Beach's Swarm app, available for Windows, phones and tablets, gives you a wide array of tweaking options, from the level of **noise cancellation** to equaliser settings that adjust bass and treble. We were particularly impressed by the **AI-assisted noise cancellation** and by the quality of the microphone's audio.

Certain features, such as the smart mic noise cancellation and options to adjust how it captures your voice are welcome additions you'd normally see on more expensive models. If you only want to listen to music the mic can be pushed back into the main unit when not in use, which also automatically mutes it.

The tuning of its 50mm **speaker drivers**



is intended to create a powerful bass sound, which makes it great for watching action movies or playing games.

VERDICT Versatile headphones with a tuck-away microphone that are great for meetings, movies and gaming

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Logitech Zone Vibe Wireless £129 Smaller, lighter headphones that are better for work than play



LISTENING DEVICE | £96 per year from Earzz www.earzz.com

Earzz Monitors

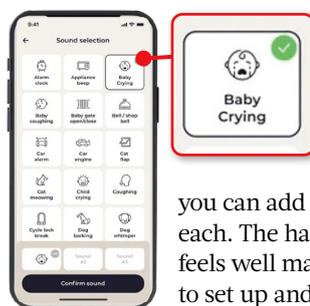
Neither hear nor there

Earzz is a UK-based service that helps you hear things in other parts of your home. This might be because you're in a different room – such as when monitoring a baby, listening out for a kitchen timer going off, or perhaps just because you have hearing difficulties.

It uses a system of devices with microphones that listen for noises but ignore speech – to ensure your privacy is maintained. When the monitors hear something it deems important, it sends an alert to an app on your smartphone (pictured above), so you can read a message that explains what's

SPECIFICATIONS

USB-C • 2.4GHz Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 4.2 (for pairing) •
Eight-hour battery life • 39x48x48mm (HxWxD)
• Six-month warranty www.earzz.com



happening.

The system costs £96 a year, which provides one listening device, though

you can add more for £79.99 each. The hardware is basic, but feels well made and it's simple to set up and use.

Each listening device can run on its own rechargeable battery for around eight hours, so are usually best left plugged in via the included **USB-C** cable. They can be set to listen for up to six of the 20 sounds (including cat meowing, child crying and kitchen appliance beeping). Phone notifications arrive quickly, often within just a couple of seconds, and the app keeps a record of



every time the device is triggered.

The gadget is generally good at picking out doorbells and alarms, but our test unit once mistook a smoke alarm for an 'appliance beep', which isn't ideal.

VERDICT An interesting device that can help the hard of hearing around the home, but it's expensive and occasionally misidentifies noises

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Signalux From £72 An alternative listening system that sends alerts to an illuminated tower unit rather than a smartphone



SMART TV | £138 from Amazon www.snipca.com/51251

TCL 32SF540K

One to watch

Chinese manufacturer TCL has used a variety of operating systems on previous TVs, including Roku, Google TV and Android TV. Now, for the first time, it's adding Amazon Fire TV to the list.

Amazon makes its own 32in Fire TV, the 2-Series (£250 from www.snipca.com/49979, reviewed in Issue 682), but this model is almost half the price. The question is, then – does it represent better value for money?

“A big budget TV with Amazon Fire TV and a decent screen”

The answer is a resounding ‘yes’. At first glance the set looks typical for a budget model. There’s no hiding its plastic finish and flimsy feet. But the slim bezel around the edge of the screen adds a touch of class that you don’t often get at this price. The screen itself is very light, so the feet won’t have problems supporting it. It also makes it easier to hang on a wall.

The Fire TV operating system has plenty going for it. Anyone who’s used the Prime Video app on other devices will be familiar with it, and it feels slick and responsive. It has all the streaming services you might want, and includes the UK’s major terrestrial catch-up services via the Freeview Play app.

It comes with a typical Fire TV remote, though replaces the Amazon Music button with Apps. It also offers access to Amazon’s Alexa voice assistant. However, unlike Amazon’s smart speakers, it doesn’t listen to you all the time. Instead you have to press the Alexa button when you want to speak a command.

Unusually for a 32in TV it has a Full HD 1080p-resolution panel. It uses contrast-rich VA technology rather than IPS, which typically provides wider viewing angles, and it’s lit directly from



the back rather than the sides. These are all good indications for high picture quality as long as you aren’t watching it from the side of the room.

Although it’s sharper than the image on the Amazon Fire Series 2 TV, the picture isn’t as bright while the colours aren’t as accurate. However, it’s not far off and is decent for the price. Contrast drops off significantly at wider angles, but for a small room where people are likely to be watching front and centre, it’s absolutely fine. The 32SF540K’s budget nature is more apparent in its sound. It has DTS and Dolby Audio, but the speakers aren’t powerful enough to make the most of these.

SPECIFICATIONS

1080p 1920x1080-pixel resolution • 32in VA screen • 60Hz refresh rate • 2x HDMI ports • 467x716x180mm (HxWxD) • 3.4kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/51251

VERDICT The build is a little flimsy and the speakers lack power, but the picture is decent for the price



ALTERNATIVE Amazon Fire TV 32in 2-series £250 Amazon’s own 32in Fire TV has a lower-resolution screen, but overall picture quality is better



DO I REALLY NEED...

A smart lock that unlocks with a wave?

What is it?

Philips has launched the 5000 Series Smart Deadbolt (www.snipca.com/51254, pictured) – a smart lock that can be fitted to a door in place of a regular lock.



What does it do?

There are a number of ways it can unlock a door, but the most interesting is that you can wave your hand in front of the sensor on the lock and it will open for anyone it recognises. This works by scanning the veins in your hand. You can also set schedules, so certain people can only access at specific times and set it to open with a PIN code or by using the Philips Home phone app.

What’s the catch?

At the moment it’s only available in the US, where it costs \$360 (£280).

So can I do without it?

Yes – it’s a lot more expensive than just getting a few spare keys cut.

NEXT ISSUE

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

LAPTOP

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus
£999 from www.snipca.com/50079
Tested Issue 683



This laptop 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. It also comes with 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
£299 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
£679 from www.snipca.com/50039
Tested Issue 667



With a much brighter screen than our previous favourite – the Galaxy Tab S8 – this is perfect for watching TV. It also has a faster processor, so tasks feel smoother, even with several windows open. £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
£329 from www.snipca.com/46332
Tested Issue 660

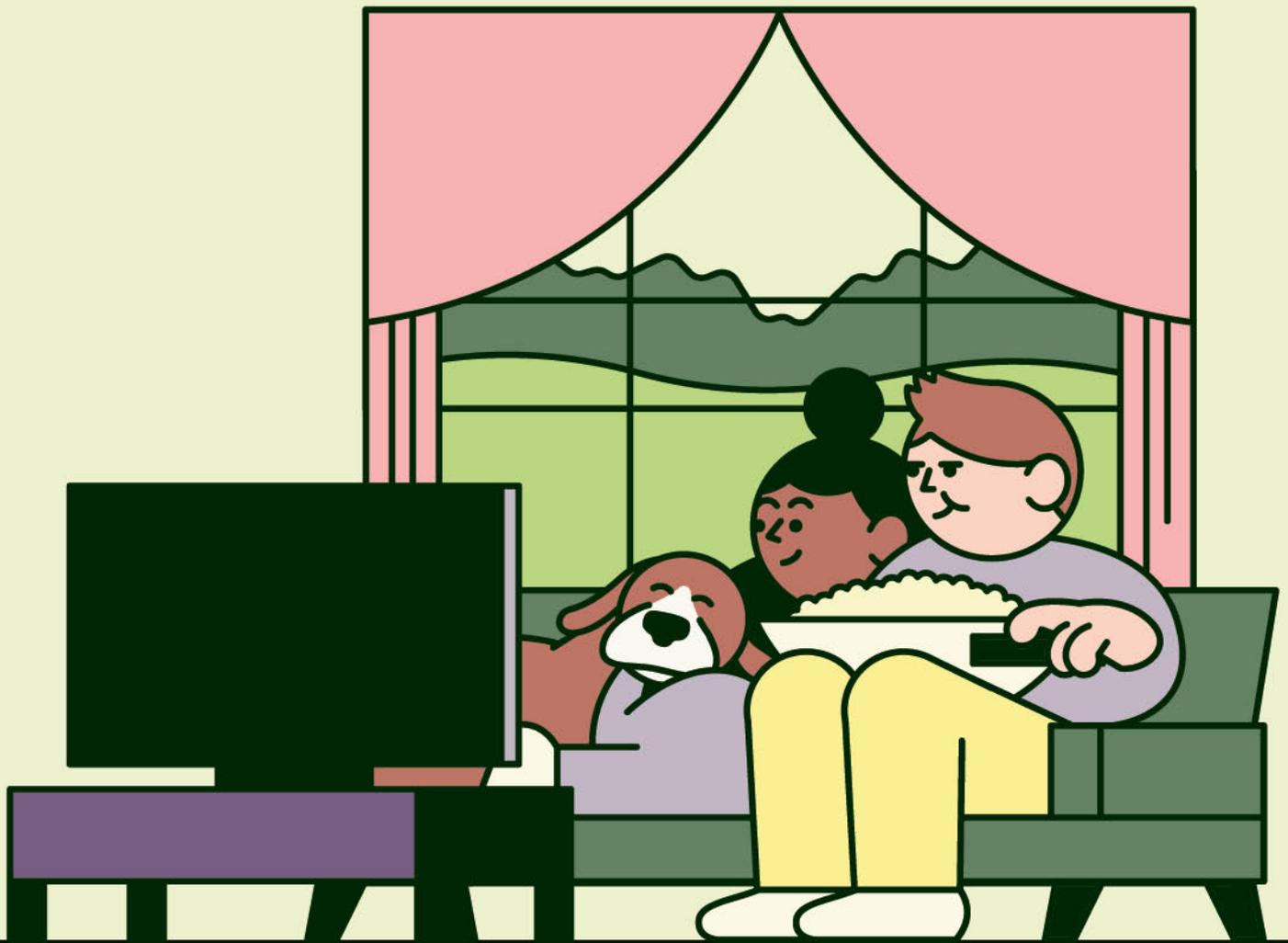


A cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, this uses AI to add clarity to photos, and lasts an impressive 10 hours. Has a fast processor and 8GB RAM to supercharge performance.

ALTERNATIVE 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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COMPARE

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

MINI PC

Minisforum UM780XTX
£639 from www.snipca.com/48917
Tested Issue 676



This powerful machine currently costs less 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
£199 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. It has 32GB storage and Bluetooth for playing audiobooks.

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

SECURITY SOFTWARE

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



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

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

WEBCAM

Logitech C925e Business Webcam
£58 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

BenQ BL2790QT
£316 from www.snipca.com/51178
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. £260 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 £86; 2TB costs £119.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £72 from www.snipca.com/37304

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 8 Majority Bluetooth MP3 Players

Winner of a Recommended award in Issue 686 (page 28), Majority's Bluetooth MP3 Player is a cutting-edge device designed for the ultimate music experience on the go. It amplifies the richness and depth of your music, helping you to immerse yourself in every intricate note.

It comes with premium wired earphones, or you can connect wirelessly to your own Bluetooth headphones. It weighs just 33 grams, has a sports clip for convenience and


MAJORITY

has a playtime of 34 hours. 16GB of storage is included, letting you save up to 4,000 songs, but you can expand this to 128GB by buying an SD card. Charge it and transfer music through USB-C, then smoothly

navigate your library with the 1.9in HD colour screen. You can also record audio notes, use a stopwatch and create folders and playlists.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/51146 and submit your details by midnight



Tuesday 13 August. Good luck!

You can buy Majority's MP3 Player for £34.95 from Amazon (www.snipca.com/50654). For details of more Majority products, including speakers, soundbars, turntables and digital radios, visit www.majority.co.uk.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830
£225 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. £170 from www.snipca.com/49863

SMART TV

Samsung Q60B
£490 from www.snipca.com/51020
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. £787 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. £248 from www.snipca.com/49161

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HOW TO...

Edit your photos without ever ruining them

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Darktable **Time required:** One hour



When you tweak a photo in a standard image editor, you can easily undo any mistakes – but only if you haven't saved and closed it. As soon as you do, those changes are baked in, and the next time you open it you'll only be able to apply edits on top of the changes you made last time. Do this too many times, and you'll probably end up with a worse picture than you started with. The alternative is non-destructive editing. Here's how it works.

I'm writing this in my south-facing office on a scorching day in June. It's hot and bright and I can't work elsewhere in my home. How could I make things more comfortable? Well, I could remove the

windows to let in some air, but it would still be too bright. Or, I could brick them up to give me some shade and keep out the heat – but I'd probably regret that decision in winter when it would rob me of even the few hours of half-light you get in January.

A better solution would be to open a window or pull down the blind – or do both. And, as my blind is slatted, I could go further, adjusting the louvres throughout the day until – when evening comes – pulling it back up entirely.

None of these changes would be permanent. I could simply constantly adjust them from one day to the next

according to my needs, no matter how many times I leave and return to my house – or I might not apply them at all if I chose.

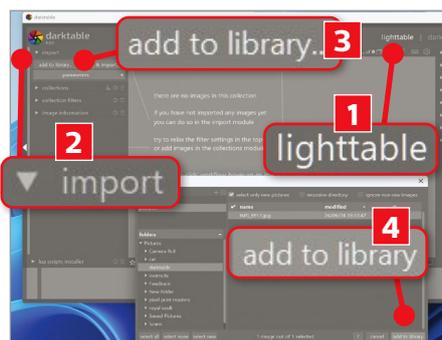
Non-destructive editing works in exactly the same way. It's a process that preserves your original image by allowing you to apply changes that can be rolled back or adjusted later, even if you save and close your file in the interim and return to it the next day, next week, next year or even several decades later.

Do it right, and it's literally impossible to ruin your photo by applying an unwise edit. Darktable is one of the best non-destructive photo editors, as we'll explain.

1 Import your photos
Darktable 4.8 was released in June. To install it, click the link below Windows at www.darktable.org/install and – when it's downloaded – launch the file.

Follow the instructions, then run the program, which will open with its 'lighttable' module active – as indicated by the word being highlighted at the top right of the window (1 in our screenshot right).

The lighttable is where you'll import



Start by importing one or more images into Darktable

and edit your photos, and it gets its name from the illuminated tables that film photographers use to backlight their slides and negatives to make them easier to see.

Click the small arrow beside 'import' (2) to expand this section, then click 'add to library...' (3) and navigate to the photo you want to work with. Either click the relevant photo if you only want to import one, or click 'select all' if you want to import a whole folder of images, then click 'add to library' at the bottom (4).



We levelled the horizon using the 'rotate and perspective' tool

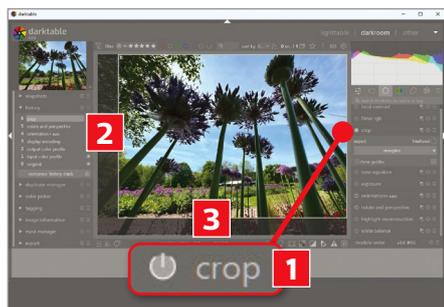
2 Crop to improve focus

Double-click the image you want to edit to open it in the 'darkroom' module. Using our picture as an example (see above), there are several things we need to change, including a very wonky horizon. However, more problematic is that the background is so bright, and the tall purple flowers in the foreground – which stretch to the sky – are in silhouette. That's a shame, because they were the subject we really wanted to capture.

To correct the horizon, we clicked the 'base' tab (1 in our screenshot above), then 'rotate and perspective' (2) to reveal the rotation slider. Dragging this to the left rotates the image clockwise. Drag it slowly and keep an eye on the image so you don't take it too far.

We stopped when the green roof of the café (almost hidden among the flowerbeds) was horizontal, even though this meant there was still a little slant in the flowerbeds themselves. Notice how Darktable has automatically cropped the image so the frame is still filled with usable pixels. The area around the edge that will be lost has been darkened.

The image looks a bit unbalanced now, with the left-most flower stretching almost twice as far into the frame as the right-most flower. To fix a similar problem in your image, click 'crop' (1 in our screenshot below) then hover close to the edge of the frame with the empty area and your cursor will change to a



Any area that's shaded will be removed

How I edit photos

This is exactly how I work with my photos. I know that my tastes change over time and I can feel entirely different about one day's work just 24 hours later. By preserving my original photos in their unedited states I can always go back to the master copy if I later decide I want to start again from scratch.



Nik Rawlinson



How do you edit photos?

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

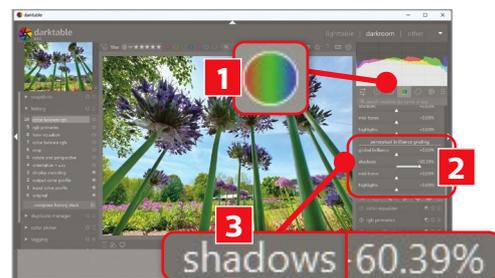
double-headed arrow. Click and hold while dragging this towards the centre until you reach the new margin position. The area that's shaded will be removed. As you can see, we removed areas on two edges: left (2) and bottom (3). Now the tall flowers really dominate the frame.

3 Adjust the tone and brilliance

Cropping into the subject before starting work on the colours and light means we can focus on the part of the image that matters, with fewer distractions. Click the 'quick access panel' tab (1 in our screenshot below) and look at the 'tone equaliser' (2). This works much like a graphic equaliser on an 1980s hi-fi music system, where sliding the markers up increases the prominence of a particular element within the mix, and sliding them down reduces the prominence.

On a hi-fi, those elements are audio tones, with low tones (bass) on the left and high tones (treble) on the right. In Darktable, the elements are visual tones, with dark tones (shadows) on the left and bright tones (highlights) on the right.

Our problem is with the shadows in the foreground, so we'll only adjust the markers on the left of the equaliser and not touch those on the right. Start by clicking the adjustment marker under -6, and dragging it up. As you'll see, the



Dragging the brilliance slider has given our image some punch

markers to the left and right also come up, but not by as much, to maintain a smooth curve.

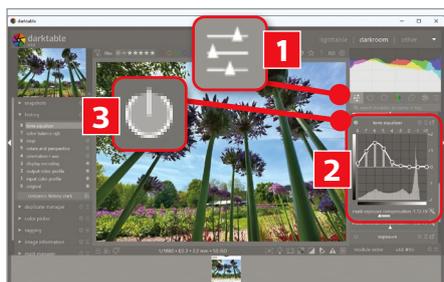
Experiment with higher and lower positions, and with dragging the markers to either side until you find a result you're happy with. To quickly preview before and after states, click the power button for that module (3) on and off. Don't go too far here, as we're also going to apply an adjustment to the photo's 'brilliance'.

Brilliance is an all-in-one adjustment that ignores colours and focuses solely on light, setting the darkest point of the image to be true black, tweaking exposure and bringing out detail. Switch to the 'color' tab (1 in our screenshot above), click the 'color brilliance rgb' header, and scroll down to the 'perceptual brilliance grading' section where you'll see four sliders (2).

As we only want to brighten the shadows while leaving the highlights as they are, we'll drag the 'shadows' slider to the right to increase the strength of the brilliance setting only in the darker areas of the image. We can go quite far here, with the ideal for our particular image being somewhere around 60 per cent (3).

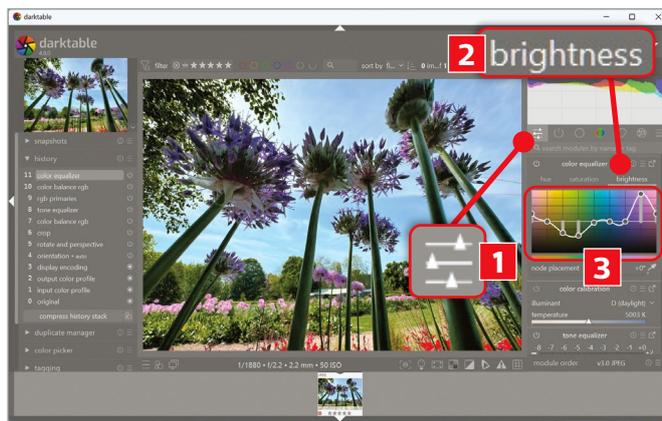
4 Change the colours

Our image is much brighter, but the purple flowers still don't look as vibrant as they do in real life and the grass and trees look unnatural.



Darktable's tone equalizer lets you tweak the colours in an image

We've used the colour equaliser to increase red tones, turn down green and keep blues the same



Create multiple versions of your original image, or start editing from scratch



In short, while we've fixed the lighting issues we still need to work on the colours.

Click the 'quick access panel' tab (1 in our screenshot above), then the 'brightness' tab (2 within the 'color equalizer'. This works much like the 'tone equalizer' in that dragging a particular slider higher increases the brightness of the tone it represents, and dragging it lower does the reverse. As you can see (3, we've dragged the red tones at the left and right edges of the spectrum higher, dragged the greens and yellows lower, and left the blues where they are as we don't want to change the sky.

This is only possible because, rather than writing the changes to the picture itself, the editing process is writing them to a separate file that lives alongside the original photo.

6 Create duplicates and start editing from scratch

Open File Explorer and navigate to the folder containing your image. You'll now see that it's been joined by another file (a 'sidecar' file), with the same name, and an `.xmp` extension. Right-click the `.xmp` file and open it in your browser to see what it contains.

It might look confusing at first, but you should start to notice some familiar terms, like 'exposure', 'colorbalancergb', and 'crop'. These are the edits you applied to the image, and the long, seemingly random strings that appear in quotes after them are the settings that relate to that adjustment.

The next time you open your image in Darktable, it will also open this list of adjustments and apply them in an instant. The same list of changes will appear in the 'history' panel, so you can step back through them if you want to revert to an earlier edit. The controls in the right-hand sidebar will be in the positions at which you left them, so you can drag them to new positions to change your settings.

Better yet, because you've not actually edited your original picture, you can see how it would look if you were to apply a whole set of other adjustments without you losing the work you've just done on your first version.

Return to Darktable and click the small arrow to the left of 'duplicate manager'

(1 in our screenshot above). This reveals a thumbnail of your edited picture.

Click 'original' (2 to create a second copy of the unedited picture and it will be added to the stack. You can now start the editing process all over again, applying a completely different set of changes, then click back and forth between the two versions – and any others that you create – to see which you prefer.

Editing photos this way is very similar to the process you'd have gone through in a darkroom years ago, increasing and decreasing exposure times until you produced the perfect print. Only here, you don't have the expense of wasted photographic paper.

And there's another benefit: you can save drive space. When you create a duplicate in Darktable, you don't actually duplicate the photo. All you do is create a new **plain text** file in which you store the edits you want to make to this second 'copy'. It's unlikely this file will take up more than a few kilobytes, which is a fraction of the space that would be needed if you generated a second photo and worked on that from scratch.

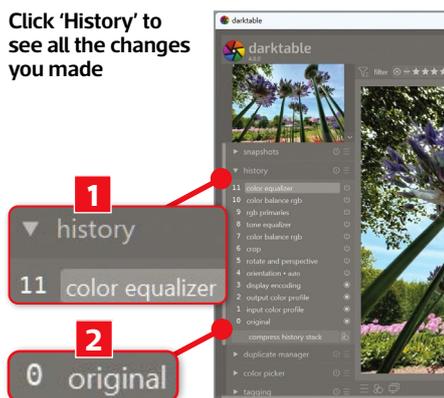
When you've found a combination you're happy with, click the triangle beside 'export'

5 Check all your changes

We're just about there, but after making so many changes it's difficult to work out how much things have improved. We'll use Darktable's 'history' panel to check. This sits in the left-hand sidebar where it shows that we've made 11 adjustments (1 in our screenshot below). Some of these were applied automatically when we imported the image.

By clicking '0 original' (2, we can see what the unedited picture looks like, and we can similarly click any of the other stages within the History stack to see what the picture looks like at that point.

Click 'History' to see all the changes you made



When you're happy with your edits, export the finished product

(1 in our screenshot left) then click 'export' (2 to save a version of your edited photo to your drive. As long as you've left the export settings in their defaults, this won't overwrite the original image, as Darktable will give the edited copy a unique name. That means, if you later change your mind about something in the exported version, you can delete it, open Darktable again, make a few more changes to (or remove a few changes from) the one stored there and export another copy.

Turn off Windows' most annoying features

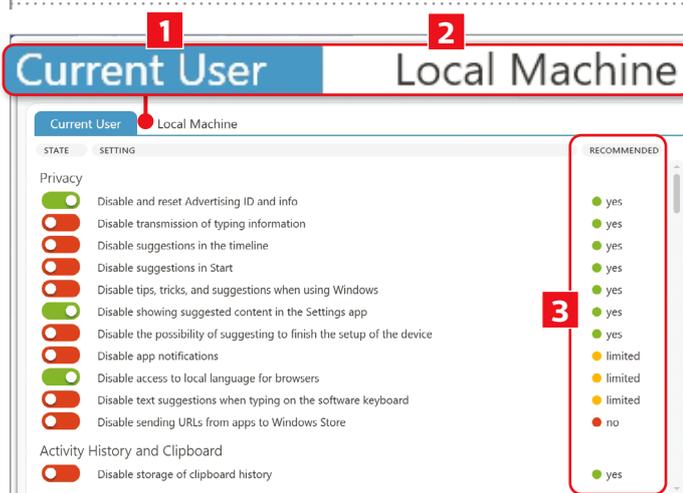
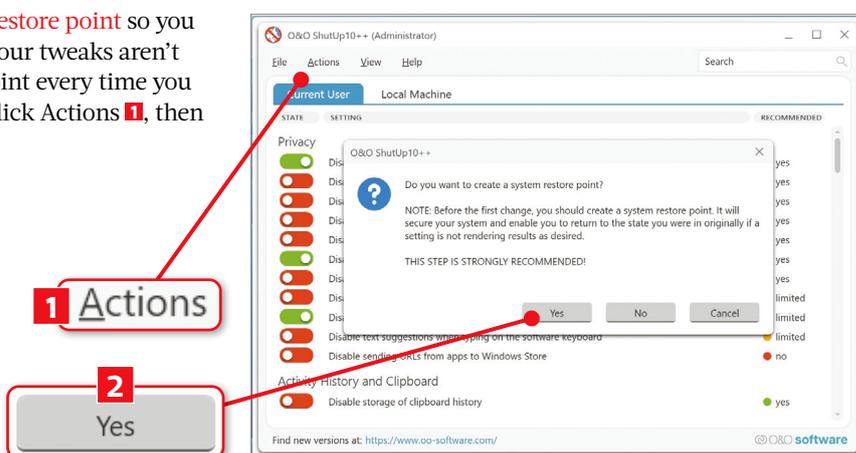
What you need: O&O ShutUp 10++

Time required: 30 minutes

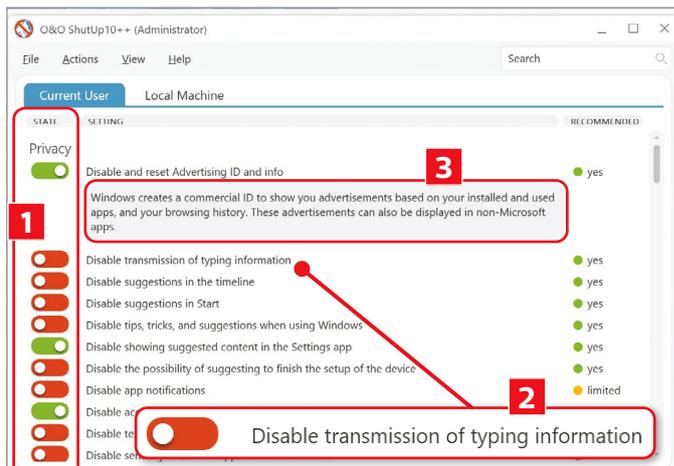
You can turn off Windows features you don't like by editing your PC's registry, but this can be fiddly. It's better to use a program that turns registry options into simple sliders you can click. The best tool for this job is O&O ShutUp 10++. Not only are its settings easy to use, but it also updates regularly to add options that Microsoft has introduced. It's free to download and install from www.snipca.com/51306 – just click the green Download button on the right.



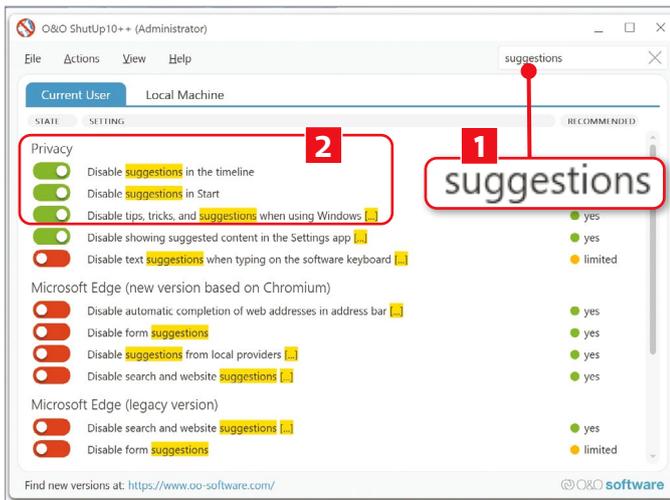
STEP 1 Before you do anything create a **system restore point** so you can undo your changes if the results of your tweaks aren't what you expected. Creating a restore point every time you use ShutUp gets around that problem. To do so, click Actions **1**, then 'Create a system restore point', followed by Yes **2**.



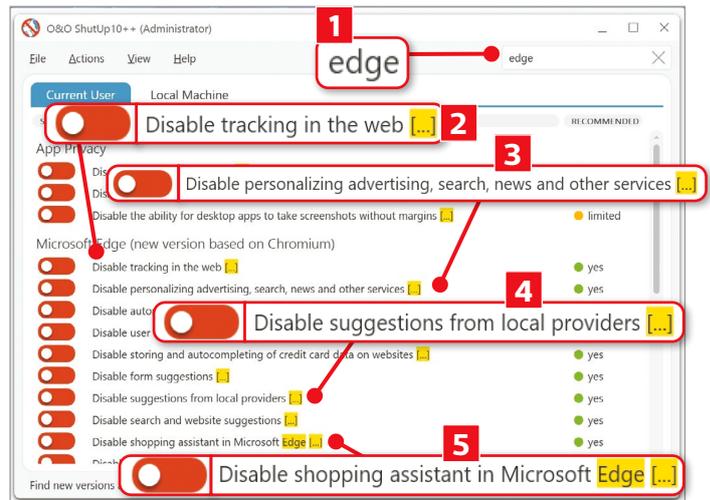
STEP 2 Scroll through the lists of options in both the Current User **1** and Local Machine **2** tabs. Current User settings only apply to the account that's logged in when the change is made, while Local Machine settings apply to the whole PC, regardless of who's using it. While the program lets you change a wide range of Windows settings, ShutUp doesn't recommend that you use them all. It uses a system of green, amber and red dots in the Recommended column **3** to indicate this. We also advise that you leave the red options unchanged.



STEP 3 Options are enabled/disabled using the sliders in the State column **1**. Be aware that when you switch on a slider, you may be switching off an option. For example, this slider **2** disables transmission of typing information only when it's turned on. If you need a fuller explanation for any of the options, click its heading to see a detailed description of the change you're about to make **3**.

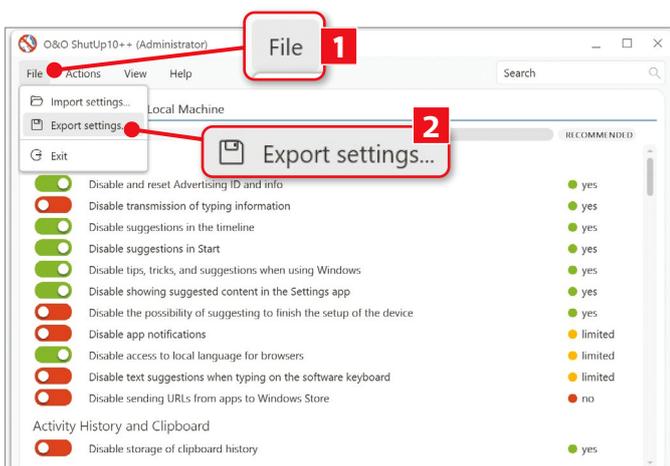
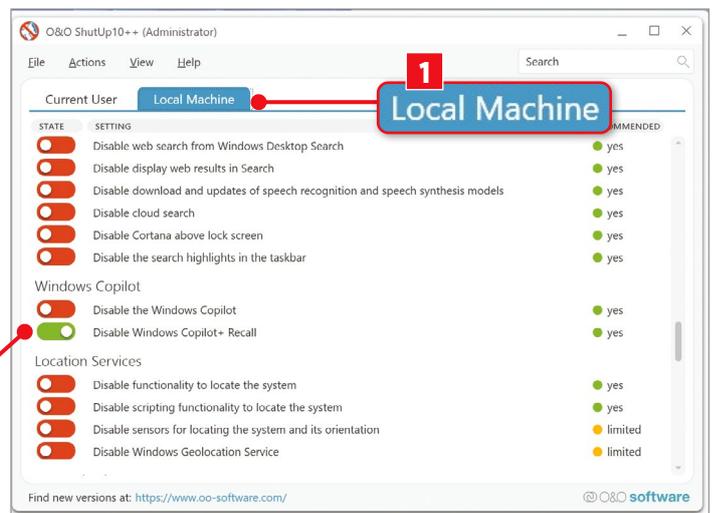


STEP 4 We'll start by turning off adverts in the Start menu and elsewhere in Windows. These have become more common in recent months. Click in the search box top right and type **suggestions** **1**, then press Enter. This lists all options containing that keyword ('suggestions' is what Microsoft euphemistically calls adverts). Now click the sliders next to the first three options in the Privacy section **2** on the Current User tab so they turn green and disable ads.



STEP 5 If you use Edge as your default browser, you may want to restrict some of its features. Again, use the search box to search for **edge** **1** and switch off any unwanted options. For example, you can disable tracking **2**, personalised ads and news feeds **3**, suggestions from local providers **4** (ie, adverts from local companies) and Edge's shopping assistant **5**.

STEP 6 Microsoft recently postponed its Recall feature, which takes screenshots of your Windows 11 desktop at regular intervals and saves them so you have a record of what you've done on your PC if you need it. It was widely slated as a security risk because it could grab private chats, bank details and other sensitive information. However, we expect Microsoft to bring it back soon, so you might want to turn it off in advance. To do so, on the Local Machine tab **1**, scroll down to Windows Copilot and click the slider next to Disable Windows Copilot+ Recall **2**.



STEP 7 When you're happy with the changes you've made, make sure you save them, because the next time you update Windows, some of the settings will be rolled back to their defaults. Exporting them at this point would save you from having to adjust them manually after the next update. Click **File** **1** followed by 'Export settings...' **2** and save the file somewhere safe. Your settings are exported to a **plain-text** file with a **.cfg** extension. To restore them at a later date, click **File** followed by 'Import settings...' and select the file you exported earlier.

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

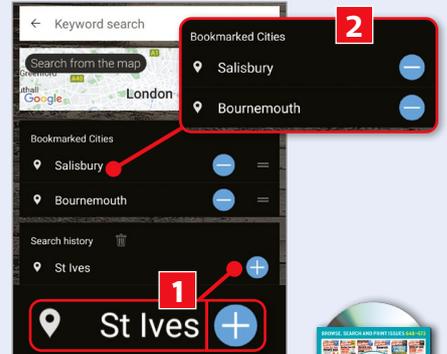
Bookmark cities in Weawow weather app

I took your advice and switched from the BBC's inadequate weather app to Weawow (Android www.snipca.com/51027; iOS www.snipca.com/51028). I like its design and accuracy, and have bookmarked five cities that I travel to regularly.

To do this, tap the search magnifying-glass icon at the top right, then search for a location in the bar above the map. Tap to choose the correct entry from the dropdown

menu (there will probably be lots of destinations from outside the UK). You'll then be shown the weather there. Now tap the magnifying-glass icon again and you'll see what you searched for in the 'Search history'. Tap the blue plus sign next to it (1 in our screenshot) and it will be added to the list of 'Bookmarked Cities' above (2). Tap one to see the weather there. Tapping the minus sign will remove the city from your bookmarked list.

Paul Burrows



Paul wins a copy of our 2023 Back Issue CD

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



SOFTWARE

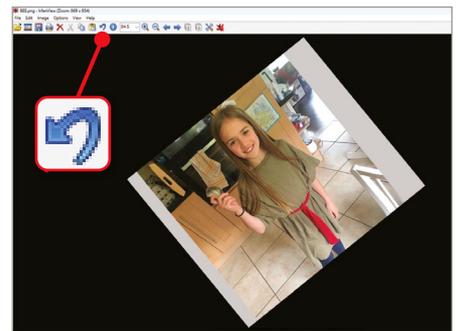
Stop your mouse jiggling when you use it again

✓ A big thank-you to Robert Irvine for introducing me to Move Mouse (www.snipca.com/51093) in Issue 688 (page 74). I always get annoyed by my PC going to sleep after only a few minutes of inactivity, so had been looking for a decent mouse-jiggling program for ages.

I didn't realise a tool with such a simple task could have so many clever settings. There's one option you should turn on to

make Move Mouse realise when you want to regain control over your cursor. Open the program then click the settings cog. Now click Behaviour on the right (1 in our screenshot below left), then turn on the 'Automatically stop when user activity detected' slider (2).

Gerry Colins



SOFTWARE

Use IrfanView or FastStone to rotate images

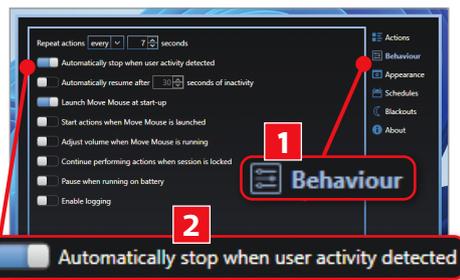
✓ When answering Colin Roberts' question in Issue 687 ('How can I rotate photos by just a few degrees?', page 20) you recommended Paint.net, but that's a very complicated program for such a straightforward job. This task is much simpler using IrfanView (www.irfanview.com), which is free and regularly updated. Just press Ctrl+U to open the tool. Best of all, it has an undo button if you don't get the rotation quite

right (see screenshot above).

Jim Barton

✓ Instead of Paint.net, Colin could try FastStone Image Viewer (www.faststone.org), which lets you fill in the missing bits of images using the Straightening option. I've been using it for many years, and find it's the only editing program I now need for everyday editing.

Roy Phillips



Why I stopped using...

Mp3tag

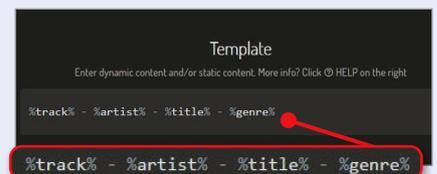
✓ I hope Morvyn Finch manages to merge all his song tags using Mp3tag (www.mp3tag.de), and your advice to him was useful (Issue 687, page 20). But I found the software confusing, and it required too much clicking. I wanted something more automated.

And what I use instead...

I was initially put off by One Tagger

(www.snipca.com/51201) because it seemed to be aimed at professional dance DJs, but it's fine for anyone to use. I tried it first with one group, and it identified and tagged all 40 songs in under one minute.

I asked it to tag my whole collection of about 4,000 tracks, and it completed the job in a couple of hours. I was a bit confused that it placed about 100 tracks into an 'Untagged' section, but then I realised these files had been corrupted and wouldn't play.



The best tool is 'Auto Rename', which does what it says. You just have to set how you want your track information to be ordered – ie, track, artist, title, genre (see screenshot).

Nick Mannister

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



AI Create Microsoft Designer images in landscape and portrait

✓ I've been impressed with Microsoft Designer (www.snipca.com/51150) since you recommended it in Issue 688's 'Why you must use AI' Cover Feature. In the past few weeks it has added the option to save images it generates in portrait and landscape modes. Before that you could only save them as squares.

Click 'Description' as usual, then type your request in the top bar, and click Generate. You'll then see the images it has created. Now click Size (1 in our screenshot above), then Portrait or Wide (2), followed by Generate again. You can then download as normal.

Peter Wishart

SOFTWARE

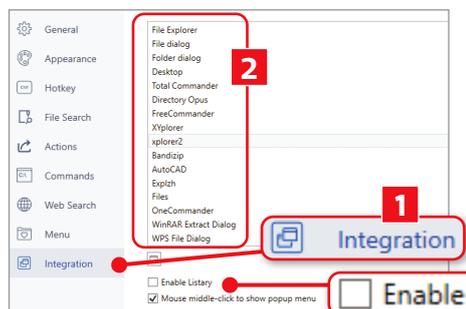
See which programs work with Listary

✓ Your excellent article on the search software Listary (www.listary.com) in Issue 688 (page 60) helped me understand better how the tool works. One tip I discovered for myself was finding out how many other file-management programs Listary works with by default.

Open the Options section in Listary then click Integration (1 in our screenshot below). You'll see the programs listed on the right (2). As well as File Explorer and Files, which you mention in your feature, these include Total Commander, XYplorer, Bandizip and AutoCAD.

If you don't want Listary to work with any of these, click to select it then untick the 'Enable Listary' box at the bottom (3).

Martin Reeve



Reader recommends...

Hisense 43in Freely TV £329 from www.snipca.com/51198

✓ It sounds like Sam Todd has been unlucky with his purchase of a Bush Freely TV (Letters, Issue 687). Like him, I've also bought a 43in Freely TV, but one made by Hisense, not Bush, and it's been great so far. But then, it does cost £329, almost £100 more than Sam's model.

I chose it because my new house doesn't have an aerial, so I don't have the option of Freeview. It's true that Freely doesn't have the breadth of content that Freeview offers, but I'm sure it'll improve in due course. Also, I don't find Freely's channel guide a "pain" like Sam does. Seems quite easy to me.

It's easy to set up, and picture and



sound quality are good, though I've attached my Samsung soundbar to the HDMI ARC port to boost the audio. You can change channels with your voice using Amazon Alexa in the remote control, but that's the only thing I can't get the hang of yet.

Brian Jordan

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

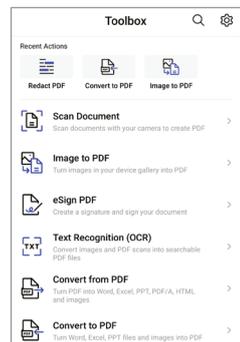
APPS

Use Xodo to access PDFs on Android

✓ Back in Issue 673 (page 53) you recommended uninstalling Foxit PDF Reader and switching to PDFgear (www.pdfgear.com). Well, because PDFgear doesn't support Android I never made the switch.

However, after reading your story about hackers exploiting a design flaw in Foxit (Issue 685, page 7), I took another look at PDF readers and came to a compromise. I now use PDFgear for Windows and Xodo for Android (www.snipca.com/51112, pictured above right).

I store my files online on Proton Drive (<https://proton.me/drive>), which is not supported in any PDF reader, Xodo included. However, because Xodo allows access to my system files, unlike most other PDF readers, I can navigate to the Proton Drive folder to open and edit them. I can highlight and write on the PDFs with the option to overwrite the original file or save a copy. I also like Xodo's clean interface, which uses dropdown right-click (context) menus and tabbed views. These simple features let me do what I want while I'm away from my PC and PDFgear.



Igor Griffiths

PRINTERS

Buy a printer with auto-feed scanner

✓ A few months ago I was in a similar position to Ruth Whitehouse (Issue 686, page 69), who has thousands of printed documents to scan. She wondered whether she could keep her old Epson XP-6100 multifunction

printer working, and you said that manually scanning so many documents would quickly become tiresome.

I wonder whether better advice to Ruth would be recommending she buy a new device with automatic sheet feeding. When I was faced with a mountain of documents to scan I looked for a multifunction device with automated feeding, and bought the Brother MFC-J4335DW (£114 from www.snipca.com/51140, pictured below). It scans very quickly, and cleared my backlog in just a few days.

Gareth Blunt



Browser Tips

FIREFOX

Delete your browsing data more easily

Firefox has several privacy features that Chrome lacks, including Enhanced Tracking Protection, which automatically blocks hidden trackers, and Total Cookie Protection, which stops cookies following you from site to site. However, it's long offered only basic and disparate options for clearing your cookies and site data, cached web content and browsing history.

Version 128 of the browser, released 9 July, addresses this weakness by introducing more sophisticated controls for deleting your browsing data. It brings all the settings together in one place, and – like Chrome – lets you choose to only clear data from a specific time range.

To access the improved options, click Firefox's three-line menu button and choose Settings then 'Privacy & Security'. Scroll down to the 'Cookies and Site Data'

section and click the Clear Data button.

Here you can choose to delete your History, 'Cookies and site data' (1 in our screenshot below left), 'Temporary cached files and pages' and 'Site settings' (such as permissions and preferences). Click the dropdown 'When:' menu (2 to specify the time range to clear data from – this can be anything from the last hour to the last day, or you can select Everything to wipe the whole lot. Click 'Clear' (3) to perform the deletion.

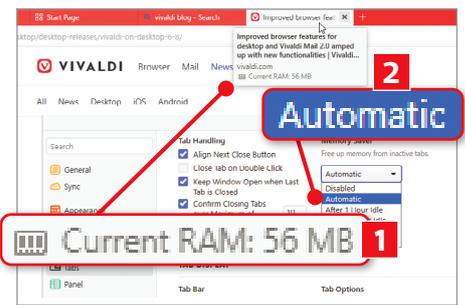
VIVALDI

See how much memory each tab is using

Vivaldi 6.8, released in June, introduced a raft of new features, including the option to import extensions from other Chromium browsers (see Issue 688, page 42). Another useful addition shows real-time memory usage for each browser tab, so you can identify web pages that are using excessive RAM.

Hover your cursor over a tab, and Vivaldi will display a 'Current RAM' figure in a tooltip, below the name and URL of the page (1 in our screenshot above right). Unlike the similar feature in Chrome, which shows only how much memory a page used when it initially loaded, Vivaldi keeps monitoring tabs to detect changes in RAM usage.

The tooltip also tells you if a tab has been set to 'hibernate' by the browser's Memory Saver



feature, which automatically frees up memory from inactive tabs. To change how long Vivaldi should wait before placing idle tabs in hibernation, click the menu button in the top-left corner and choose Settings followed by Tabs.

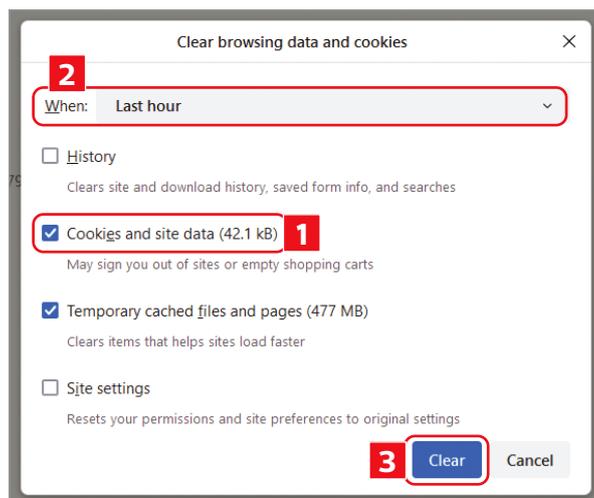
Scroll down to the Memory Saver section and select a length of time in the drop-down menu, from one to six hours. Alternatively, choose Automatic (2) to let Vivaldi decide for you, or Disabled to switch off the feature.

EDGE

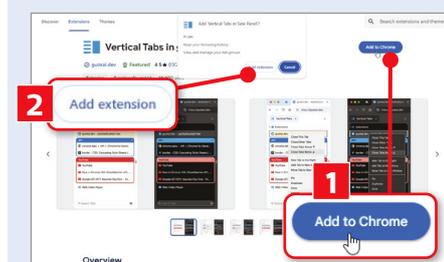
Generate AI themes from the sidebar

In Issue 686 (page 43), we explained how to use Microsoft's new AI Theme Generator to create your own themes for Edge. You can either enter a text prompt describing the contents of your desired theme, or modify one of Microsoft's theme templates.

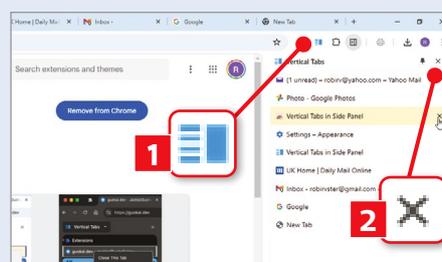
It's a fun feature but – unlike the AI assistant Copilot – it isn't fully integrated with Edge, so you'll need to visit the website (www.snipca.com/50624) to generate new themes. However, you can add a shortcut for the site to the browser's sidebar, giving you one-click



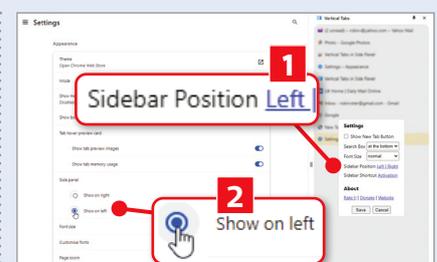
WORKSHOP Add vertical tabs to Chrome



1 Go to the Chrome Web Store and find the page for 'Vertical Tabs in Side Panel' (www.snipca.com/51210). Click 'Add to Chrome' (1) then 'Add extension' to install the extension in the browser (2).



2 Click the Extensions button then the Pin icon next to 'Vertical Tabs in Side Panel'. Click the new blue toolbar button (1) to display your tabs vertically on the right-hand side of the browser. Select a tab to switch to it or click the 'x' icon to close it (2).



3 To move vertical tabs to the left-hand side of the browser, click the Settings cog at the bottom of the side panel and click Left next to Sidebar Position (1). When the Appearance page opens, select 'Show on left' (2) under 'Side panel'.

BEST EXTENSION FOR...

Creating a shopping wishlist

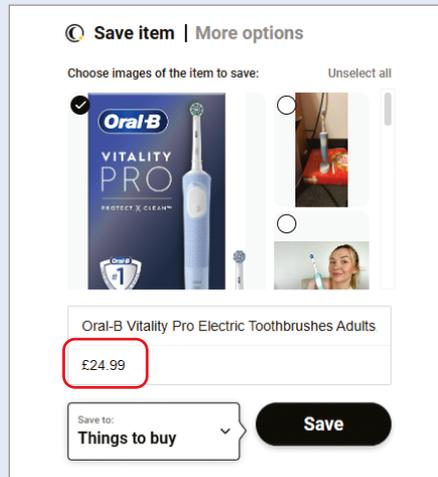
Moonsift

Chromium

www.snipca.com/51211

Last year, Amazon discontinued its Amazon Assistant extension, which let you compile a 'universal wishlist' of products you wanted to buy. Moonsift provides an excellent alternative that's even easier to use and works with any online store. Simply click its Save button to add an item to your wishlist, complete with a photo, direct URL and the current price (see screenshot).

You can create as many lists as you want, including one containing products you've already purchased so you don't buy



them again, and either share them with other people or keep them private. Items in your lists can be rearranged and deleted as required.

You need to sign up for a Moonsift account to use the extension, but this is completely free with no nags to upgrade to a premium version.

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

Chestr

www.snipca.com/51212

This extension also lets you create a universal wishlist, which you can sync with its app on your iPhone. However, it's more US-biased and intrusive than Moonsift.

access to the theme generator.

Open the AI Theme Generator website and click the Customise button (a plus sign) on Edge's sidebar. Select 'Open in sidebar' next to AI Theme Generator to view the site in a side panel, then right-click its sidebar button (this looks like the Microsoft logo - 1 in our screenshot below) and choose 'Pin to sidebar' 2.

You can now generate AI themes from wherever you are on the web by clicking the shortcut on the sidebar. Enter your text prompt and click 'Apply theme' 3 to add the result to Edge, or select 'Modify prompt' on an existing template and click 'Create theme'.

Note that you need to be signed into a Microsoft account to use AI Theme Generator. To remove an AI theme, go to Settings then Appearance and choose one

of the browser's simpler themes.

CHROME

Open Google Docs files in Reading mode

Chrome's 'Reading mode' removes the clutter from web pages to make it easier to focus on the core text. Streamlined articles are displayed in the browser's side panel, where you can adjust the font, text size, line spacing and background colour to suit your visual needs.

Chrome 127, released in July, expands the 'Reading mode' feature to cover Google Docs, too, so you can view simplified versions of documents that contain a variety of formatting and lots of images. This new option is currently an experiment, which you need to enable.

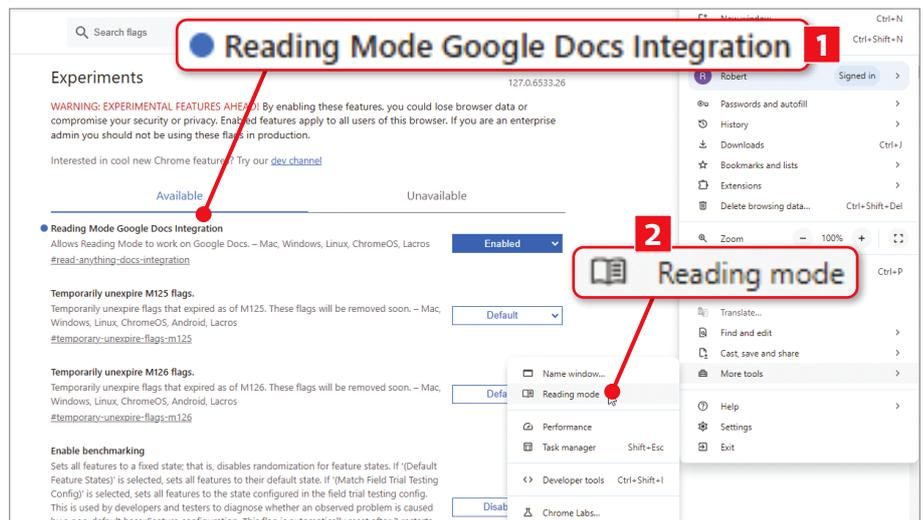
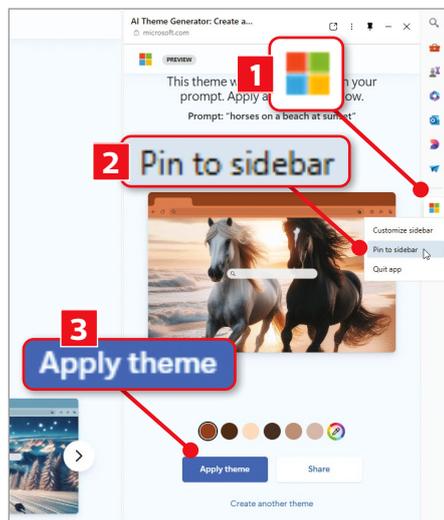
To do so, type `chrome://flags` into the

browser's address bar and press Enter to load the Experiments page. Search for the entry **Reading Mode Google Docs Integration** (1 in our screenshot below), select Enabled in its dropdown menu and click the button to relaunch Chrome.

When the browser reopens, open a file in Google Docs, click the three-dot menu button and select 'More tools', then 'Reading mode' 2. A text-only version of the document should then open in Chrome's side panel.

If not, try selecting some text on the page before switching to 'Reading mode'. We found that the feature works with **RTF, DOCX** and PDF files, but not on documents created in Google Docs.

Chrome's side panel can also be used to display vertical tabs, but only with the aid of an extension. See our Workshop opposite to learn more.



Phone and Tablet Tips

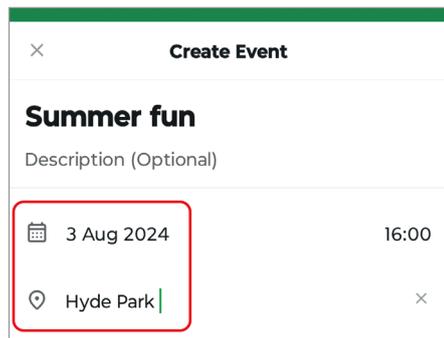
ANDROID & iOS

Create events in WhatsApp group chats

WhatsApp has added the option to create events in group chats, so you can plan meetings, parties and other get-togethers with the people you're talking to. Previously, this feature was limited to WhatsApp community groups, though it's long been available from WhatsApp's Meta stablemate, Facebook.

To create an event in a group chat (it's not possible in one-to-one conversations), tap the paper-clip (in Android) or plus-sign (in iOS) button in the message box, and choose Event in the panel that opens. Enter a name for the event, the proposed date, time and location (see screenshot below), and an optional description. If it's a virtual event, you can also add a call link.

Tap the Send button to share your event in the group chat. The other members can then tap the message to view further



information and respond. Note that you can't invite people who aren't in the group event, or forward the details to another chat.

To make changes to an event, tap the name of the group chat and choose Events then 'Edit event'. You can alter the name, date, time, location, or cancel the event altogether – the other group members will then be notified.

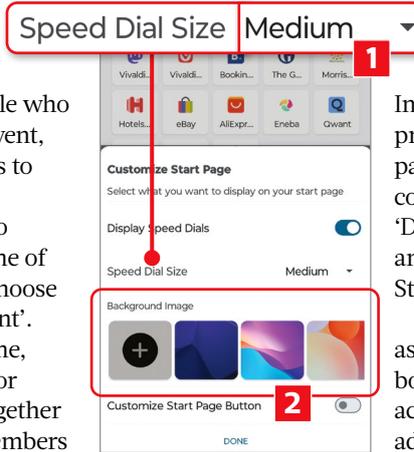
ANDROID & iOS

Customise your Start Page and bookmarks in Vivaldi

Vivaldi has updated its apps for Android (www.snipca.com/51222) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51223) with several new features for enhancing your mobile-browsing experience.

You can now customise the website shortcuts – called Speed Dials – and background image on the browser's Start Page (the page that's shown when you launch Vivaldi or open a new tab). Tap the three-dot icon in the top-right corner of the Start Page and select Customise Start Page.

Press the Speed Dial Size menu (1 in our screenshot above) to increase the size of the shortcuts from small to medium or large, or present them as a list. Alternatively, you can switch off



Speed Dials altogether. In the Background Image section (2), select your preferred wallpaper for the page from more than 30 colourful designs. Tap 'Done' to save your changes and view your customised Start Page.

Vivaldi also now lets you assign nicknames to your bookmarks, so you can access them faster from the address bar. Open the browser's main menu,

choose Bookmarks and open the Bookmarks folder. Select a bookmark, tap the Edit (pencil) icon, enter a nickname for the page – such as 'beeb' for BBC News – and tap the tick button to save.

ANDROID

Minimise web pages to a picture-in-picture window

Back in Issue 676 (page 44), we wrote about a new experiment in the Chrome app for Android that lets you minimise web pages to a floating picture-in-picture (PiP) window. The feature – called Custom Tabs – is now officially available on Android devices, allowing you to continue with other tasks without losing the page you're viewing.

Simply tap the down arrow to the left of the address bar (1 in our screenshot above right) to minimise the current page to a small PiP window (2) that you can

BEST NEW APPS

What you should install this fortnight

CaffeInMe

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/51236

If you're concerned you might be consuming too much caffeine, this new app will help you track your daily intake.



Log every caffeinated drink you have, including coffee, tea and energy drinks, and CaffeInMe will calculate your caffeine consumption and warn you when you exceed the recommended amount of 400mg per day.

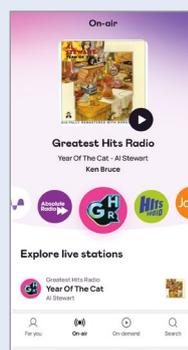
Rayo

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/51230

iOS www.snipca.com/51231

Rayo lets you tune into more than 50 radio stations from across the UK, including



Absolute Radio, Greatest Hits Radio and Magic. You can listen to shows live and on-demand, search for stations by name, location and genre, and explore themed playlists. Subscribe for £3.99 a month to avoid adverts and skip songs.

Strava

Free*

Android www.snipca.com/51232

iOS www.snipca.com/51233

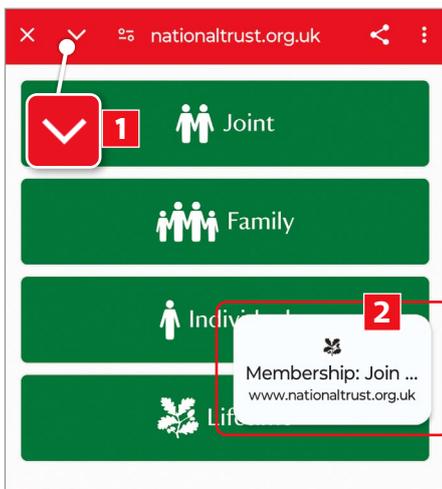
This popular app for planning, tracking and sharing your walking, running and cycling



activities has been updated with a much-requested **dark mode**. Designed to reduce eye strain when using Strava in the evening or early morning, the mode can be activated in the app's Settings by choosing Preferences then Appearance.

*Contains in-app purchases

Brilliant things to do on your device



iOS Share your location instantly in the Messages app

When you want to let someone know where you are, you can either describe your location to them via a phone call or message, or pinpoint your whereabouts in a mapping app and send them a link. A much easier option is to type two simple words into the Messages app on your iPhone or iPad, and share your location instantly using iMessage.

To try this secret trick, first open the



Settings app and select 'Privacy & Security' followed by Location Services. Tap 'Messages' in the list of apps, choose 'While Using the App' and enable Precise Location.

In the Messages app, start or resume a conversation

with the person you want to share your location with. Type 'I'm at' into the message box (1 in our screenshot above), press Space and a Current Location option will appear above the keyboard (2). Tap this to share your position without needing to look it up, or scout for street signs.

move around your screen. This window remains visible even when you switch to other apps, and you can tap it and press the maximise (rectangle) icon to restore the original page.

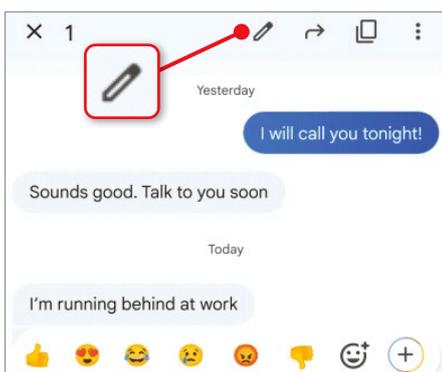
Custom Tabs isn't available in the Chrome app itself, but in other apps that use the browser to display web pages. These include Gmail, Reddit, Tripadvisor and X (formerly Twitter).

ANDROID Edit text messages after sending

The Google Messages app for Android phones (www.snipca.com/51249) now lets you edit messages after you send them, provided you do so within 15 minutes. This allows you to correct misspelt words, add details you forgot to include or clarify what you originally wrote.

Simply long-press the message, tap the Edit (pencil) button on the top toolbar (see screenshot below) to make your changes, then tap the tick button to Save.

To use the new Edit feature, both you and the recipient will need to be chatting using RCS rather than SMS. It's rolling out gradually, so you may not see the option yet.



BEST APPS FOR...

Older communication methods

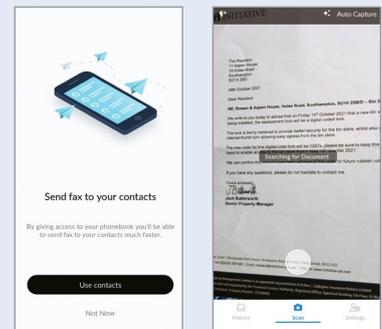
Fax.Plus Free*

Android www.snipca.com/51245

iOS www.snipca.com/51246

If you need to send or receive a fax but don't have access to a machine, Fax.Plus can help. It lets you scan documents using the camera on your phone or tablet, or attach them from online storage. You can send 10 pages for free, then will need to buy a subscription, which also gives you a dedicated fax number for receiving faxes.

Best For Sending and receiving faxes



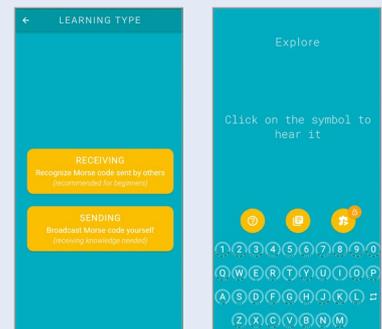
Morse Mania Free*

Android www.snipca.com/51242

iOS www.snipca.com/51244

This app offers a fun but effective way to learn Morse code. Starting with the simplest letters – E (dot) and T (dash) – you progress through the levels to master the whole alphabet, followed by numbers and symbols, before tackling whole words and phrases. Choose between sending and receiving modes, and beeps or vibrations.

Best For Mastering Morse code



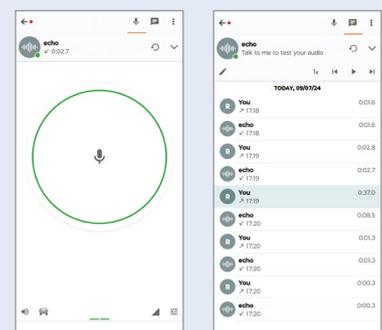
Zello PTT Walkie Talkie Free*

Android www.snipca.com/51247

iOS www.snipca.com/51248

When you can't get a good mobile signal, and you don't have time to type a message, Zello provides a speedy way to talk to friends and family, provided they also have the app installed. Just press the big push-to-talk button to chat to your contacts over Wi-Fi or any available network. You can also record your conversations for posterity.

Best For Walkie-talkie conversations



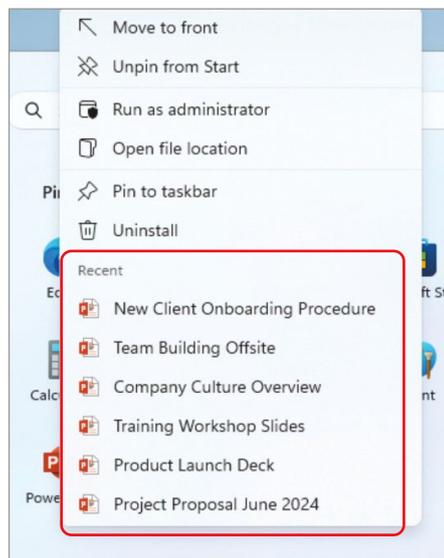
*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 11 INSIDER

Access jump lists in the Start menu

Microsoft is adding Windows 10's jump lists to Windows 11. These let you access recent files for each program you've pinned to the Start menu when you right-click their icon in the taskbar. In our example, we've clicked the Windows icon bottom left, followed by the PowerPoint icon in the Start menu to bring up recent presentations (see screenshot below).

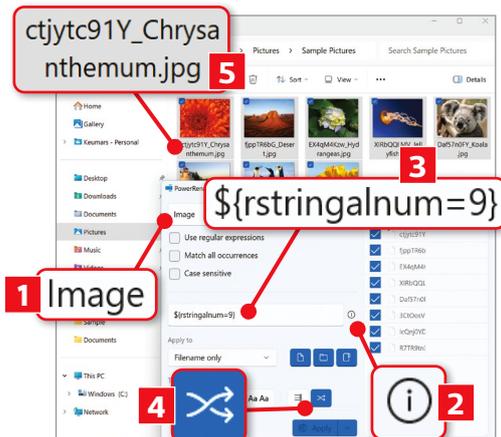
These jump lists are available to Windows Insiders in the Beta channel running the Preview Build 22635.3785, and will hopefully be added to the final version of Windows 11 soon.



WINDOWS 10 & 11

Rename multiple files with random characters

Version 0.82 of Microsoft's PowerToys improves the PowerRename tool to let you rename files with random characters. This would be

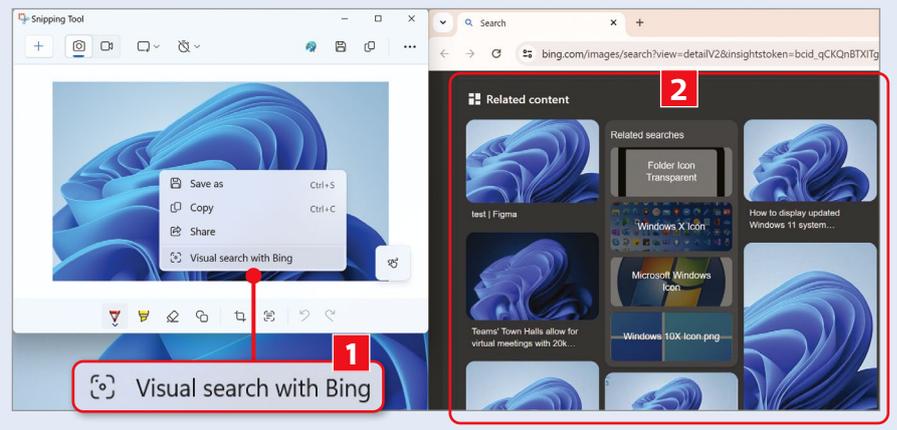


WINDOWS 11

Search for your screenshot on the web

Snipping Tool now lets you search the web for screenshots you have taken. This is useful if you want to track down the source for an image, or find similar screenshots to the one you've taken. Right-click on

your screenshot then click 'Visual search with Bing' (1 in our screenshot). Your default browser will open showing search results in Microsoft's search engine Bing (2). You'll need to be running Windows 11.2404.40.0 or later.



useful if, for example, you want photos to be shown in a slideshow in a random sequence.

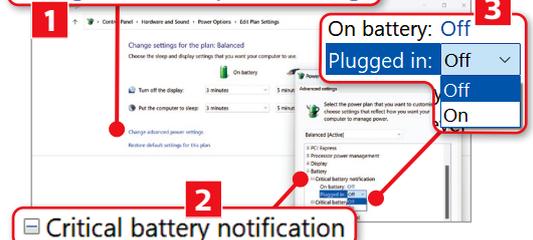
Open PowerToys, then click PowerRename on the left and switch on 'Enable PowerRename' at the top right. Also turn on 'Use Boost library' at the bottom.

Now select all the files on your PC you want to rename, then right-click one and click 'Rename with PowerRename'. Type a word common to all the files, such as 'Image' (1 in our screenshot below left), then click the small 'i' button (2) next to the 'Replace with' box. Scroll to the bottom of the list that appears, and under the 'Replace using random values' heading select 'Random string with uppercase letters, lowercase letters and 0-9 digits, customized length'.

The text '\$(stringalnum=9)' will appear in the 'Replace with' field (3). This will create a random file number of nine characters. Change the '9' to another number to make it longer or shorter. Finally, click the 'Random string features' button (4), then Apply in blue at the bottom. The word 'Image' in our file names changed to random text (5).

If you've got PowerToys installed, you'll see a prompt to update to 0.82 when you next open it. If not, install it from www.snipca.com/51313.

Change advanced power settings



WINDOWS 10 & 11

Remove 'critical battery' notification

When you're using your laptop on battery power, Windows shows you two notifications when you're running low: a 'low battery' notification at 20 per cent, and 'critical battery' at five per cent. If you'd rather be notified only once, you can turn off the 'critical battery' message.

Search for and open Control Panel, then make sure Category is selected in the top-right 'View by' dropdown menu. Now click 'Hardware and Sound', followed by 'Edit power plan' under Power Options.

Next, click 'Change advanced power settings' (1 in our screenshot above). In the box that appears, click the plus (+) sign next to Battery section, then do the same for 'Critical battery notification' (2). Change both the 'On battery' and 'Plugged in' options from On to Off (3). Click Apply, then OK.

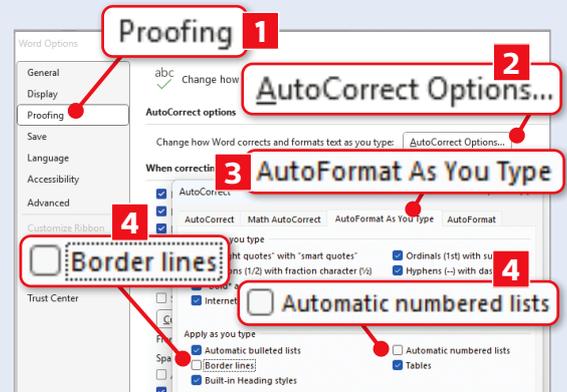
MICROSOFT WORD

Turn off auto-formatting features

Word comes with many useful auto-formatting options, such as typing **1** for automatic numbering in a list, or tapping the hyphen key three times and pressing Enter to produce a full-width horizontal line.

But if you don't want these features, it's easy to disable them. Click File at the top, then Options

at the bottom of the left panel. Click the Proofing tab **1** in our screenshot) then the 'AutoCorrect Options...' button **2**. Now click Autoformat As You Type **3**, then untick any box next to an auto-formatting feature you don't want. To turn off the two features mentioned above, untick 'Automatic numbered lists' and 'Border lines' **4**. Click OK, then OK again.



MICROSOFT EXCEL

Show minimum and maximum values in bar charts

You can use colours in Excel bar charts to highlight the highest and lowest values.

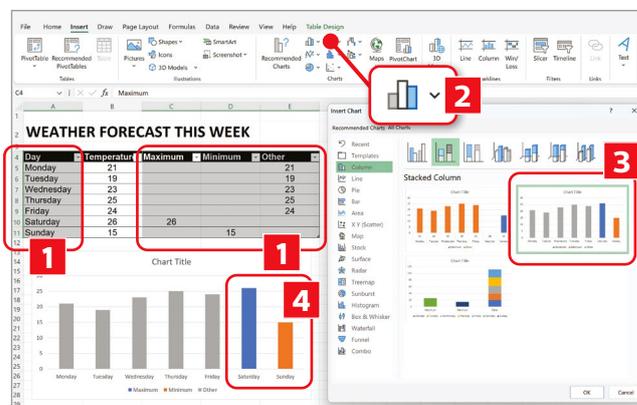
First, enter your data into a table and create three additional columns with the headings Maximum, Minimum and Other.

In our example, we typed `=IF(B5=MAX(B5:B11),B5,"")` in cell C5, which is in the Maximum column. This checks whether cell B5 shows the highest temperature in the range B5 to B11. If so, the maximum will appear in C5. If not, it will be left blank.

We then repeated this in cell C6, changing **B5** at the end and beginning to **B6** (for example, `=IF(B6=MAX(B5:B11),B6,"")`), and so on down column C. We did the same in the D column (Minimum), changing **MAX** to **MIN** (for example, `=IF(B5=MIN(B5:B11),B5,"")`).

Next, in E5, we typed `=IF(AND(C5="",D5=""),B5,"")`. This checks whether the corresponding cell in column C or D has a value. If not, it shows the value that appears in column B. We copied and pasted this into cells E6 to E11, changing C5, D5 and B5 accordingly – ie, to C6, D6, B6 and so on.

Next, we highlighted all the columns in our table apart from B **1** in our screenshot above right), then clicked the 'Insert Column or Bar Chart' dropdown button **2** in the

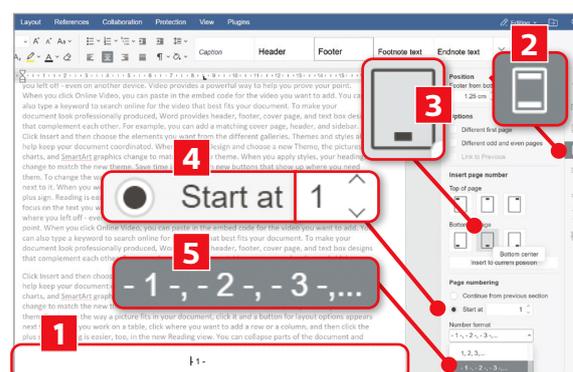


Charts section, and clicked 'More Column Charts...' at the bottom. We clicked the Stacked Column option, chose the second chart **3** and clicked OK. Our chart appeared in our spreadsheet with the highest value highlighted in blue and the lowest highlighted in orange **4**.

ONLYOFFICE

Change your document's page numbering

OnlyOffice 8.1, released in June, lets you change how page numbering looks in your document. First, click View at the top and tick 'Right Panel'. Next, double-click on



the Footer area of your document **1** in our screenshot below left), then click the 'Header and footer settings' icon **2** on the right sidebar.

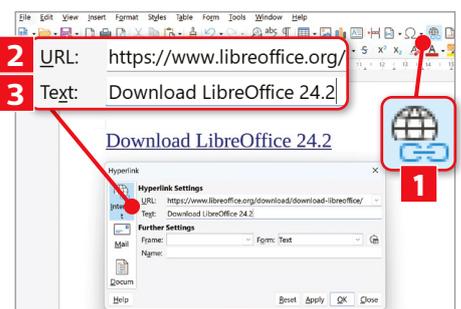
Now choose where you want your page number to appear – we selected bottom centre **3** – and select which page to start at **4**. Finally, set a number format, such as 1-2-3 **5**, A-B-C, i-ii-iii and so on.

You can update to OnlyOffice 8.1 by following the prompt when you next open the program, or download it from www.snipca.com/51274.

LIBREOFFICE WRITER

Add hyperlinks in documents

There are two ways to add hyperlinks to documents in LibreOffice Writer. You could type the text you want to link from, highlight it, then click Insert in the toolbar and select 'Hyperlink...' (or press Ctrl+K). That's probably the best-known method, but you may prefer an alternative, which is clicking the Insert Hyperlink icon **1** in our screenshot below) – or pressing Ctrl+K – then typing your link into the URL box **2** and typing your text into the Text box **3**. Click OK, and a new link will appear where your cursor is positioned.



In The Club



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

Agree a date and time for meetings

LettuceMeet is a free website that can help your club members agree on a time and date for a meeting that suits everyone. You simply propose a time, then let members check their diaries and share their availability. You can then compare everyone's schedule to select the best time to maximise attendance.

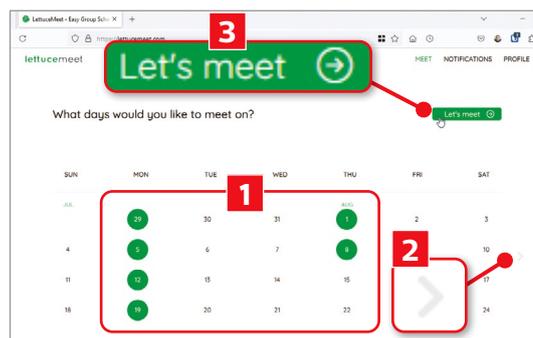
Propose dates for your meeting

Start by visiting www.snipca.com/51227 – you can sign in with Google or set up a LettuceMeet account by entering your name, email address and a suitably strong password before clicking 'Sign up'.

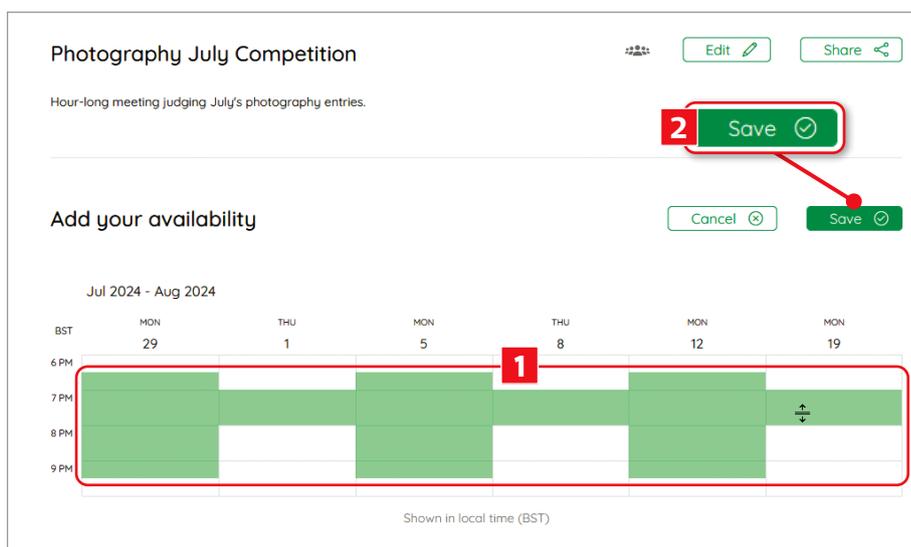
You'll be presented with a calendar displaying the next four weeks as shown in our screenshot below. Now click a range of proposed dates – you'll see them turn green **1**. Click the > button **2** to move forward four weeks. Once you've selected your proposed dates, click 'Let's meet' **3**.

Next, give your meeting a title and a description under 'What's your meeting about?'. Below this you'll be asked 'What times would you like to meet between?'. By default, LettuceMeet assumes your meeting will take place within business hours (9am-5pm). Click each time to change it – for example, to 6pm-10pm for an evening meeting.

Leave the Group button selected for meetings with three or more people, then decide if you want to limit its length under Advanced Options – click the dropdown menu to between 30 minutes and three hours. Finally, click Create.



Click each potential date for your meeting followed by 'Let's meet'



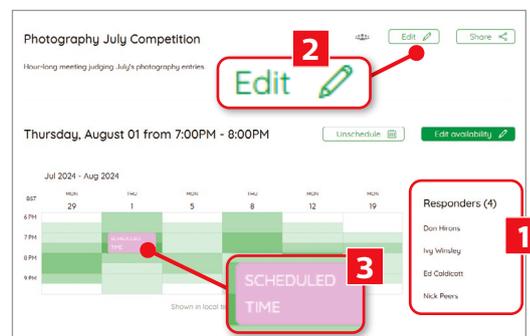
Click a square and it'll turn green to indicate you're free, then click Save

Check people's availability

Next, on the meeting page, click 'Add availability', then click within the squares for the times you're available – they'll change to green (**1** in our screenshot above). Once done, click Save **2**. You'll now see your name under the 'Responders' list.

Now you need other club members to add their availability. To facilitate this, click the Share button, which copies the meeting's web link to the clipboard. Paste this into an email or chat message, so club members can click it. They then need to click 'Add availability' to add the times and dates they're available. Once done, they'll be prompted to click Continue instead of Save to add their name and email address. This means they'll be notified when the meeting is scheduled.

As people add their availability, keep checking back or refreshing the page. You'll see people's names appear under 'Responders' and their available dates and times will be added to the calendar. The darker the shade of green, the more people are available at that time and date. Roll your cursor



Once you've saved a time and date it will turn pink on your calendar

over a date and time on the calendar and the Responders list will reveal who's available then (**1** in our screenshot above).

It also shows the availability of individuals – just roll your cursor over an individual name in the 'Responders' list. If you're struggling to find a suitable time and date for everyone, click Edit **2** to change them.

When you've settled on a time and date click Schedule, then the square that corresponds to it. The square will then change to pink. Click Save, and the words 'Scheduled Time' will appear on it **3**. Anyone who shared their email address will receive a message with the meeting's details and an option to add it to their Google or Outlook calendar.

What's All the Fuss About...



Windows 11's Category view

Microsoft is making a fresh Start with one of its most important tools

What is it?

A new way of seeing which software you have installed on your computer on the Windows 11 Start menu. It groups programs into categories, including Music, Entertainment, 'News & weather', 'Navigation & maps' and 'Utilities & tools'.

Is that it pictured (right)?

Yes. The coloured squares show where the program's icons will appear once you've placed them in their categories. This screenshot was posted on X (formerly Twitter) by @PhantomOfEarth, who often unearths hidden options in preview builds of Windows.

Ah, so this isn't available yet in Windows 11?

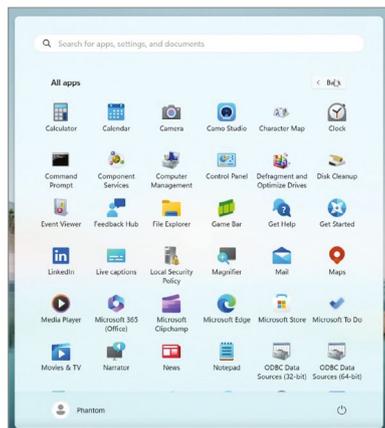
Not the full version, no. It's part of build 22635.3930, released by Microsoft on 12 July and available to Windows Insiders. However, you won't find it mentioned in the company's official list of features for that build (www.snipca.com/51354).

Why not?

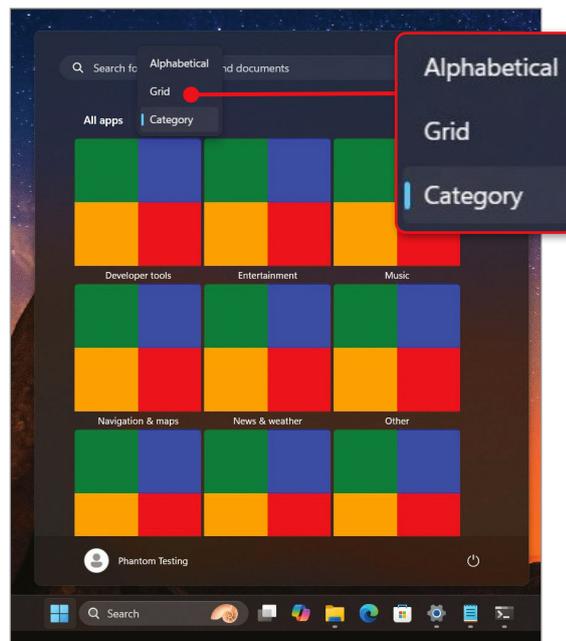
Because it's a hidden feature that can only be turned on if you know the correct code to type (known as Feature IDs). This allows Microsoft to add experimental options to preview builds of Windows knowing that they'll only be discovered by advanced and confident users.



Nice design you have there, Apple. Mind if Microsoft borrows it?



Clicking 'All apps' might soon actually show all your apps



Such as @PhantomOfEarth you mean?

Yes – they explained on X how they did it (www.snipca.com/51356). It requires the program ViVeTools (www.snipca.com/51355), which is a third-party program for revealing hidden Windows features. We revealed how to use this in Issue 676's How To (page 35).

Do we know which apps will go into which categories?

Presumably you'll be able to move them around, but @PhantomOfEarth dived into the tool's code and found where many built-in Windows features will go by default. Paint for example sits in Entertainment, while Notepad is in Productivity, and both Calculator and Sticky Notes are in 'Utilities & tools' (see www.snipca.com/51357 for more).

Isn't this how apps are presented on phones and tablets?

It certainly is, as some



It reminded some people of the App Library view on iPads and iPhones – others of Windows 8's annoying live tiles



people pointed out on X. In particular, it reminded them of the App Library view on iPads and iPhones (pictured bottom left). Others said it brought to mind Windows 8's colourful live tiles, which many found annoying and distracting.

Will it definitely be added to the full version of Windows 11?

Can't say for sure, but we'd be surprised if it isn't. The reason Microsoft has introduced it now is to run early tests and gauge feedback, possibly aiming to include it in the 24H2 update due in the autumn. It certainly seems to be planning a revamp of the Start menu, with a new 'All apps' view also planned.

How do you know that?

It was spotted in April in an earlier Windows 11 preview by you-know-who: @PhantomOfEarth. He posted this video on X (www.snipca.com/51358), demonstrating how it shows six rows of installed programs (pictured left). This is the 'Grid' view in the dropdown menu highlighted in the main screenshot, alongside 'Alphabetical' and 'Category'. One of those three options should prove right for you.

Best **FREE** APPS For Your **VIDEOS** **MUSIC** & **PHOTOS**



Ditch the default camera and microphone apps on your phone or tablet for superior free alternatives. **Robert Irvine** explains how to capture, edit and enhance content like the experts do

Over the past 20 years, smartphones and tablets have gradually replaced standalone cameras and audio recorders. After all, why carry around three gadgets when one does everything you need and fits snugly into your pocket?

As the quality of phone cameras and microphones has increased, so has the

number of apps designed to help you make the most of your mobile device's capabilities. This is particularly true of photo, music and video tools, which are now among the most popular in the Google Play and Apple App stores.

Last October, consumer-insights company Statista reported that four in 10 of us regularly use photo-editing apps

(www.snipca.com/51337) – way ahead of news, fitness and dating apps.

However, for every good app, there are thousands of awful ones that are more interested in showing you ads, collecting your data and nagging you to pay for subscriptions than they are in offering useful options. In this feature, we save you wasting your time installing this junk by recommending the best free apps for your movies, music and photos.

Rather than pick services that let you access other people's content, such as YouTube and Spotify, we've chosen apps that let you capture, edit and enhance your own video, audio and image files. Whether you choose to share the results, or keep them for personal use, you'll discover fantastic new tools you'll never stop using.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Turn your phone's camera into a professional camcorder
- Edit and enhance videos using one-tap AI features
- Apply vintage video effects to your home movies
- Boost the volume and quality of your audio recordings
- Improve your photos using advanced settings and tools
- Remove unwanted people and objects from shots

BEST APPS FOR RECORDING & EDITING VIDEOS

Record professional quality videos

While the camera on your phone or tablet will be fine for shooting short clips, and may even offer a few advanced options, if you want to capture professional-looking videos, you're best off with a dedicated app. The problem lies in finding one that won't make you pay to unlock its best features or to save your recordings without a watermark.

The best completely free video-camera app is also one of the newest: **Blackmagic Camera**, which launched for iPhones last September (www.snipca.com/51285), and Android phones in June (www.snipca.com/51286) – though only for Google Pixel and Samsung Galaxy S23 and S24 handsets. From the developer of the powerful free video-editing software DaVinci Resolve, this app transforms your phone into a high-end film camera, with sophisticated controls for capturing stunning footage every time.

These include lens selection, **frame rate**, shutter angle, **ISO**, **white balance**, tint, histogram (for checking exposure – see screenshot above right) and audio levels. However, the beauty of Blackmagic Camera is how straightforward it is to use. Settings can be adjusted simply by tapping and swiping them on screen, without having to navigate complex menus, before pressing the Record button. You can save videos to your phone or upload them to the Blackmagic Cloud online-storage service to access and edit on other devices.

If you don't own a high-end Android phone, or need Blackmagic Camera's more advanced tools, **Open Camera** (www.snipca.com/51256) is a simple free alternative, with no in-app purchases or ads (despite what its Play Store page says). Although primarily a still-photo camera, its video options let you record footage of unlimited length and size at Full HD resolution (4K on compatible devices). You can easily adjust the exposure, white balance (see screenshot top right) and recording speed; zoom in and out by swiping a slider; and even apply video stabilisation to reduce camera shake.

Another way to improve your iPhone's video-recording capabilities is to install Apple's new **Final Cut Camera** app (www.snipca.com/51273). Like Blackmagic Camera, this is entirely free, and lets you adjust shutter speed, ISO and white balance; tweak video frame rate



Blackmagic Camera provides tools to tweak videos you record, including histograms

and resolution; and use its 'focus pull' and stabilisation features to keep your subjects sharp while they're moving.

Edit and enhance your videos

Editing videos on the small touchscreen of your phone or tablet is inevitably more fiddly than using a PC and mouse, but thankfully there are lots of excellent apps that make the task easier. **CapCut** for Android (www.snipca.com/51258) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51259) is the most popular for good reason, with a huge range of options – most of them free – for perfecting the clips you capture.

These combine practical tools – such as those that let you trim videos, enhance picture quality, insert **transitions**, adjust speed and improve sound – with fun features for applying filters, effects and stickers. It can generate captions and transcripts for your clips, and lets you export them at the frame rate and resolution of your choice.

CapCut is geared towards 'content creators' who post their clips on social media – it's the official video editor for TikTok, and only supports content in portrait mode – but it's still worth exploring its many functions. We particularly like the one-tap option for removing the background from videos to isolate the subject (see screenshot right).

Similarly, Google's new **YouTube Create** app for Android (www.snipca.com/51266) allows creators to edit, annotate, and add music, sound effects and voiceovers to their videos – as well as **emojis**, **GIFs** and stickers – then upload them directly to YouTube.



Open Camera offers an impressive range of video-recording options for free

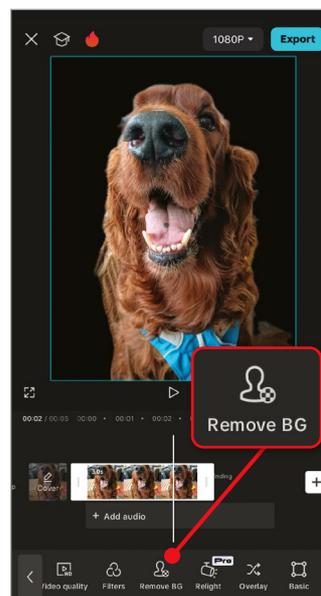
Its slick, simple interface makes it ideal for performing quick enhancements to clips, even if you don't plan to share them online. An iOS version is coming soon, but iPhone and iPad users already have access to Apple's free **iMovie** video editor (www.snipca.com/51275). This has a clever Storyboards feature for creating different types of video, such as Celebration, Trip and 'Day in the Life'.

Another good option is **LightCut** for Android (www.snipca.com/51277) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51278). This fantastic free video editor has a One-Tap Edit function that uses **AI** to transform individual or multiple clips into different styles at the touch of a button. Its templates span categories such as Urban, Nature and Portrait, and videos can be enhanced with music, text and filters.

If you'd prefer a more traditional video editor that works with both landscape and vertical clips, and has fewer social-media features, try **VN Video Editor** for Android (www.snipca.com/51262) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51263). This app uses a timeline view, with separate

tracks for video content, music and subtitles, above buttons for applying an array of edits and effects. You can tap the book icon in the top-left corner to open the Help manual, and export your completed videos in your preferred **aspect ratio**.

The free version of VN Video Editor has some limitations and displays adverts, but unlike better-known **freemium** rivals such as **Kinemaster** (www.snipca.com/51264) and **CyberLink PowerDirector** (www.snipca.com/51265), it doesn't add a watermark to your exported videos.



CapCut is packed with useful video-editing tools, including background removal

Apply vintage film effects to your videos

Whereas most video editors are designed to improve the quality and appearance of content you capture, **Super 16** for Android (www.snipca.com/51268) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51269) takes the opposite approach. This fantastic app makes your videos look like they were shot on an old 16mm camcorder in the 1970s.

It lets you experiment with different colour grading, temperature and saturation; increase the level of grain (see screenshot below) and distortion; apply authentic-looking scratches and defects; and slow the frame rate until you get the retro look you desire. You can either configure these settings before you capture a new video, or choose a clip from your library to reprocess it accordingly.

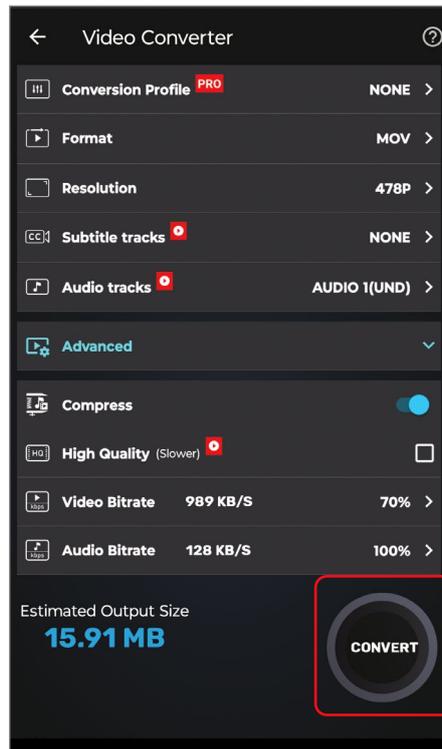
Certain options – including the Super 8 effect – are limited to the paid-for version of Super 16, which costs £2.12 a month, but the free app has enough tools to take you back in time and make your videos look convincingly old.



Make new videos look convincingly old by applying retro effects with Super 16

Convert and compress video files

From **AVI** to **WMV**, there are dozens of different video formats currently in use,



'Video Converter & Compressor' lets you play any video file on your device

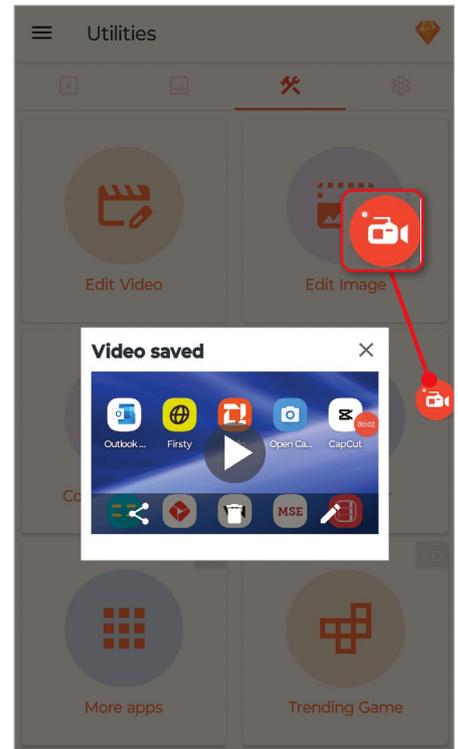
and not all of them may be supported by the apps you use on your phone or tablet. **Video Converter & Compressor** for Android (www.snipca.com/51270) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51271) solves this problem by letting you easily convert videos from one format to another.

Tap 'Convert or Compress', select a file and choose the format to convert to (you may need to watch an ad to unlock some options). Before you press Convert (see screenshot above), you can change other settings, including the resolution, frame rate and **codec**, and specify whether to compress the video and by what percentage – the app will estimate the new size. Once the file has been converted, the original can be deleted.

'Video Converter & Compressor' also lets you extract the audio from videos, and trim and merge clips, without losing quality. Pay £1.99 per month (or 99p per week) for additional formats and options, and to remove the (admittedly annoying) adverts.

Record videos of your phone screen

As well as shooting videos with your phone's camera, it's sometimes useful to capture what's on your screen. For example, you may want to record a video call for future reference, an online video that you can't download (without paying)



AZ Recorder makes it easy to capture videos of your phone or tablet screen

or a short tutorial demonstrating how to perform a specific task.

Many screen-recording apps have annoying restrictions, such as imposing a time limit on the length of videos you can capture, or imposing their own watermark. **AZ Recorder** is one of the most flexible free options for Android (www.snipca.com/51282), letting you record videos – with audio – of up to an hour, at **1080p** resolution and 60 frames per second – and without a watermark.

It's very easy to use (once you grant the required permissions) and it has a floating control 'bubble' (see screenshot above) you can tap to start recording any app you're viewing – following a three-second countdown.

AZ Recorder also has built-in video editing-tools and a Wi-Fi-transfer function that lets you download recordings on your PC. If its ads and feedback prompts annoy you, try the more basic but ad-free **RecGo Screen Recorder** (www.snipca.com/51283) instead.

Apple doesn't allow many screen recorders in its App Store, preferring you to use the Screen Recording feature in the Control Centre of your iPhone or iPad. The best of a small bunch is **Record it!** (www.snipca.com/51284), though its free version limits you to capturing 30-minute videos and sharing three-minute clips. Pay £5.99 to remove these restrictions.

BEST APPS FOR RECORDING & EDITING MUSIC

Record high-quality music and audio

The stock audio-recording app on your phone or tablet – called Recorder on Android, Voice Recorder on Samsung Galaxy devices and Voice Memos on iOS – may be useful for recording voice notes, conversations and other nearby speech, but it's designed for convenience rather than audio quality and enhancement.

For superior recordings, it's hard to beat **Dolby On** for Android (www.snipca.com/51290) and

iOS (www.snipca.com/51291), which unlike rival free apps has neither ads nor in-app purchases.

As soon as you press Stop to end a recording, Dolby works its audio magic by reducing background noise and distortion, maximising the volume, and applying effects such as dynamic

equalisation and stereo widening.

Essentially, this means you get the best-quality sound possible, without needing to tweak anything – whether you're capturing music, speech or ambient noise. You can hear the before and after difference by using the off/on slider in the top-right corner (1 in our screenshot above).

The app's extra tools 2 let you experiment with different audio styles, adjust the treble and bass, and trim unwanted segments. Go into Dolby On's Settings to insert a three-second countdown before recordings begin and to capture sound in **lossless** quality.

WaveEditor lets you convert and make simple edits to your audio files



Delete



Lexis Audio Editor is packed with useful tools but you need to pay to save MP3s

Noise reduction

Edit your music and audio files

As with video-editing apps, many 'free' music editors for Android and iOS have annoying restrictions unless you pay – for example, limiting the length of files you can edit or the formats you can save in. One of the better options is **WaveEditor** for Android (www.snipca.com/51293), which looks and works a bit like the brilliant free audio editor Audacity (sadly that doesn't have a mobile app).

Either browse to an audio file on your device or record one through the app to open its **waveform**. You can then perform edits such as deleting unwanted sections (see screenshot below left), inserting silences, fading the track in and out, and even playing parts backwards, before exporting the file in your preferred format and quality.

The app also lets you convert tracks from one audio format to another. Upgrade to the Pro version for £3.79 to use WaveEditor's many effects and remove ads.

Alternatively, **Lexis Audio Editor** for Android (www.snipca.com/51294) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51295) gives you lots of effects for free. These include options to change the pitch, tempo and speed of music tracks; apply echo, reverb and a robotic vocoder effect; and improve the sound quality using its equaliser and noise reduction (see screenshot above).

The app also lets you mix two audio files, and record music using a metronome to help you keep time. Which all sounds great, until you try to save the track as an MP3 and find you need to pay £7.99 – other formats, including **AAC**, **FLAC** and **WAV**, are available for free.

Trim music files to turn them into ringtones

Many Android phones now come with only a small selection of shrill and rather boring ringtones, which doesn't give you much scope to personalise your incoming

AIMP Audio Cutter lets you create your own ringtones from cropped MP3s



calls. Although there are lots of apps that let you create your own ringtones from favourite songs, these tend to be stuffed with adverts, trackers and in-app purchases – and are as annoying as Noughties nuisance the Crazy Frog.

The best way to trim MP3 files and turn them into ringtones, without being bombarded with pop-ups, is to use **AIMP Audio Cutter** for Android (www.snipca.com/51298) – sadly, it's not available for iOS. This free app, from the developer of **open-source** music player AIMP, has no ads, trackers or in-app purchases, and only requires a few permissions – such as access to your audio and music files.

Long-press a track on the My Music tab, select Crop and highlight the section you want to use as your ringtone. Tap the Save button top right (see screenshot above) to crop the file and save it to your Ringtones folder – you may need to allow access.

The cropped MP3 will now be listed in AIMP Audio Cutter's My Ringtones tab, where you can long-press it and choose 'Set as ringtone'. Once you grant the app permission to modify system settings (which sounds worrying but is completely safe, and essential for it to work), you'll be able to use the trimmed song as your ringtone, notification sound or alarm.

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BEST APPS FOR CAPTURING PHOTOS

Replace your phone's default camera app

The built-in Camera apps on smartphones have improved in line with the number and quality of camera lenses, and now offer a variety of shooting modes and manual settings – especially on high-end handsets. However, there are still advantages to trying a different camera app, even if you don't make it the default on your phone.

Open Camera for Android (www.snipca.com/51256, see page 51) makes it easier to adjust the white balance, exposure and resolution of shots before you press the Shutter button, and offers a wide selection of scene modes, including Action, Sunset and Theatre (not that you should be taking photos in a theatre). It also provides simpler control of the flash, torch and zoom on your phone, and – unlike most free camera apps – it doesn't collect your data or restrict options to a paid-for version.

At the other end of the scale are apps that replicate the features of professional **DSLR** cameras, such as **ReLens Camera** for Android (www.snipca.com/51299) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51300).

It offers a choice of lenses (see screenshot below), a wide aperture-adjustment range and dozens of filters, effects and manual settings. The catch is that it adds watermarks to your photos – pay £1.89 to remove these, or buy the VIP version for £3.89 a month, £15.49 a year or £19.49 outright. This includes even more options, including a DSLR Bokeh effect for blurring the background of photos while keeping the subject in focus.

A less sophisticated but more fun alternative to your camera app is **OldRoll** for Android (www.snipca.com/51303) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51305). This lets you take photos as if you were using a vintage film or disposable camera.

ReLens Camera provides a wide choice of lenses, but its free version has a catch



OldRoll turns your phone into a vintage camera – like the Leica M6 – and takes photos with a retro look



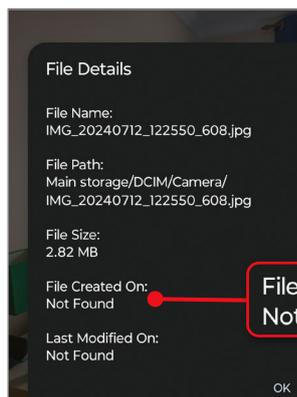
It displays your viewfinder within mock-ups of old camera models, including authentic flash and brightness controls, and applies suitable effects to give your pictures a retro look. You don't need to edit or retouch the result, though settings and filters are provided should you want to.

The free version of OldRoll includes a selection of classic cameras, such as a Classic M (pictured above, inspired by the Leica M6), Polaroid Instant and Argus C3 – switch between them by tapping the camera icon (see screenshot above). You need to pay to unlock additional models, either individually, by subscribing to OldRoll for £2.69 a month, £9.49 a year or by purchasing the app for £10.49 – a free trial is available when you open the app.

Remove sensitive data from your photos

The photos you take with the camera on your phone or tablet include **EXIF** data, which provides details of when and where the shot was taken and the device you used. Although this **metadata** is useful for organising images by date and location, it also poses a privacy risk when you share pictures online, because the **GPS** coordinates may reveal where you live and where you've been.

Secure Camera for Android (www.snipca.com/51307) fixes this problem by automatically stripping the EXIF data



Secure Camera takes photos without revealing the location or time

File Created On: Not Found

from photos you take, so nobody can see when, where or on what device they were taken (see screenshot below left). It works just like a standard camera app – indeed, its name is shown as 'Camera' – with a selfie mode, timer and flash, and it can also scan **QR codes** and capture videos.

On an iPhone or iPad, you can prevent the built-in Camera app from saving location and other data for photos – see our 'Phone & Tablet Tips' section in Issue 687 (page 44). Alternatively, use **Exif Metadata** (www.snipca.com/51308) to strip details from existing snaps.

Digitise old photos with your phone's camera

If you don't have access to a scanner or all-in-one printer, you can digitise old photos for free using your smartphone's camera and **Google PhotoScan** for Android (www.snipca.com/51309) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51310). This free app makes scanning photos incredibly easy, removes glare from glossy prints and automatically detects and crops the edges of pictures.

To use PhotoScan, hold your phone over a photo until it fits in the frame, then press the shutter button. When four white circles appear on your screen, move your phone so the selection ring (pictured below) surrounds each one in turn. The app will then scan the photo and save it to Google Photos, where you can edit and enhance the result.



Google PhotoScan makes it easy to digitise your old photos



BEST APPS FOR EDITING & ENHANCING PHOTOS

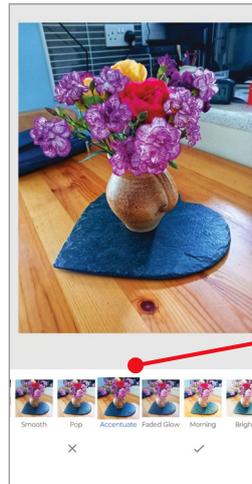
Edit your photos without restrictions

There are thousands of free photo-editing apps in the app stores, but nearly all are blighted by adverts, watermarks, premium-only options, dubious privacy policies and other annoyances. One of the few exceptions is **Snapseed** for Android (www.snipca.com/51311) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51312). This provides dozens of useful tools for free without any catches, and though it's owned by Google, it has no ads or trackers.

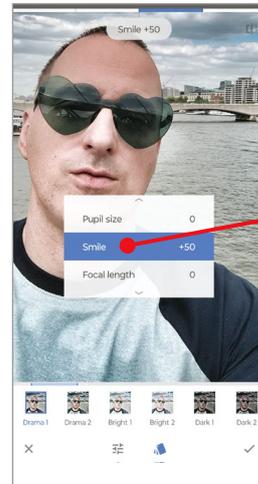
Open a photo from your library and Snapseed will display a range of simple styles you can apply, such as Accentuate (see screenshot right), Faded Glow and Silhouette. Switch to the Tools tab to explore the app's full set of options, which include fine-tuning the colour, contrast and brightness levels; using subtle effects to enhance the subject or background; adding frames and text; and even changing the perspective of the shot.

We particularly like the Healing tool, which lets you erase unwanted elements from pictures by swiping them with your finger; the Double Exposure option, which blends two images together; and the (slightly creepy) 'Head pose' feature, which adjusts eyes and smiles to make bored faces appear happier (see screenshot top right – yes, that is us looking happier!).

Snapseed makes it easy to undo edits and revert to the original image by tapping the back-arrow button in its top-right corner, and you can go into its



Snapseed offers plenty of styles you can apply to photos with a single tap



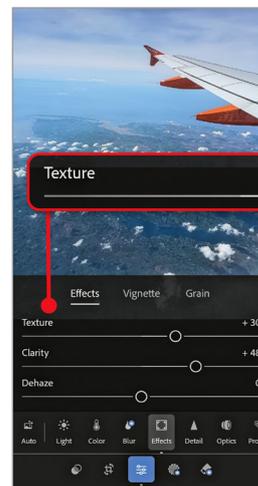
Snapseed's many tools include the option to cheer up gloomy subjects

Settings to change the default size and quality at which you export edited photos

We're also big fans of **Image Toolbox** for Android (www.snipca.com/51339), which is similarly free of distractions and restrictions. It offers loads of handy editing tools, filters and effects, and makes it easy to convert images from one format to another.

Edit your photos using professional tools

For greater control over your photo edits, the best option is Adobe's **Lightroom Photo Editor** for Android (www.snipca.com/51321) and iOS (www.snipca.com/51322). You can use this app's presets to apply one-tap enhancements to your shots, such as different skin tones, photo styles and levels of sharpness, then



Lightroom Photo Editor lets you fine-tune every aspect of your pictures

use its expert tools to refine every aspect of your shots, from the colour and exposure to the texture and 'optics'.

Lightroom is easier to use than Adobe's desktop software, letting you make most adjustments by swiping sliders (see screenshot above), though some of its features – including new AI tools – require a subscription. This costs £4.49 a month or £45.49 a year, following a seven-day free trial.

Adobe also has a photo-editing app that's a bit more fun – **Photoshop Express** (Android www.snipca.com/51323; iOS www.snipca.com/51324). Although its filters, stickers and selfie tools seem targeted more at younger users and Instagrammers, it includes lots of useful options for perfecting your pics, including the removal of blemishes, red-eye and unwanted objects.

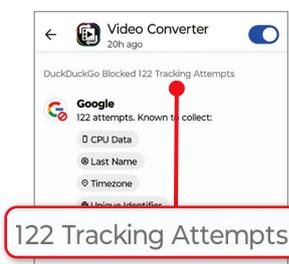
You need a subscription to unlock all its features, but it's less restrictive than the similar **Picsart** (Android www.snipca.com/51318; iOS www.snipca.com/51319), which frequently interrupts you with ads

Stop free apps collecting your data

The popularity of video, music and photo apps makes them especially lucrative for advertising and marketing companies – through hidden trackers. Many apps we tested for this feature showed the same privacy pop-up,

asking for consent to share our data with nearly 200 'vendors' and ad partners.

Although some had a 'Do not consent' button, others didn't, hoping we'd tap Consent just to close the pop-up and access the app. Instead, you should always choose 'Manage options' and switch off every setting that shares your data with third parties. This won't prevent ads, but it



will stop them being personalised based on your interests.

You can block trackers in apps using the App Tracking Protection feature in the DuckDuckGo Private Browser for Android (www.snipca.com/50131). Switch

this on in the browser's settings, allow DuckDuckGo to set up a **VPN** and it will monitor and block all tracking attempts (see screenshot).

Your iPhone or iPad has its own setting for blocking app tracking. Select 'Privacy & Security' in the Settings app, tap Tracking and switch off the option 'Allow Apps to Request to Track'.



The Magic Eraser AI tool in Google Photos deletes background intruders

unless you upgrade to its pricey paid-for version.

Remove people and backgrounds from photos using AI

Google recently added several AI-powered features to its **Photos** app (Android www.snipca.com/51325; iOS www.snipca.com/51326) that were previously only available with a Google One subscription or Pixel phone. By far the most interesting is Magic Eraser, which removes unwanted people from photos using AI.

Unlike the Healing tool in Snapseed (see opposite), Magic Eraser automatically detects and highlights background interlopers. Tap a highlighted person to erase them, or press 'Erase all' (see screenshot above) to delete all unwanted people in one go. The tool will conceal the removal by blending in surrounding elements, so you'd never know the intruders were there. Magic Eraser only works on devices with at least 3GB of RAM, and limits you to saving 10 edited photos a month.

Some image-editing apps use AI to remove the entire background from shots, though this is a subscription-only option in many. **Remove.bg** for Android (www.snipca.com/51329) lets you cut out subjects for free (with no ads or in-app

Five video, music and photo apps to avoid

Video Editor & Video Maker

This app is not only stuffed with ads and in-app purchases, but may also steal your data. Its Chinese developer, Coocent, was last year accused of exploiting device permissions to spy on its users (see www.snipca.com/51330).

Video Lite for Android

The iOS version of this app (www.snipca.com/51288) lets you watch YouTube videos without ads, but – because Google doesn't allow YouTube ad blockers in the Play Store – the Android version doesn't, even if you pay for a subscription.

Audio Editor - Ringtone Maker

As mentioned on page 53, ringtone makers are among the most junk-filled apps and this is one of the worst. It's slow,

full of trackers and has a hard-to-read interface, and to remove its ads you need to pay a ridiculous £13.89 a week.

Magic Photo Collage & Photo Editor

Many free collage-making apps are supported by ads, but this one shows them even when you're not using it. With more than 21 embedded trackers and 74 permissions, it's invasive, irritating and not even good at creating collages.

VSCO: Photo & Video Editor

There are many worse photo-editing apps than VSCO, but it used to be so much better. A large proportion of its tools now require a subscription, you can't use it without an account, and it keeps nagging you to use its social-media features.

purchases) and place them on a wide variety of solid-colour, photo and abstract backgrounds. You can save the result for free, but to download an HD version you need to sign up for a free account.

On an iPhone, you can use the built-in Photos app to cut out the subject of photos by long-pressing them until an outline appears.

Add text to your photos

Although many image editors let you add text to your photos, their options are usually pretty basic. **Phonto** (Android www.snipca.com/51315; iOS www.snipca.com/51314) is designed solely for this purpose, and makes overlaying and customising text on pictures incredibly straightforward.

Select an image, tap the pencil icon (see screenshot above right) and enter the words you want to include. You can then choose a font from Phonto's collection of more than 200, experiment with different colours and styles, including curving the text into a circle (as



Phonto lets you add text to photos in hundreds of different fonts and styles

shown in our screenshot), and move and tilt the words until you're happy with your design. Add more text if required, before previewing the result and saving the annotated photo as a JPEG or PNG file.

Phonto is completely free to use, and though it includes ads, these are of the banner variety rather than full-screen horrors – pay £3.99 to remove them. **ca**

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BEAT AMAZON'S DELIVERY FEES

You now need to spend £35 to get free delivery on your Amazon orders. Robert Irvine reveals secret tricks that save you paying extra for your shopping

In April 2023, Amazon increased the minimum amount you needed to spend to get free delivery on your orders from £20 to £25. Only 14 months later, in June, it quietly raised the threshold again to a whopping £35 (www.snipca.com/51390). This means you now need to spend 40-per-cent more to avoid paying for delivery on items dispatched by Amazon.

Amazon blamed the hike on “a number of external factors influencing shipping costs” – despite earning a net profit of \$30.4 billion last year. However, it’s also keen to get customers to subscribe (or re-subscribe) to its Prime membership, which offers free delivery on eligible items – for £8.99 a month or £95 a year.

Here, we explain how to beat Amazon’s delivery fees without subscribing to Prime.

Find small items to qualify for free delivery

The obvious way to avoid paying for delivery, without signing up for Amazon



Super Saver Delivery Tool finds items that can take your Amazon order just over £35

Prime, is to spend at least £35, so you hit the new free-delivery threshold. But if your order comes to slightly less than that amount, you’ll need to buy another item to make up the difference, which may end up costing you more than the price of the original product plus delivery.

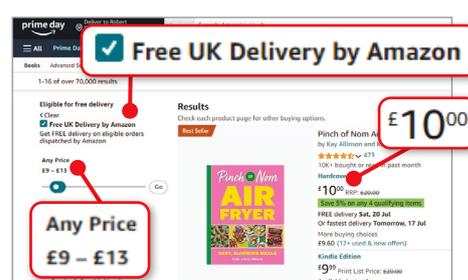
To qualify for free delivery without overspending on things you don’t urgently need, visit Super Saver Delivery Tool (www.snipca.com/51352) before you click or tap ‘Proceed to Checkout’. Enter how much more you need to spend to reach the £35 threshold and this tool will suggest items priced around that amount. Select a cheap product to open its page on Amazon, and add it to your basket to beat the delivery fee.

A search for ‘£1.21’ (see screenshot below left) found us such handy household products as a roll of electrical tape, a jumbo sponge and a pack of elastic bands, as well as sweet treats including Milky Way Magic Stars, Haribo marshmallows and Robinsons Blackcurrant drink.

Alternatively, browse Amazon’s own selection of items for under £5 (www.snipca.com/51353) – select the filter ‘Free UK Delivery by Amazon’ to ensure they’ll qualify for free delivery. You can also filter the results by department (by default, they include groceries from Morrisons) and sort them by ‘Price: Low to High’.

Buy at least £10 worth of books

Amazon’s new £35 free-delivery threshold doesn’t apply to book orders, for which the minimum spend remains



Buying this £10 cookbook gets us free delivery on other items in our order

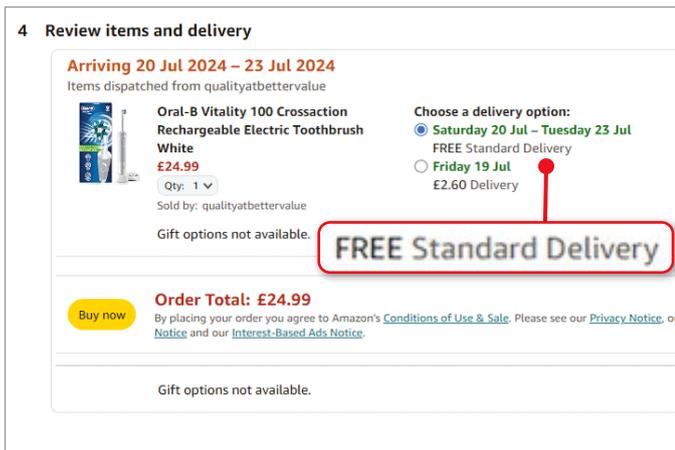
£10. This means you can get other items delivered for free when you buy at least a tenner’s worth of books.

This trick only works for books and other products that are dispatched by Amazon – not from third-party sellers – and it doesn’t apply to Kindle ebooks.

Browse Amazon’s Books department (www.snipca.com/51359) to find a hardback or two paperbacks to take your order over £10, and get free delivery on anything else you buy without needing to spend £35. Use the ‘Free UK Delivery’ and Price filters (see screenshot above) to display eligible and suitably priced titles.

Purchase items from third-party sellers

If your order doesn’t hit the £35 threshold, Amazon will charge you from £3.95 to £4.99 for delivery – though it will also tempt you with a Prime subscription to avoid that fee. You may be able to get free delivery by purchasing the same item from a third-party Marketplace seller – provided it isn’t dispatched or fulfilled by Amazon.

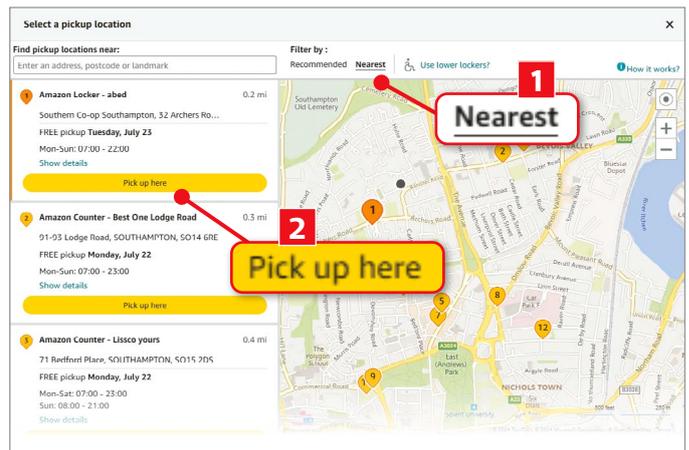


Look out for third-party sellers that offer free delivery on items that Amazon doesn't

Although professional Marketplace sellers can set their own delivery charges, some choose not to – at least on smaller items. Click the 'See All Buying Options' button or 'Other sellers on Amazon' box on the right-hand side of the product page to see if you can get the item for less, without needing to spend £35.

In our screenshot above, we bought an Oral-B electric toothbrush from a third-party seller for the same price that Amazon was selling it (£24.99), but with free standard delivery. Just double-check the item is labelled New and not Used (especially if it's a toothbrush!). Marketplace purchases are covered by Amazon's 'A-to-z Guarantee' (www.snipca.com/51364).

Also make sure Amazon doesn't thwart your saving by pre-selecting 'Fastest delivery' rather than the free option. In our experience, estimated dates for slower deliveries are often pessimistic and, provided the seller is based in the UK, you're likely to get your order within a few days – without paying extra.



Choose a nearby pickup location from where you can collect your Amazon order for free

Collect your order from a pickup location

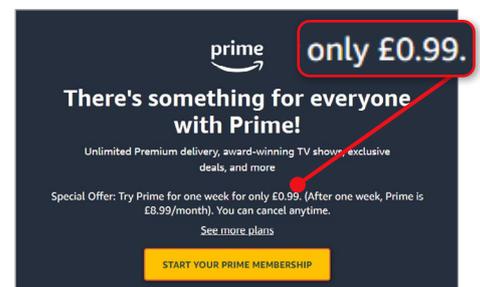
Rather than pay for your Amazon parcel to be delivered to your home, you may be able to collect it for free from a local shop, Post Office or Amazon Locker. To be eligible, the item must be dispatched by Amazon rather than a third-party seller and be within the size and weight restrictions for the pickup location.

For example, parcels sent to an Amazon Locker must be smaller than 42x35x32cm and weigh under 4.5kg – see www.snipca.com/51365 for more information. Also, 'Subscribe & Save' orders, which let you schedule deliveries of regularly needed items, can only be sent to your home or business address.

To use a free pickup location instead of paying for delivery, click the 'Find a pickup location near you' link on the 'Choose a delivery address' page of the Checkout process. This will open a window showing a list and map of recommended pickup locations for your default address – you can also filter these

by nearest (1 in our screenshot above), and search for a different address or postcode. Usefully, Amazon offers the option to 'Use lower lockers' to make it easier to collect your parcel if you're in a wheelchair or mobility scooter.

Click 'Pick up here' (2) to return to the Checkout, confirm that free delivery is selected and complete your purchase. Once your item arrives at an Amazon Locker, you'll have three business days to collect it. At local shops and Post Offices, you have seven days.



Check your Amazon account to see if you're entitled to a discounted Prime trial

Sign up for a cheap Amazon Prime trial

If you've never been a Prime member, ended your subscription over a year ago or are willing to create a new Amazon account, you can get a 30-day free trial, and free delivery on eligible items by signing up at www.snipca.com/51368. Just remember to cancel before the trial ends or you'll be charged the full price.

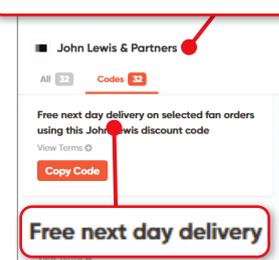
If you left Prime within the last 12 months, check the Your Prime Membership section of your Amazon account to see if you're entitled to a free or cheap Prime trial – we recently paid 99p to resubscribe for one week (see screenshot above). You may also be offered one when you buy an item, as an alternative to paying for delivery. **ca**

Get free delivery from other online stores

Discount codes often entitle you to free delivery at online stores, but finding coupons that actually work is another matter. Save time, hassle and money by installing Pouch in your Chromium browser (www.snipca.com/51372) or Firefox (www.snipca.com/51373).

This extension automatically detects discounts – including free-delivery deals – when you visit more than 3,000 UK

John Lewis & Partners



online stores and either applies them at checkout or lets you copy the code to enter it yourself.

Pouch is better suited to British shoppers than the similar Honey (www.joinhoney.com), covering big names such as Boots, B&Q, Currys, John Lewis (see screenshot) and Marks & Spencer. You don't even need to register to use Pouch – though doing so lets you earn cashback on purchases.

Delete your messages permanently!



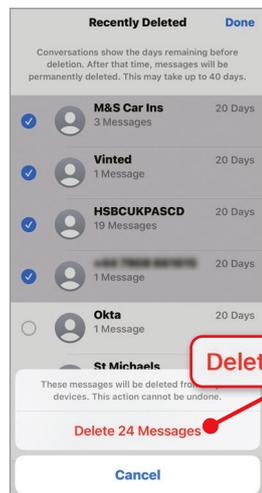
Wiping an email or phone message doesn't mean it's gone for good. Daniel Booth explains how to erase them completely – freeing up space and preserving your privacy



Delete messages from your iPhone or iPad

Tech giants often reinterpret what words mean, confusing us mere mortals in the process. Apple's use of 'Delete' is a case in point. You can delete a message from your iPhone/iPad by opening the Messages app, long-pressing a message's bubble or attachment, then tapping More. You then need to select what you want to remove, and tap the bin (Delete) icon.

You can also wipe a whole conversation by going to the 'Messages conversation' list on your device, then either swiping left on the conversation and tapping the bin, or long-pressing it and tapping Delete. To remove multiple conversations, tap Edit top left, then the More button (three horizontal dots) top right. Now tap Select Messages, choose the conversations



Delete messages from Apple's 'Recently Deleted' folder to permanently erase them

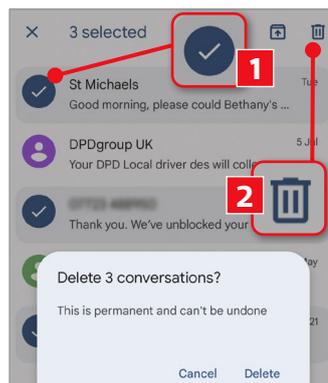
you want to delete, then tap Delete.

But in all these examples, Apple defines 'Delete' as 'Saved in the Recently Deleted folder for 30 days'. Anyone with access to your device can still read the messages. To *permanently* erase them, open the 'Messages conversation' list, then tap Edit top left, followed by Show Recently Deleted. Select what you want to delete, then tap Delete bottom left, then the red 'Delete' option (see screenshot below left).

To delete emails from Apple's Mail app on your iPhone or iPad, open your inbox then tap Edit at the top right. Select the emails to delete, or tap Select All, then tap Bin. If you only see Archive here, long-press it to see the option Bin Selected Messages. You can also swipe left to delete emails, or long-press them and tap Bin Message.

Delete messages from your Android device

Google is just as bad as Apple – in Gmail at least. Delete an email and it will stay in your Bin folder for 30 days. To permanently delete one, select it then click 'Delete forever'. To erase the whole folder, click the 'Empty Bin now' link that appears in the banner at the top. Note that Gmail will warn you there's no



Long-press an email so the tick appears, then tap the bin icon

reversing this, but this is not the case when you delete individual emails.

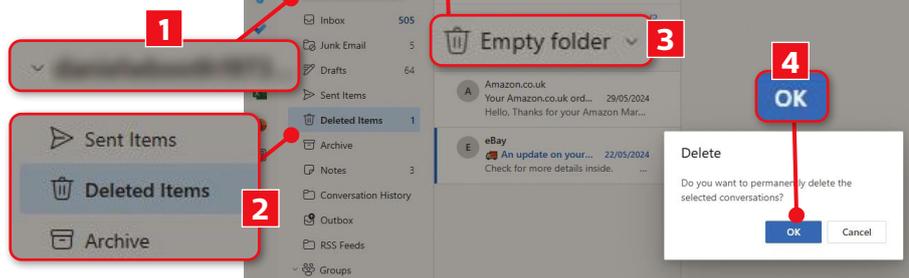
Google has a clearer understanding of what 'delete' means in its Messages app on Android. Long-press to select a message, then tap the bin icon at the top followed by Delete. It's then gone for good. However, if you tap the 'Archive' icon instead

(to the left of the bin), you'll merely place the message in Google's 'Archived' folder. This is easily opened by tapping your profile photo or initial top right, then Archived.

To remove a message from this folder – and delete it for good – long-press it so the tick appears (1 in our screenshot above), then press the bin icon (2). You'll be warned they can't be recovered, so if you're fine with that tap Delete.

You should also check whether Google Messages is paired with another device – such as an Android phone or tablet, or a computer via 'Google Messages for web' (www.snipca.com/51406). If it is, then anyone with access to that can read new messages you receive. Launch the Google Messages app on your device, then tap your profile photo/initial top right. Now tap 'Device pairing', where you can see which other devices it's linked to, and 'unpair' them if necessary.

The Delete Items folder in the new Outlook sits between Sent Items and Archive



Permanently erase messages from Outlook

Microsoft's equivalent of Apple's 'Recently Deleted' folder is 'Deleted Items', and like Apple it stores them for 30 days. You'll find it in the new version of Outlook by clicking the three horizontal lines at the top left to open the navigation pane, then clicking the arrow next to your email address (1 in our screenshot above). It sits between the Sent Items and Archive folders (2). Open it, then delete either every email by clicking 'Empty folder' (3) at the top, or select individual emails to delete then click Delete. Click OK when warned this is permanent (4).

The process in Outlook.com is the same, except you need to click the Folders heading to see the Delete Items folder, not your email address.

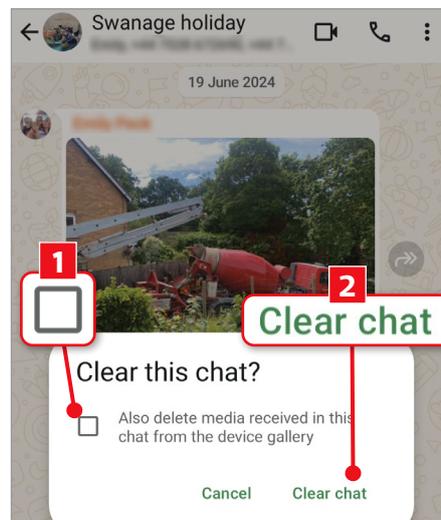
If you use the old version of Outlook (and we wouldn't blame you – see Issue 686, page 62), click More on the left – under the Folders heading – then Deleted Items in the grey panel that appears. Hover over an email, then click the bin icon.

Wipe WhatsApp messages and chats

WhatsApp offers plenty of deletion options, going as precise or broad as you like. To delete a single message, long-press it then tap the bin icon at the top. Now choose to delete it just for everyone in the group or the other person in a one-to-one chat (within two days of sending it), or just for yourself (so everyone else can still see it). If you're using the Windows version of WhatsApp, right-click a message then Delete followed by 'Delete for everyone'.

To successfully delete messages for everyone, all group members must be using the latest version of WhatsApp. Also note that the iOS version of WhatsApp might still save videos and photos to the device even after you delete the message.

You can also clear an entire chat. Tap the



Untick this box when deleting a WhatsApp chat to keep photos and videos from within it

three dots top right, then More followed by 'Clear chat'. Next, untick the box (1 in our screenshot above) if you want to keep photos and videos sent to this chat saved on your device, then tap 'Clear chat' (2) again.

You can delete a group if you created it, but you'll need to exit it first. Tap 'More' as above, then 'Exit group' followed by Exit. Now go to the Chats page, long-press to select the group, then tap the bin icon at the top, followed by 'Delete group'. Again, untick the box to keep any photos and videos.

To delete *all* your chats in every group, tap the three dots top right, then Settings, followed by Chats, then 'Chat history'. Tap 'Clear all chats', untick the box to keep photos and videos, then tap 'Clear chats'. Note this won't remove you from a group or erase the chat from the Chats tab.

If you've set WhatsApp to back up to your Google account (as explained at www.snipca.com/51402), you'll need to wipe these messages too. Open the Google Drive app, then tap the three-lines icon on the left. Now tap Backups and scroll until you see the WhatsApp backup. Tap the three dots next to it,

Stop iPhone/iPad messages syncing with other Apple devices

We don't have much sympathy for an unnamed UK man who is suing Apple for not completely deleting messages he sent to prostitutes (see Issue 687, page 8). He wiped them from his iPhone, but didn't realise Apple's 'iCloud for Messages' automatically syncs them with other Apple devices. This means anyone else can read them if they're signed in with the same Apple ID.

So his wife got a terrible shock when she signed into the family iMac and read his messages. It led to a £5m divorce, which is the amount he wants Apple to pay him in compensation.

But you don't have to be a cheating husband to want to stop Apple syncing your messages. There are more wholesome reasons, such as removing messages relating to presents or surprise parties. To do this, open Settings on your iPhone/iPad, and tap your name, then iCloud. Next, under 'Apps using iCloud', tap Show All. Now tap Messages, then turn off 'Sync this iPhone/iPad' (see screenshot).



then Delete Backup.

Finally, bear in mind that if you've linked your WhatsApp account with other devices (as explained at www.snipca.com/51404), then any subsequent messages you receive will be accessible on those. Learn how to unlink them at www.snipca.com/51405.

Delete Facebook Messenger messages

In the Messenger app for Android, long-press a message, then tap Remove, 'Remove for You', then Remove again. To erase an entire conversation, long-press it, then tap Delete twice. It's slightly different on iPads and iPhones: to wipe a message, long-press it then tap More, followed by Remove then 'Remove for you'. To wipe a conversation, tap More, then the red bin icon followed by Delete.

On the downloadable Windows version you need to right-click a message, while on the web version (www.messenger.com) you need to hover your cursor over the three dots. **ca**

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Will I need to pay for a new landline?

Q We got rid of Virgin TV because it was expensive, and the TiVo box that came with it was difficult to use. We still have a Virgin phone line, but we get our internet through a mobile-broadband setup, which is both cheap and convenient. Does this mean that when the copper phone network is switched off, we'll need a separate router and subscription just to have a landline?

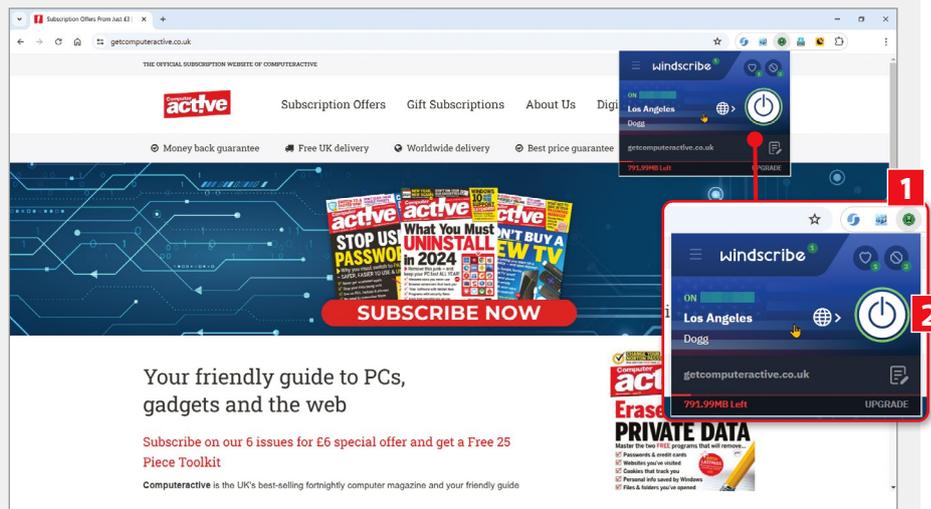
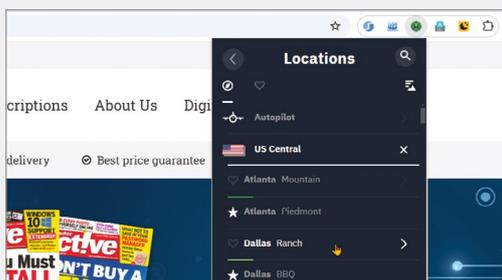
On another subject, several websites, mostly in the US, display errors when I try to access them. The Internet Archive (<https://archive.org>) is one example. I think it started when I switched my antivirus software from Kaspersky to Norton, but I'm not sure.

Ted Drury

A Let's start with the Virgin situation. We don't know what plans Virgin or any other company might have, but we think it's unlikely they will offer a landline-only service once the copper switch-off eventually happens. In fact, the very idea of a 'landline' is likely to be relegated to history. Instead, anyone who wants a 'landline' telephone will need to arrange a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) package – and, as the name suggests, these services rely on an internet connection.

As we noted in our reply to Tom Fry in Issue 683's Problems Solved, Virgin uses a system called hybrid-fibre coaxial (HFC). This is distinct from the copper-based network many other telecoms companies use, almost all of

If you still can't access a site, change your IP address by switching locations in a VPN



Use a VPN such as Windscribe to help you access sites that block mobile IP addresses

which rely on the copper network maintained by Openreach (a subsidiary of BT). This means Virgin's network is not subject to Openreach's deadline for copper switch-off, which is currently in 2027.

However, Virgin is working alongside the rest of the industry to switch customers to purely digital networks, so you can expect the company to withdraw its traditional landline services by the same date. That's assuming it hasn't happened already, because many Virgin users have already received an adapter dongle that plugs into the back of their routers, connecting them to Virgin's 'digital voice' (VoIP) service. Some customers will still be using their BT-style Virgin phone socket, as we suspect you are. Either way, if you want to keep using Virgin's voice services, you will eventually have to use a Virgin internet service and receive phone calls through a router.

As for your second question, your website access problems are almost certainly due to your mobile-broadband service, or more specifically,

the security policies that some websites use. Sites can allow or deny access to visitors according to their own criteria. Some use **blacklists of IP addresses** to prevent 'abusive' behaviours. Dodgy types tend to use mobile-broadband services because their connections are hard to trace, so some blacklists include blocks of IP addresses that are associated with mobile services. It's a fairly drastic approach, but we suspect that's what's causing your problem.

One simple solution is to install and use a free VPN browser extension, such as Windscribe, to mask your IP address. Simply enable it when you hit an affected site. Unfortunately, some websites also block known VPN IP addresses, but Windscribe lets you try a variety of different servers (and therefore different IP addresses), so you should be able to find one that works for any particular site. Once you've installed it, just click the Windscribe icon in our browser's toolbar (1) in our screenshot above, and click the big On switch (2). If you need to change servers, open the Locations Menu (click the globe icon) then select a different one (see screenshot left).

How can I calculate columns in LibreOffice Writer?

Q I've been using Microsoft Word since the 1990s, and my current version is part of the Office Home and Student 2007 version. It crashes occasionally, and I accept that the time has come to replace it. I've tried various **open-source** replacements, including LibreOffice, OpenOffice and OnlyOffice, but none of them seem to offer a particular feature I need.

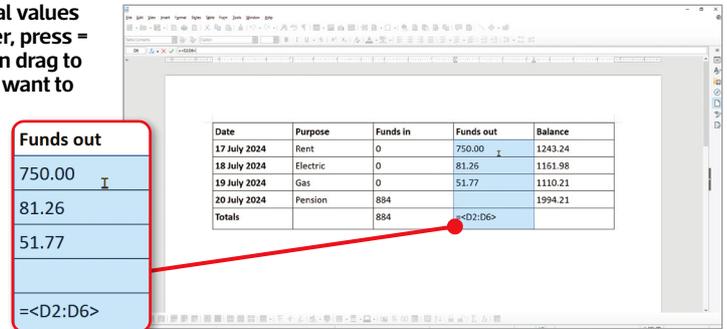
I keep track of my finances in a Word table with five columns: Date, Purpose, Funds in, Funds out and Balance. All the alternative programs let me open this table, but I can't find a way to total a column. This is very easy to do in Word, but if I type the formula `=SUM(ABOVE)` in the 'Total' cell in the other programs, I get an error. What am I doing wrong?

Alan Whitby

A You're assuming that these other suites use precisely the same methods and commands as Word. That's not unreasonable, because these Office rivals offer plenty of features that look and feel identical to Microsoft's. However, this is not one of them.

We'll focus on LibreOffice because it's

To calculate the total values in a column in Writer, press = in the Total cell, then drag to select the cells you want to add up



the most popular free Office alternative. This suite's word processor – Writer – does indeed allow you to tally numbers in tables. It's not quite as slick or versatile as Microsoft's offering, but the tools are there.

First, create or open your table. Find the cell in which you want to perform a calculation, such as totalling a column, and delete its contents. Next, press the = (equals) key or F2 to open the Formula bar, which will appear just under the normal toolbar. From here, you can either type your formula manually or drag with the mouse to do the job.

If you're typing it manually, bear in mind that the top-left cell is A1, because

for some reason these row and column headings are not visible in Writer. Otherwise, you can drag your cursor to select a range of cells. For example, you could type = (or press F2) in a footer cell, then drag to select all the cells above. When you press Enter, the correct formula will appear, such as `=<D2:D6>`, which adds up the contents of cells D2 to D6 (see screenshot).

That's the basic principle, and we suspect you can work out the rest. If you're not sure which functions are available or how to write them as formulas, click the Fx icon in the Formula toolbar to see what's on offer.

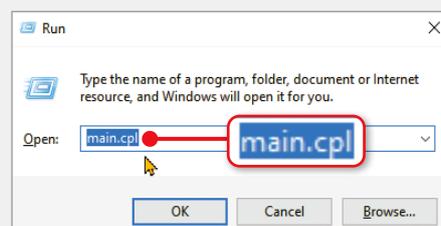
Why does my cursor keep disappearing?

Q My mouse pointer keeps disappearing, and I have to reboot my Windows 10 PC to get it back. So far as I know all my **drivers** are fine and up to date.

Is there a method for recovering my cursor without rebooting? Any idea what might be the reason for this?

David Martin

A We're not entirely sure, but it could be down to a specific aspect of your mouse drivers. In particular, there's a feature that intentionally hides the cursor when typing. If this is misfiring, it might lead to this random problem. So, we'd

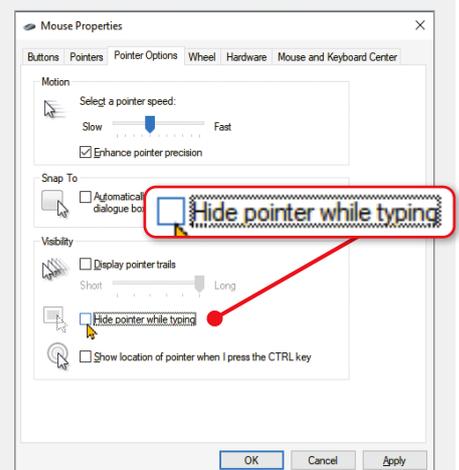


To stop your cursor disappearing, type this into a Run box and press Enter...

suggest disabling that feature.

To do this, first press Windows key+R to open a Run box, then type `main.cpl` (see screenshot above) and press Enter. In the Mouse Properties box that appears, first select the Pointer Options tab and then untick the 'Hide pointer while typing' box (see screenshot right) then click OK.

Hopefully, that will resolve the problem. If not, you can sign out and back into Windows using only keyboard commands. That should certainly be quicker than



...then on the Pointer Options tab untick the 'Hide pointer while typing' box

rebooting. To do this, first press Control+Alt+Delete (Ctrl+Alt+Del), then use the cursor (arrow) keys to highlight the 'Sign out' option before pressing Enter.

Are these password-protected files on my PC dodgy?

Q Recently, Bitdefender Total Security antivirus found a number of password-protected files that it couldn't scan. I recognised some of them, but there were many I didn't. Their file names all started with 'pagefile.sys=>rtkhdasetting'. When I checked online, I found that password protection is used to stop programs being altered without permission, but it seems unlikely that I'd have dozens of similar files. I'm worried that this is malware.

Jim Abernethy

A It's reasonable to worry when your antivirus finds something unexpected, but we think this is safe. 'Pagefile.sys' is a large hidden file on your PC that Windows uses as a sort of digital dumping ground. The 'rtkhdasetting' in the name relates to Realtek drivers, which do contain numerous password-protected elements to stop hackers reverse-engineering them for criminal purposes. Bitdefender explains this at www.snipca.com/51063 (see screenshot).

We suspect that your PC recently updated its audio drivers, and a lot of the working files have ended up in your 'pagefile.sys' file. Windows manages this, so the offending items are likely to disappear from your system sooner rather than later.

encryption. Password-protected files belong in most cases to legitimate software. They are protected with a randomly generated password by their developers to avoid reverse engineering for malicious purposes. Most

The current file is a password-protected item. Please enter the password here below so that Bitdefender can scan it. If you do not know the password, you can choose to skip this file.

This notification indicates that the files are either protected with a password or by some form of encryption. Password-protected files belong in most cases to legitimate software. They are protected with a randomly generated password by their developers to avoid reverse engineering for malicious purposes. Most

Lots of legitimate tools password-protect their files, as Bitdefender explains

What's silencing my speakers?

Q The speakers on my HP Victus laptop seem to stop working if I turn the volume down to around 40 per cent or less. Previously, this was not a problem.

I've tried reinstalling the drivers and using HP Assistant to test the system, but it says everything is working properly. Both speakers work at higher volumes, but they both go silent when I turn the volume down to this level.

Dave Challice

A This is almost certainly a case of a Windows update breaking compatibility with some aspect of HP's audio drivers. In other words, there's probably nothing you can do other than wait for Microsoft – or more likely HP – to fix the problem. Keep an eye on the support page for your particular HP laptop <https://support.hp.com>, so you'll know as soon as an update is available.

While we're fairly sure this is a driver issue, there's no harm in trying the audio troubleshooter that's built into Windows,

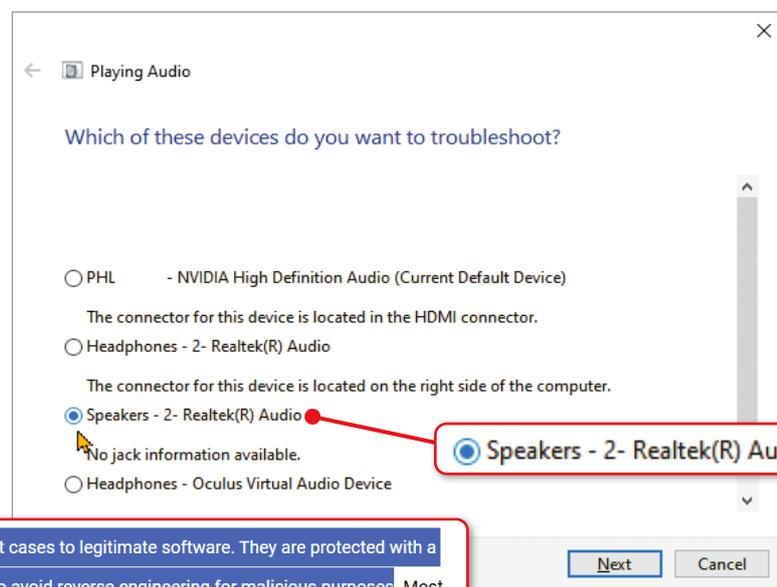


Windows' built-in audio troubleshooter can help you fix volume problems on your PC

as there's always a chance it might find and fix the problem.

First, on the far-right side of the Windows taskbar, at the bottom of the screen, right-click the speaker icon and choose 'Troubleshoot sound problems' (see screenshot above).

Click to select your laptop's built-in speakers (see screenshot below), then click Next. If the troubleshooter finds any problems, it will give you advice on how to fix them, or even offer to fix them itself.



Select the audio device you want to fix in the list that appears

Q: Can I unlock a person's laptop after they die?

A: Issue 662, page 67 – find it on our 2023 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/48860

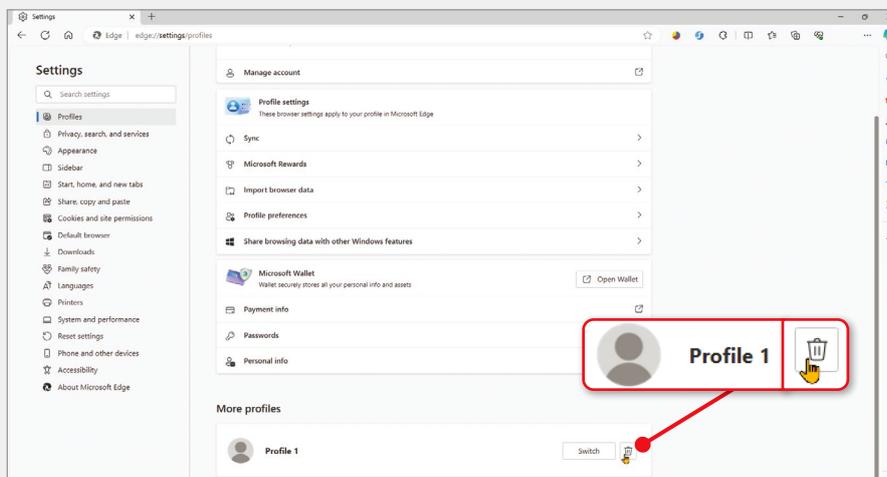


Why does the Edge icon on my taskbar look smudged?

Q I switched to the Edge browser a few months ago, prompted in part by the regular praise you give it. I like it and don't have a problem as such, but an annoying little glitch has appeared. On my Windows taskbar, at the bottom of the screen, the Edge icon now looks strangely corrupted, as if the bottom-left corner has been smudged. This doesn't affect the way the browser works, but it looks ugly. None of the other Edge icons on my system have been affected, so if I click Start and find Edge that way, its icon looks fine. Do you know what has caused this and how I can fix my taskbar icon?

Keith Anderson

A Yes, we think you probably have more than one profile set up in Edge. When that's the case, Windows overlays the current user's profile icon on Edge's taskbar icon. As taskbar icons are rather small, and even more so if you've enabled the Windows Settings option to 'Use small



To delete a user profile in Edge, go to Settings and click the dustbin icon next to its name

taskbar buttons', this detail can be tricky to see.

If you have set up a second profile, deleting it will remove the overlay icon. Click to open the Edge menu (three dots, top right), then choose Settings followed by Profiles. Next, scroll to the unwanted profile, then click the dustbin icon next to its name (see screenshot), and confirm

your decision by clicking 'Remove profile'.

Alternatively, if you don't want to delete the profile, choosing different avatar icons for each profile might create greater clarity. To do this, return to Settings, click a profile's icon, then under 'Pick an avatar' choose a new icon and click Update.

Why can't I format my SD card?

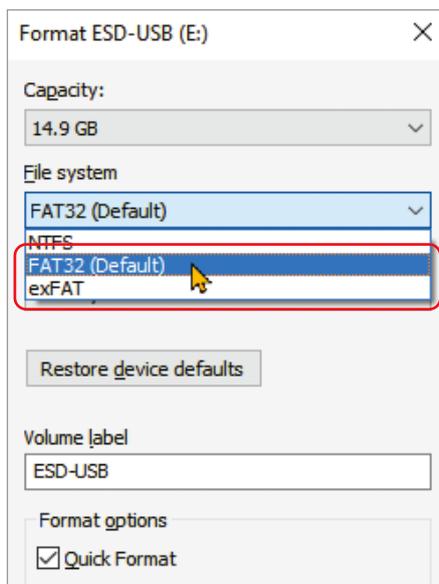
Q I recently copied some holiday photos to a new 64GB SanDisk SD card so I could view them on my TV using my DVD recorder. Now I'd like to delete them and use the card in my camera. However, when I insert it into my camera and switch it on, I see a message telling me to insert a memory card.

I assume I need to reformat the card, but although the camera offers a Format option, it doesn't seem to work with this card. Any ideas?

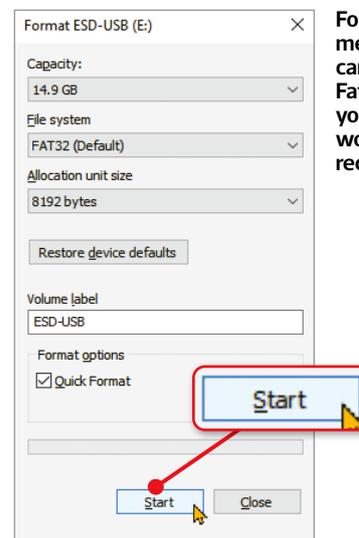
Stephen Foster

A Reading between the lines, it sounds as if you may have formatted the SD card on your laptop. That was probably unnecessary, because new memory cards tend to be pre-formatted. Assuming that's what you did, however, your computer probably used the NTFS format, which is good for Windows but not great for wider compatibility.

That would explain why your camera



can't format the card – because it simply doesn't recognise cards formatted using NTFS. The solution is to format it again using the more compatible FAT32 or exFAT systems. You can do this on your computer.



Format your memory card using Fat32 if your camera won't recognise it

First, insert the card into your computer's memory card reader. Next, press Windows key+E to open File Explorer, then right-click the SD card and choose Format. Then, in the Format box that appears, open the 'File system' dropdown menu, choose either FAT32 or exFAT (see screenshot above left), tick the Quick Format box, then click Start (see screenshot above).

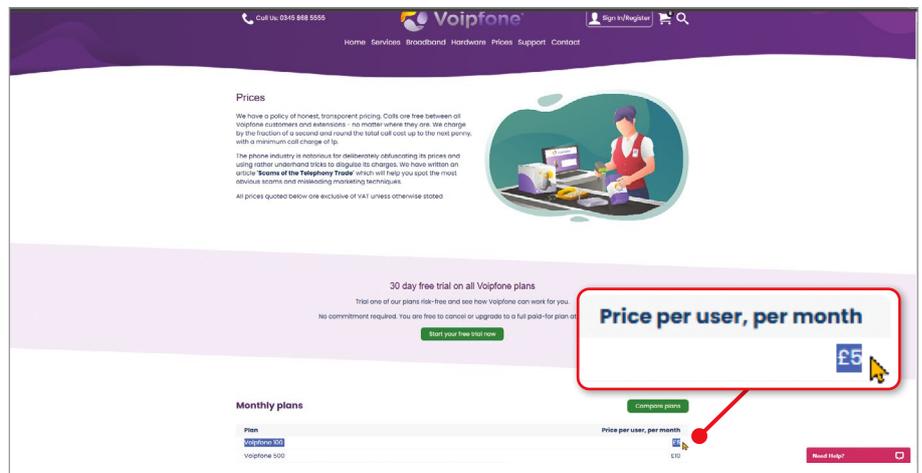
Can I port my landline number to my mobile phone?

Q Despite living in a rural area, I get an excellent 4G mobile signal. Our copper broadband and landline work well enough, but I have no interest in getting fibre broadband when the copper network is eventually switched off. Instead I plan to use mobile broadband. However, I'd like to retain my old landline phone number and port it to a mobile SIM card, because I'm sure a forwarding service wouldn't be cost effective. Does Ofcom support this, and if so, do all mobile-service providers let you port landline numbers?

Dave Pointer

A The short answer is no, you can't port a landline number to a mobile phone SIM in the UK. However, it is possible to port a landline number to a dedicated Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) service provider. In turn, many of those companies offer stealth call-forwarding, which means that anyone calling your landline number would be rerouted to your mobile phone without them even knowing.

We don't have the space here for an exhaustive comparison of VoIP services, but while you say you're worried that



VoIP services such as Voipfone let you keep your landline number for free

Call forwarding from a landline number to a mobile costs as little as £5 a month plus VAT

	Voipfone Flex	Voipfone 100	Voipfone 500	Voipfone 1000	Voipfone Unlimited
Monthly price (per user, ex VAT)	£1.50	£5	£10	£15	£20
Standard features	Included free with all our plans				
UK mobile and landline calls (per included phone numbers per month)	100 Minutes	500 Minutes	1000 Minutes	Unlimited	Unlimited
Call groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Call barring	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Call queue	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Call me back pro	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
IVRs (single menu)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
IVRs (multi menu)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cloud call recording	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

number-forwarding services might be expensive, a package can actually work out cheaper than a traditional landline.

Veteran provider Voipfone (pictured above), for example, offers free number porting and various packages that will divert incoming calls to a mobile.

These costs as little as £5 a month plus VAT for 100 minutes' worth of forwarded calls (www.voipfone.co.uk/prices, see screenshot above).

How do I clear Microsoft's clutter from my lock screen?

Q Can you tell me how to rid my Windows lock screen of all the clutter Microsoft thinks I might be interested in. If I want to see the weather forecast or find out how the markets are doing, I can look these up myself. Incidentally, I've been subscribing to your excellent magazine for many years now and it has helped me solve problems on numerous occasions.

Tony Hemsley

A We're glad to hear that you've been with us for so long. As for this little problem, it's easy to fix but – as ever with these issues – only if you know how.

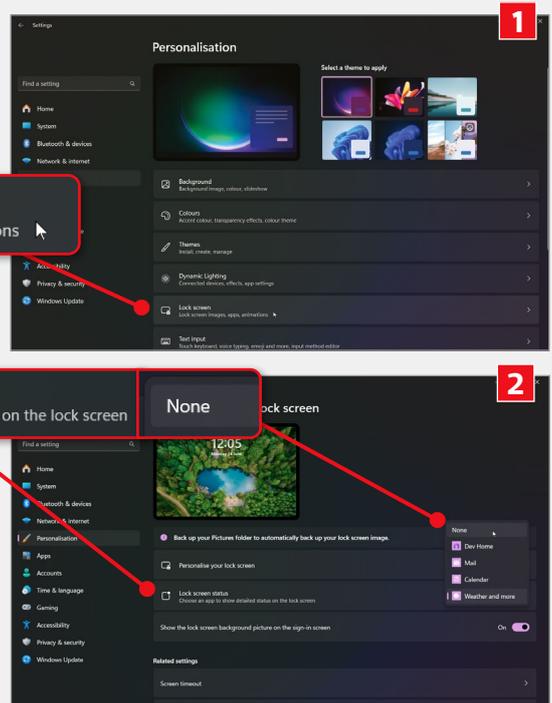
The clutter you describe specifically afflicts Windows 11, though Windows 10's lock screen does have similar elements. In either case, click Start followed by the Settings cog, then

Remove Windows 11's lock screen clutter in the Personalization section of Settings

Lock screen
Lock screen images, apps, animations

Lock screen status
Choose an app to show detailed status on the lock screen

Personalisation followed by 'Lock screen' (see screenshot 1). Next, in Windows 11, open the dropdown menu beside 'Lock screen status' and choose None 2. In Windows 10, click each widget icon in turn, and set it to None.





WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

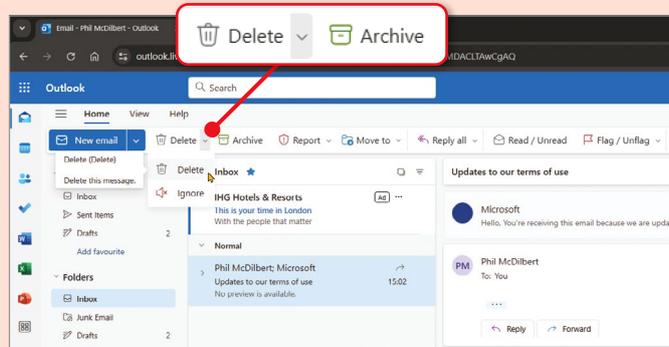
Outlook.com's Archive and Deleted Items?

Q While tidying up my Outlook.com inbox recently – possibly for the first time ever – I found that I was clicking the Delete button a lot. During this process, however, I noticed (again, possibly for the first time) that there's an Archive button as well as a Delete button (see screenshot). As an experiment, I selected an unwanted email and clicked Archive instead of Delete. The message ended up in a folder called Archive, which I've never used or even really noticed before.

But that's left me wondering what the difference is between these two functions. Both folders receive emails that I don't want in my inbox, but to remove emails from either folder, I still have to click the 'Empty folder' button. What am I not understanding?

Dennis Patterson

A We agree that the difference between Delete and Archive isn't immediately obvious, but there is at least one fundamental distinction.



Outlook erases items from your Deleted Items folder after 30 days

As you know, when you click Delete on an email, Outlook sends it to the Deleted Items folder. However, while you can indeed click the 'Empty folder' button to erase the contents of Deleted Items, there's actually no need. That's because, if left to its own devices, Outlook.com automatically erases deleted items that are more than 30 days old. So, if you didn't delete any messages for a month then checked your Deleted Items folder, it would be empty.

Obviously, in everyday use we tend to delete emails regularly, so the Deleted Items folder usually contains at least some messages. That's no bad thing,

because mistakes are easy to make, and so it's good that you can recover any messages you have deleted by accident.

On the other hand, items you send to the Archive folder are *not* deleted automatically. Instead, this folder acts as a storage space for messages you don't want in your inbox or other folders but you don't want to delete either.

So if you're not 100-per-cent sure that you want to delete a message, click the Archive button instead.

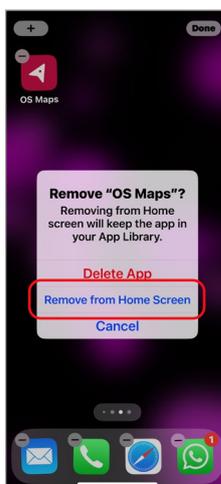
 Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Where have my iPhone icons gone?

Q My iPhone's camera icon used to sit happily next to the icon for my Photos app. Then suddenly it disappeared. I can't see it on any of the Home screens, so now I have to ask Siri to "Open the camera".

Similarly, I have a subscription to the Ordnance Survey (OS) app. I use it a lot, but the icon for that has disappeared too. How did this happen, where have they gone and how can I restore them?

Tim Nice



You can accidentally remove app icons from your iPhone by resting your hand on the screen and triggering this option

Home Screen followed by the minus ('-') symbol, then 'Remove from Home Screen' (see screenshot). That's obviously not something you're likely to do by accident very often, but with enough fumbling around with the iPhone in your pocket, it's possible to enact this sequence. Simply resting your hand on the screen is enough to start the process.

That's our best guess as to how it happened. Where they've gone and how to restore them are easier questions to answer. All apps live in your phone's App Library, which you can access by swiping right repeatedly until you swipe past your last Home screen.

A If you have an app on your iPhone that you rarely use, you can hide it by 'long pressing' its icon (tap and hold), then tapping Edit

Your iPhone automatically groups apps by genre. Look for one of your missing apps, then give it a long press and tap 'Add to Home Screen'. Now repeat for the second app. Finally, to place them where you want them, tap and hold any icon, select Edit Home Screen, then just drag things around.

Next Issue

ONSALE
Weds
14 Aug

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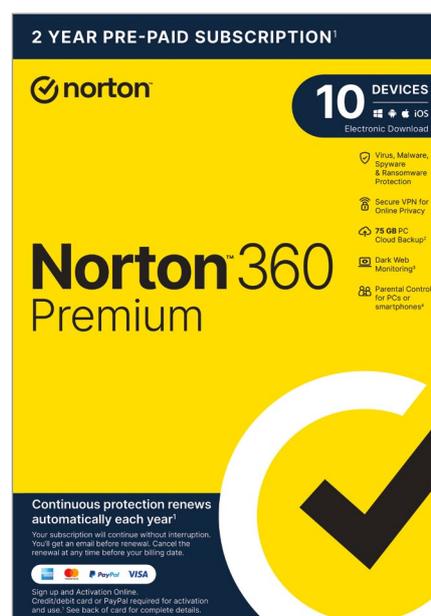
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Can I use your favourite printer through my PC?

Q You recommend Epson's ET-2830 as your Buy It printer (see page 33). It seems like a good option, but it makes a great deal about being operated by phone. Can it be easily set up and used via a computer in the normal way? If not, then it's not for me.

Ian Shering

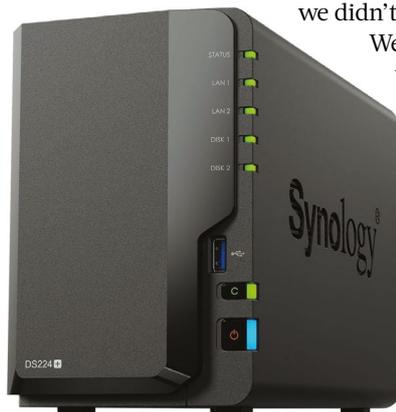
A According to Epson's support page and the online instruction manual for that model (www.snipca.com/51037), the ET-2830 operates exactly like any other printer, in terms of being able to set up the device and use it via your PC. As with many newer printers, smartphone control is more of a bonus feature rather than a replacement for traditional computer-based functions.

Are NAS drives too expensive for long-term storage?

Q In your feature 'How not to save your videos' (Issue 685, page 62), you wrote that the Synology DS224+ RAID 1 NAS costs £318 for 32TB (www.snipca.com/50597, pictured below). While the DS224+ can indeed support 32TB of storage, the price you quoted is for the diskless unit. Two 16TB drives alone would cost well in excess of £1,000.

If you don't already own a NAS drive, buying one just for the long-term storage of videos is an unnecessarily expensive option. External hard drives of the same size as a similar-capacity NAS drive are always going

NAS drives like the Synology DS224+ can be expensive if you add high-capacity drives, but built-in backup preserves your videos



to be significantly cheaper. You would lose the convenience of RAID 1, but you could buy two external hard drives to make multiple backups for a fraction of the cost of a RAID 1 NAS of the same capacity.

Les Hornby

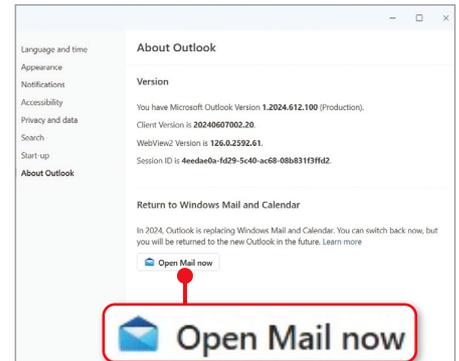
A The point we were making was that NAS drives configured with RAID 1 offer a good balance of cost and peace of mind when preserving your videos. This is because RAID combines two or more drives into a single-storage volume and reserves some capacity on each drive to store backup copies from the others.

This means that even if one drive fails, your video files will remain safe, because they are automatically backed up on the other drive. And, while it's true that a standalone external drive would work out cheaper, this solution would not offer the security of built-in backup that a NAS drive configured with RAID 1 provides.

That said, we'll admit the wording of the article makes it seem as if the Synology DS224+ NAS drive costs £318 with 32TB of storage included, when that price actually refers to the barebones NAS unit without any drives installed, as you correctly point out.

For that amount of storage, it would cost around £480 for a pair of 16TB Toshiba MG Series internal drives, putting the total cost at £798. Apologies if we didn't make this clear.

We did acknowledge that NAS drives aren't necessarily the cheapest method of storing videos and mentioned that extra drives would make them even more expensive. However, it's still cheaper than using high-capacity SSDs and much more reliable than M-Discs or external drives.



Click 'Open Mail now' in the Outlook app to revert to the old Mail app

Why can't I switch back to the old Mail app?

Q Following your feature on ditching the new Outlook (Issue 686, page 62), Microsoft has finally updated my computer to the new Outlook, replacing my Mail app. Previously there was a switch icon to exit the new version, but this has now disappeared, leaving me stuck with Outlook. I find this hard to navigate, so how can I get the old Mail app back?

James Munroe

A Microsoft has now ditched the switch in the new Outlook that allowed you to revert to the old Mail app. However, for the time being at least, you should be able to return to Mail from within the Outlook app. Click the Settings cog, followed by General, About Outlook – then the 'Open Mail now' button you'll find here (see screenshot above).

A word of warning, though – Microsoft is planning to close the old Mail app later this year (see www.snipca.com/51039), so it may be advisable to either try and get used to the way Outlook works, or switch to an alternative email tool that suits you better. We recommend Proton Mail (<https://proton.me/mail>) for privacy, though only the online version is free. If you prefer a desktop tool, try Thunderbird (www.thunderbird.net).

Jargon **Buster**

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

8K Video with a resolution of 7680x4320 pixels. Currently the highest resolution available.

AI Artificial intelligence. Intelligence demonstrated by a machine rather than a human being.

ARC Audio return channel. A feature on TVs that lets audio signals travel both to and from the TV via a single HDMI cable.

ARM Advanced RISC Machine. Processors that are more energy-efficient and used in more devices than those made by AMD and Intel.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen. Traditional PC screens are 4:3. Widescreen displays are 16:9 or 16:10.

AVI Audio Video Interleave. A type of video file. AVI is known as a container format, as it can hold many types of audio and video.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Bitcoin A digital currency, not controlled by governments.

Blacklist A list of files, email addresses or websites known to be bad.

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. Can be memory used on a computer processor, or space on a hard drive used by a web browser.

CFG Configuration file. Generic term for a file used to configure the settings of a program.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users.

Codec A file that tells a computer how to record or play a type of media file.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country.

Dark mode Showing white text on a black background.

Dark web Websites that can only be accessed using special software such as the Tor browser.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

DOCX The default file format used by Word 2007 and later.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

DSLR Digital single-lens reflex. A digital camera that uses a moving mirror so its viewfinder looks out through the lens.

DTS A type of surround-sound technology.

E Ink A special type of ink used to display content in electronic devices.

Emoji A small graphic that can be inserted into a text or email.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

exFAT Microsoft's file system for USB sticks and SD cards.

EXIF Exchangable Image File Format. A method for storing extra information, such as the date and time inside digital photo files.

FAT32 An old system used for formatting hard drives, and still used for some portable drives.

Field of view The amount of space measured in angles that can be seen from the camera lens.

Frame rate The number of still images, or frames, shown per second to create a moving image.

Freemium Online business model where basic services are provided for free, while more advanced features must be paid for.

Geo-restricted Content such as TV programmes and films that's intended to be watched only in a specific country.

GHz Gigahertz. A measure of how many instructions a chip can process per second. 1GHz is equal to 1,000MHz.

GIF A type of image file often used on the web.

GPS Global positioning system. Satellite-based navigational system.

GPU A chip designed to create 3D graphics, but which can also be used for other computing tasks.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HDR High dynamic range. Screen technology that improves the range of luminance between the darkest and brightest parts.

HTML Hypertext Markup Language. The language used to write most web pages.

Hyperlink A clickable link that takes you to a new document or website.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours than monitors that do not use this technology.

ISO The light sensitivity of a camera. Higher ISO numbers allow you to shoot without flash in darker situations.

ISO file A type of image file that contains all data from a CD or DVD.

Java A programming language used to create software and internet tools.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by digital cameras.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

Lossless Music file formats that take up more space but provide higher sound quality.

M-Disc A disc for storing media that its creators claim can last for a thousand years.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

Mobile broadband Internet access provided by mobile phone networks rather than fibre cables.

NAS Network-attached storage. A hard drive attached to a network that can be shared with other PCs.

Noise cancellation Method for reducing unwanted sound by adding a second sound specifically designed to cancel the first.

NPU Neural processing unit. Specialised chip designed for performing AI tasks.

NTFS New Technology File System. A file system used by all recent versions of Windows.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone, rather than just by the employees of the company that created it.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

Phishing A form of internet fraud that tries to trick you into revealing personal details.

Picture-in-picture Shows video in a small moveable screen while you browse the web or watch TV.

Plain text Text in a document that doesn't contain any formatting.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software or to your web browser.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

Product key A unique serial number that must be typed in by the user before a program will launch for the first time.

RAID System for storing data efficiently and automatically backing up computer hard drives.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

RTF Rich Text Format. A format used to transfer files between different word-processing programs.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones.

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.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that uses no moving parts.

System image A PC backup that includes your operating system drivers, settings, programs and files.

System restore point The collection of system files stored by System Restore on a given date and time to which Windows can revert if a problem occurs.

Tag A keyword used to describe a file or web page. Many programs use tags to organise related information quickly.

Tooltip A small message that appears when the cursor hovers over an option.

Transition A way of joining two video clips together or moving from one clip to another.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A new connector that's reversible, letting you plug it in upside down.

VA A form of LCDs in which liquid crystals align vertically between the panes of glass.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication private.

Waveform An image that represents an audio signal or recording.

White balance Adjusts the balance of colours in an image to make them look more natural.

Wi-Fi 6E Wi-Fi 6 extended to include the 6GHz band.

Wi-Fi card Adds Wi-Fi connectivity to a computer.

XMP Extensible metadata platform. An Adobe file format for storing metadata.

WMV Windows Media Video. A Microsoft file format for video.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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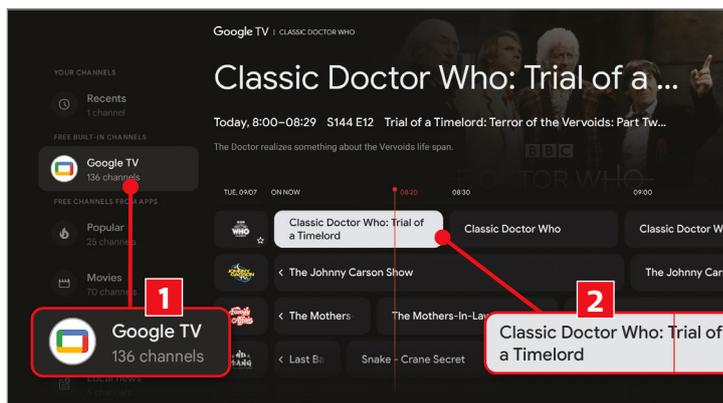
Easy when you **Know How**



Bored of browsing the same old British TV shows on Freeview, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Watch US channels on a smart TV

Since I cancelled my subscriptions to Netflix and Amazon Prime Video, following the introduction of their 'pay to watch with ads' and 'pay even more to watch without ads' plans, I've spent a lot of time moaning that there's never anything good on (free) TV. If it wasn't for the Freeview channels That's TV and 'Great! TV' showing classic series from yesteryear, there'd be very slim pickings among the endless antiques, cookery and property shows that dominate the electronic programme guide.



Robert managed to unlock Google TV's live US-only channels, only to find lots of British TV shows

“
Would Google be
fooled by my change
in location, from
Hampshire to Texas?
”

So I was intrigued to read that Google recently added 10 new – and free – channels to its Google TV platform for smart TVs and 'Chromecast with Google TV' dongle (www.snipca.com/51218). This means you can now watch more than 130 'live' channels (not actually live, but streaming content on a schedule) without subscribing to any services.

Except you can't, unless you live in the



Robert used Windscribe VPN to pretend he was in Dallas, Texas

US, because Google TV's Live section has yet to 'roll out' to the rest of the world. Think of all the free entertainment we're missing out on because of petty geo-restrictions. Determined to find out what the Americans are enjoying while I suffer another episode of *Escape to the Country*, I decided to unlock those elusive channels.

To do so, I installed my favourite free VPN, Windscribe (www.snipca.com/51220), on my Google TV. I already have an account with the service, which gives me 10GB of free data a month (2GB until you confirm your email address) and meant I was able to log into the app in seconds.

When Windscribe opened, I granted it permission to set up a VPN connection and browsed its list of US servers. Unlike other free VPNs, there are loads of locations to choose from, and on this occasion I opted for Dallas Ranch – if it's good enough for JR Ewing, it'll do for me. I selected the on-screen power button to connect to the Dallas server, and Windscribe confirmed that the VPN was connected (see screenshot left). So far, so good, but would Google be fooled by my mysterious change in location, from drizzly Hampshire to dusty Texas?

At first it appeared not, as nothing had changed on the Google TV home screen. But after disconnecting from then reconnecting to my Wi-Fi network, a new Live tab appeared in the top-left corner. I wasted no time in diving into this section to discover what US-only

treats it had in store.

Across a huge variety of channels, I was pleased to note several films I'd actually heard of (unusual for free TV), including *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Gladiator* and *Top Gun*, and classic TV shows such as *I Love Lucy* and *Happy Days*. However, when I tried to play any of this content, I was told to install the app for Pluto TV.

A quick search online revealed that many American Google TV viewers have complained they can only see Pluto TV channels, but there was a suggested solution. I went into Google TV's Settings and chose Apps followed by 'See all apps' then 'Show system apps'. I selected Google TV in the 'All apps' list and pressed 'Clear data'.

When I returned to the Live section, I was happy to see I now had 136 free Google TV channels (1 in our screenshot above), and hundreds more from third-party services such as Plex, Tubi and the aforementioned Pluto TV – provided I installed their apps.

Alongside US shows such as *Baywatch*, *Murder, She Wrote* and *Dateline NBC*, Google TV included channels for classic *Doctor Who* (2), *Midsomer Murders* and *Antiques Roadshow UK*, so I'd travelled halfway around the world just to come home again. But at least I now know the VPN trick works, for future reference.

✉ Need help with your smart TV? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

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