



**MASTER BT
DIGITAL VOICE**

Prepare for the landline switch-off
p62

**DON'T USE THIS
'MCAFFEE APP'**

It's a clever scam – p11



GIVE UP

Google for

ChatGPT

Get better search
results – not
useless ads

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Computer **active**

Nothing to see here – page 26

Learn something new in every issue

EVERY DEVICE YOU MUST STOP USING

▶ Ditch slow and unsafe
PCs, laptops, phones,
tablets, routers & more

- ✓ Check if support has ended
- ✓ Update software to fix flaws
- ✓ Stop hackers attacking you

p50



PLUS

**USE OLD TABLETS AS
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New method that's safer, easier – and FREE p38



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I hate the idea of binning devices just because they're past their prime, but sometimes there's simply no choice. Recently the battery in my iPhone 7 had degraded so much that it would only stay charged for less than the time it takes Apple to earn £5m (ie, one hour).

It's now practically useless, though Apple hasn't yet labelled the iPhone 7 as 'vintage'. Robert Irvine explains what this means in his excellent Cover Feature, and reveals how you can check whether other devices - PCs, laptops, tablets, smart TVs and more - are unsafe and need replacing.

I've learned that my Microsoft Surface laptop, HP Chromebook and Asus router are no longer supported, while one of my PCs has an Intel processor that's soon to become obsolete. Please let me know which devices you've identified as out of date, and what you plan to do with them.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

PS We've just created our 50,000th Snipca: www.snipca.com/50000. It's good to know there's a Wikipedia page for everything.

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- ✓ Stop hackers attacking you p50

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Number of Windows 11 users who've 'upvoted' for a grid view in the Start menu - p49

£190
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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLS

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

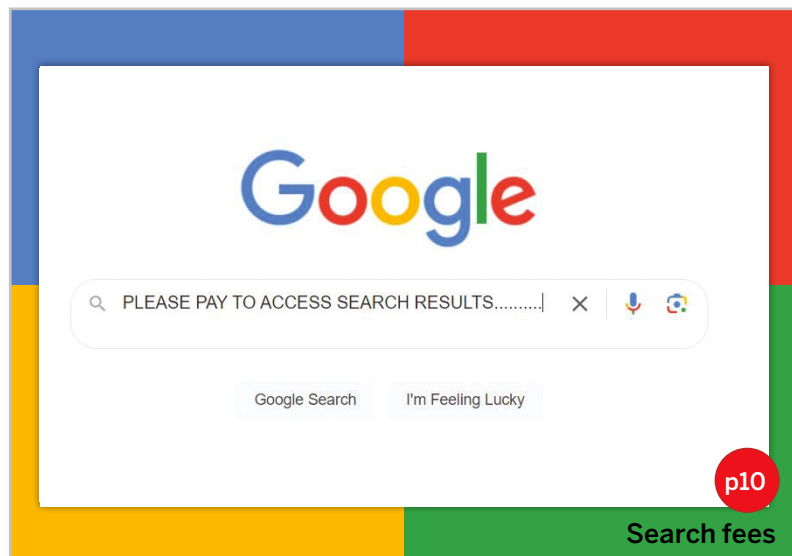
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GMKtec NucBox G3

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Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS

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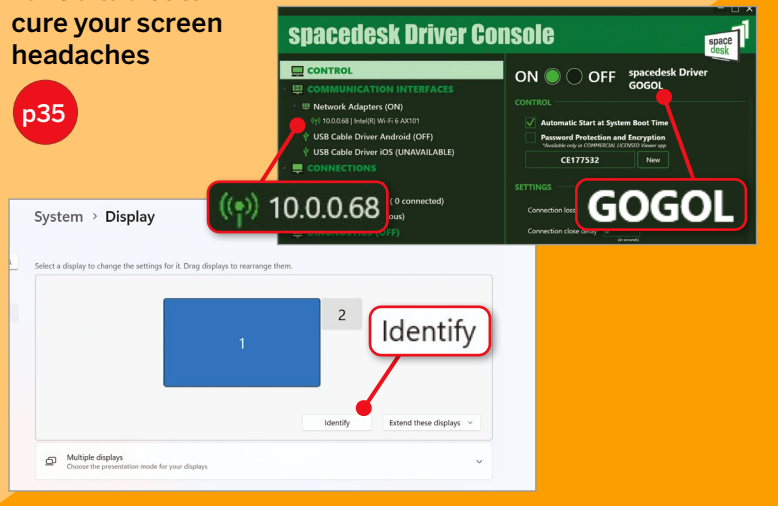
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EVERY DEVICE YOU MUST STOP USING

COVER FEATURE
P50

▶ Ditch slow and unsafe PCs, laptops, phones, tablets, routers & more



End of the line p62

Master Your BT DIGITAL VOICE PHONE

BT



Microsoft lifts 'block' that stops PCs upgrading to W11

Microsoft has lifted a "block" that was preventing some Windows 10 computers from upgrading to Windows 11.

The problem stemmed from Intel's Smart Sound Technology (SST) driver, which helps your computer

recognise your voice, and makes sure you can hear sound clearly and that your microphone works well.

This driver is built into some of Intel's Rocket Lake processors, which were released in 2021. Versions 10.29.0.5152 and 10.30.0.5152 of the driver were causing Blue Screen of Death crashes.

You can check whether you have SST by searching for Device Manager in Windows, then clicking Open. Now click 'Sound, video and game controllers' and look for any drivers called 'Intel Smart Sound Technology'.

Intel released new versions of the drivers within weeks of the bug being discovered in 2021. These fixed the problem, but you had to download them manually from Intel's website (www.snipca.com/50076).

Since then Microsoft has blocked any computers without the updated drivers from upgrading to Windows 11. It has now lifted this block



after including Intel's updates as part of its latest Patch Tuesday, released on 9 April.

Microsoft has now changed the status of this problem from 'Mitigated' to 'Resolved External' on its support site (www.snipca.com/50077). This means the problem has been fixed by a third party – Intel in this case.

Check for KB5036892

April's Patch Tuesday fix, called KB5036892, should have been installed automatically on your computer. To check, open Settings (press Windows key+I), then click 'Update & Security' followed by 'Check

for updates'. If KB5036892 appears, click to install it.

If it doesn't appear, it's probably already been installed. Check this by typing about into Windows search, clicking Open, then looking for the 'OS build' under 'Windows specifications'.

After installing KB5036892, Windows 10 21H2 will be updated to build 19044.4291, while Windows 10 22H2 will be updated to build 19045.4291. If your build number is lower than this, then KB5036892 hasn't been installed.

If it is installed and you want to upgrade to Windows 11, click 'Check for updates' and see if the upgrade option appears. If not, try again every couple of days.

Should the option to upgrade to Windows 11 not appear, then your computer probably fails to meet another technical requirement, such as lacking TPM 2.0 or a minimum of 64GB storage. For Microsoft's full requirements for Windows 11 visit www.snipca.com/50078.

WHAT WE THINK

Regardless of how many users were affected by this block, it's taken far too long for Microsoft to lift it. Such restrictions are keeping Windows 11's market share at pitifully low levels, and it surely won't overtake Windows 10 before support ends for the latter in October 2025. At that point, we expect millions of people will reluctantly decide to pay for extended support, if only for one year while they consider their options. Many of them will end up skipping Windows 11 and buy a new PC running its successor.

PRICES DOUBLE EVERY YEAR FOR EXTENDED W10 SUPPORT

Businesses will have to pay \$61 (about £49) per device for extended security updates for Windows 10 after Microsoft ends standard support on 14 October 2025. But this price is for the first year of support only. It will double for the second year (\$122), then double again (\$244) for the third.

Microsoft's Extended Security Update scheme for Windows 10 will run for only three years after 2025. For the first time it's offering the scheme to individuals, but hasn't confirmed pricing – though it's likely to be significantly cheaper than for businesses (see www.snipca.com/50080).

Windows 10 remains by far the world's most popular operating system, despite support ending in 18 months' time. Its market share even jumped in March from 67.26 to 69.07 per cent, while Windows 11 fell from 28.16 to 26.68 per cent (see www.snipca.com/50081).



You'll like this...

Google to make paid-for photo-editing tools free (www.snipca.com/50066)



but not this...

Over-55 are most likely to be targeted in investment scams (www.snipca.com/50067)

Google to wipe user data collected in Incognito mode



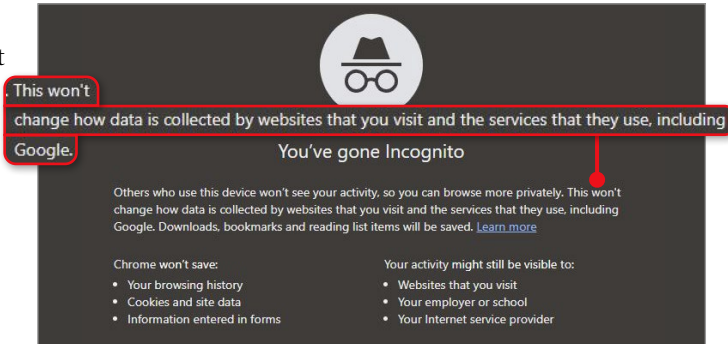
Google will destroy the data of millions of users it collected while they were browsing the internet in Chrome's **Incognito mode**.

The move aims to resolve a class-action lawsuit brought in California, that accused the company of invading people's privacy by gathering their data when they thought they were browsing privately.

The lawsuit sought \$5bn in damages, but Google has instead agreed to delete billions of data records it has collected. It will wipe data from around the world, not just the US.

Any data it can't delete must be 'de-identified' so it can't be used to identify individuals.

Google will also continue to be more transparent about how Incognito mode works. For example, it has changed the wording when you launch Incognito to say that it "won't change how data is



collected by websites you visit and the services that they use, including Google" (see screenshot).

Privacy campaigners have long argued that while Incognito mode stops browsing history being saved on the PC being used, Google should be clearer that websites can still track your activity.

Lawyer David Boies of Boies Schiller Flexner LLP, which filed the lawsuit, said the deal is a "historic step in requiring honesty and accountability from dominant

technology companies".

Google spokesperson José Castañeda said that it's "pleased to settle this lawsuit, which we always believed was meritless".

"We are happy to delete old technical data that was never associated with an individual and was never used for any form of personalization," he added.

Individuals can still file claims for damages in the California state court. The deal will now go to the court for approval.

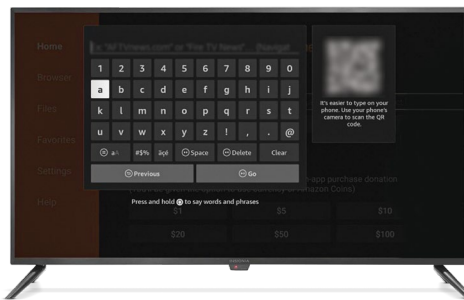
Amazon blocks use of Fire TV remote control over hacking claim

Amazon has stopped letting you use your phone or tablet as a TV remote or virtual keyboard to fix an alleged flaw that could allow hackers to infect your TV with malware.

The problem affects a new feature in the Fire TV operating system that lets you scan a **QR code** to open a virtual remote on your phone's browser.

Amazon hoped this would make it easier to type passwords and navigate the Fire TV interface, but it also appears to be vulnerable to attack.

Security researchers at US firm Green Line Analytics said that by acquiring the QR code hackers would be able to



"hijack the device by installing unwanted apps".

This is possible because to control a Fire TV device using the QR code you don't need to be connected to the same Wi-Fi network as the Fire TV. You also don't need to log into an account.

However, to launch an attack a hacker would still need to see the code on your

TV so they could scan it.

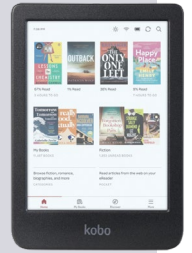
Amazon said it "immediately disabled" the feature while it investigates the issue, and hopes to bring it back soon.

Until Amazon confirms it's safe, you should use your physical remote or the Fire TV Remote app (www.snipca.com/50047), which isn't affected by the flaw.

IN BRIEF

KOBO BEATS AMAZON TO COLOUR E-READER

Kobo has released its first colour e-readers, beating Amazon which has been working on colour Kindles for some time. The **Libra Clara Colour** (pictured) has a 6in screen and costs £139.99, while the **Libra Colour** is 7in and costs £219.99. Both devices go on sale on 30 April – read more at www.snipca.com/50044. We'll review them soon.



EBAY AXES FEES FOR SECOND-HAND CLOTHES

EBay has removed fees for selling clothes that are second-hand, or "pre-owned" to use the website's term. It says encouraging more people to sell clothes they no longer need will help to keep them out of landfill. However, fees still apply for selling trainers, watches, handbags and jewellery. Read more at www.snipca.com/50043.

TOMORROW'S WORLD



Tesla and X (formerly Twitter) boss **Elon Musk** (pictured)

thinks **AI** is progressing so quickly that it'll be "smarter than any one human probably around the end of next year". He also predicted it will outsmart all humans within five years. Listen to his interview with Norwegian wealth fund CEO **Nicolai Tangen** at www.snipca.com/50042.



IN BRIEF

SET SHORTCUTS ON CHROMEBOOKS

Google has updated ChromeOS (version M123) to let you create your own keyboard shortcuts on Chromebooks. To do this, type **chrome:flags** into Chrome's browser bar, then search for **#enable-shortcut-customization**. Now select Enabled and restart your Chromebook. The new version also lets you change what your mouse buttons do. For details visit www.snipca.com/50026.

UK HAS 5TH CHEAPEST MOBILE DATA

The UK has the fifth "most affordable" mobile data in the world, according to a global study from comparison site Broadband Genie. It compared the average cost of a monthly phone plan with 10GB+ of data against average salaries from over 70,000 people in 179 countries. Brits spend £12.14 on average a month – 0.52 per cent of their salary. Singapore has the world's most affordable data. Read the report at www.snipca.com/50022.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!



Teenagers addicted to social media are more likely to be smokers and vapers, according to a study from Glasgow University. Researchers found the more time children spent online aged 14, the higher the chance they'd end up smoking or vaping at 17. Yet another reason for kids to put down their phones and do something more productive instead.



Virgin resumes landline switching but not to vulnerable customers

Virgin has resumed switching landline customers to digital phones, but is excluding vulnerable people and those using a telecare device.

It paused the Digital Landline Switchover programme in December following numerous reports of telecare systems not working during power cuts.

It led to the company signing a Government charter (www.snipca.com/48867) with five pledges to protect vulnerable customers as copper-based landlines are switched to digital. BT also signed the charter, along with KCOM, Shell Energy, Sky, TalkTalk and Vodafone.

Virgin said that pausing the



rollout has given it the time to undertake "a detailed end-to-end review of our processes" and work to "further improve them" (see www.snipca.com/50020).

It has introduced new measures which it claims makes it "easier to identify and support those who need extra help". These include "improved" communications

to customers about changes, and engineers providing "additional" support when installing digital phones in the home.

Virgin will only switch people who volunteer for it. It will also check that customers are using their landlines "in a similar way to before", and "proactively contact anyone we suspect may be having issues".

The company added that ultimately every customer will need to switch to digital in order "to receive a reliable landline service". It will release further details soon on how it will help vulnerable and telecare customers switch successfully.

VIRGIN LAUNCHES 'SMART SUPPORT'

Virgin Media O2 has launched its 'Smart Support' service that it claims will fix problems remotely so customers "often won't need to call and report faults". It monitors routers

and internet connections to identify problems and "irregularities", so they can be fixed "with minimal action from customers". Read more at www.snipca.com/50019.

Roku wants to show adverts on any device connected to your TV

Roku wants to show adverts on any device that you connect to your TV via HDMI, including TV boxes, game consoles, DVD/Blu-ray players, PCs and even other video-streaming devices.

The adverts would appear only on TVs made by Roku, such as the new Logik range which start from £130 at Currys (www.snipca.com/50023).

Currently Roku shows ads on its screensaver – such as



the pictured McDonald's ad – which appears when your TV is switched on, but a programme or game is paused.

However, these appear only within apps installed on Roku's TVs. Any devices connected by

HDMI will show their own screensavers, allowing the manufacturers to make money from any ads that appear on them.

Roku's patent, filed last August but not yet approved, would allow it to override screensavers from other devices and show their own ads.

It also wants to identify what the user is watching or playing in order to show relevant ads – a system it calls "customised ad insertion".

One in six over-65s never use the internet

More than one in six people aged over 65 (2.3 million) never use the internet, according to Age UK. Almost half of these are over 75.

It also said that more than 1 in 3 over-65s (4.7 million) lack the basic skills to use the internet successfully.

The figures come from the charity's new report 'Offline and Overlooked', which highlights the UK's 'digital excluded'.

It said that of those who do use the internet, around 2.5 million lack "key skills" required to "thrive in a digital society in day-to-day life". These include "being able to communicate, to store and access information and content, carry out transactions, search for information and be safe online".

The charity is calling on all political parties to ensure that all public services, including

the NHS and councils, offer easy and affordable ways to access them offline – such as by phone, letter or face to face. It also wants private companies, particularly banks, to make it easy for customers to use their services offline.

Caroline Abrahams CBE, Charity Director at Age UK said: "The inconvenient truth is that many millions of people of all ages, especially older ones, are neither confident nor adept at using the internet, and want and need to continue to be able to transact their business in more traditional ways".

She added that older people often tell her how "cross and upset" they are when essential



services like GP appointments and Blue Badge applications are moved online.

"This often leaves them feeling disregarded and disempowered, and the consequences can be serious, severing them from the support they need to stay fit, well and independent," she said.

Read more on Age UK's site: www.snipca.com/50002.

 Do you feel digitally excluded? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Most people 'in favour of telegraph poles'

Most of the public are in favour of telegraph poles being used for broadband, according to the industry body that represents internet providers.

ISPA (Internet Service Providers Association) said a nationwide survey of 2,500 people found that 75 per cent "clearly recognise the benefits of having access to faster and more reliable broadband even if that is delivered via poles" (see www.snipca.com/50005).

The survey showed that even in areas where poles are not currently being used, 69 per cent of people would accept new poles "to provide the community with better access to broadband".

Less than 20 per cent

"frequently notice" poles when they are out and about, the results found, while only 30 per cent would be willing to pay to lay broadband cables underground in their street.

ISPA's survey comes amid growing scrutiny of internet providers using telegraph poles rather than laying cables underground.

In March, Digital Infrastructure Minister Julia Lopez urged network operators like Openreach and Virgin Media O2 to do "everything possible" to share existing equipment or use underground cables.

It followed widespread protests from residents across the UK angry that they weren't consulted about the



erection of poles. Planning rules were relaxed in 2017 to allow broadband firms to install poles without requiring planning permission from local councils.

• "Poles being installed where cables already exist" – Letters, page 12

IN BRIEF

BT CREATES 2,000 MORE STREET HUBS

BT is converting another 2,000 unused phone boxes into Street Hubs (pictured) providing public Wi-Fi and USB charging – both free. The boxes will offer speeds of 1Gbps within a 150-metre radius, as well as local information on touchscreens. The roll-out will happen across 200 towns over 10 years from 2025, joining the 959 boxes that have already been converted. Read more at www.snipca.com/49950.



JOHN LEWIS BROADBAND TO CLOSE IN MAY

Plusnet will close its John Lewis Broadband service on 28 May, and will offer customers the chance to switch to another of its packages. However, customers will lose email addresses associated with John Lewis Broadband, including @john-lewis.com, @greenbee.net and @waitrose.com. It's thought around 25,000 people are signed up to the service.

DISNEY+ TO AXE PASSWORD SHARING

Disney+ will soon start to crack down on subscribers sharing passwords. Walt Disney boss Bob Iger said from June it would start charging for password sharing across households in "a few" countries, before spreading this across the world in September. Industry analysts expect it to be similar to Netflix's password-sharing options: www.snipca.com/49998.

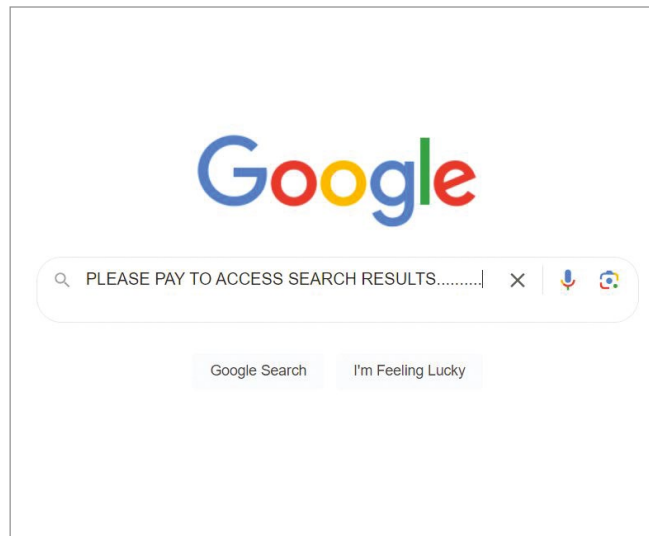
Question of the Fortnight

Will Google start charging for search results?

Reports say the company might make you pay for AI-powered search

Google is worried about AI, but not for the reasons most people are. Rather than fretting about killer robots or whether any jobs will still exist in 10 years' time, it's concerned that AI will spark the end of its dominance as the world's most popular search engine.

Its fear stems from the rise of AI tools like ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com>), which some users say give more useful answers to questions than Google. We think that's true in many cases (see page 60), and Google is right to be nervous. Last year, it made \$175bn (about £138bn) from adverts in search results – more than half its total revenue. That's a lot of money to lose if people



available online and as an app as part of the new Google One AI Premium Plan, which for £18.99 also gives you 2TB of storage.

from ads in this service because the results will be detailed enough to give the user all the information they need without having to click a sponsored link.

These costs are probably one of the reasons why Google's bosses have yet to launch paid-for AI search. But whether or not it arrives, Google isn't going to ditch free results. That \$175bn advertising cash cow depends on 8.5 billion searches a day and a 91-per-cent market share (www.snipca.com/50028).

The *FT*'s story cited "three people with knowledge of Google's plans", but that was never going to be enough to force the company into revealing its intentions. It said it had nothing to announce, but added that "for years, we've been reinventing Search to help people access information in the way that's most natural to them".

Yet paid-for results raise fears of a two-tier Search,

THE FACTS

- The *FT* says Google is considering whether to charge for "premium" search results that are powered by artificial intelligence
- It comes in response to the rise of AI tools like ChatGPT, which often give accurate results to questions
- There are an estimated 8.5 billion searches on Google every day, and its market share is over 90 per cent

providing detailed information for those who can afford it, and inadequate snippets for those who can't.

The difference may not be obvious at first, but if the paid-for service proves lucrative Google would be tempted to move more tools behind the paywall.

There's also a chance Google might scrap the idea entirely and add all its AI tools to the free version of Search. This would undercut ChatGPT, which has its own paid-for version, as does Microsoft with its AI tool Copilot.

But all the evidence so far shows that people – and business executives especially – are prepared to pay for AI tools. They might not always understand what they're paying for, but they're terrified of being seen as out of touch.

As the AI hype grows, Google will surely seek every opportunity to make money from it.

“ It raises fears of two-tier search results, with detailed information only for those who can afford it ”

start switching to rival tools.

Google's response seems to be that if you can't beat them, join them. Sources at the company told the *Financial Times* that it's considering launching "premium" search features powered by AI that you'd have to pay for.

This would be the biggest change ever to Google's business model, and it's already moving in that direction. In February, it started charging for access to the most advanced version of its AI chatbot Gemini (previously called Bard). It's

That price gives away what Gemini is good at – writing code, creating complex instructions and summarising work documents. It's aimed at businesses and the self-employed, and can be used easily in Gmail and Google Docs.

Google is currently testing an experimental search service that uses AI to give more comprehensive answers. This costs Google more money than normal results because they consume more computing resources. It's also likely to make less money

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

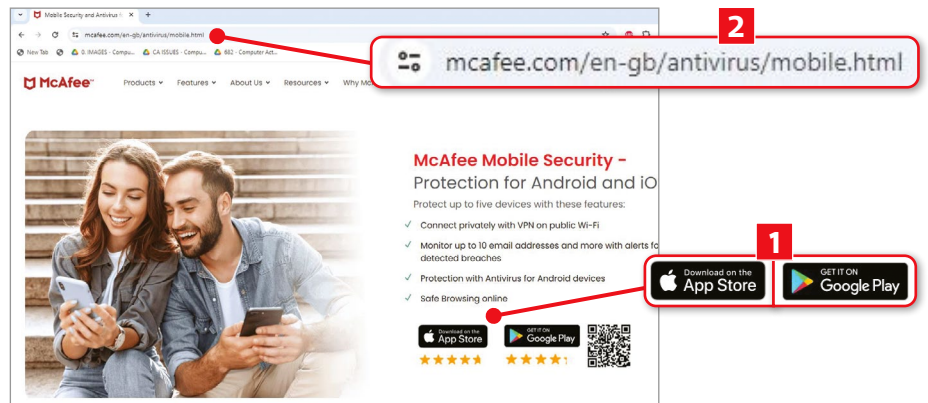
Malware impersonating McAfee app

What's the threat?

Scammers are infecting Android devices with malware hidden inside an app that appears to be an official product from McAfee. The scam begins when the victim receives a text message claiming there's been an unauthorised transaction in their bank account.

The message tells you to call a number for advice. This is answered by a scammer, who asks you to click a link in a text message they're about to send. Clicking this link takes you to a site that offers the fake McAfee app. Installing it infects your device with a new, more powerful version of the Vultur Trojan that criminals can use to steal money from your bank.

First spotted in 2021, Vultur is now one of the top 10 most common banking Trojans. The latest build has new features that give scammers complete control over infected devices. They're now able to perform tasks such as downloading files, blocking apps from running, clicking



links, and scrolling and swiping through screens. They can also record your screen and track what you tap.

How can you stay safe?

First, remember never to ring a number in a text message that you weren't expecting. If you're worried about a transaction, search for your bank's phone number, then call it. Also look out for the

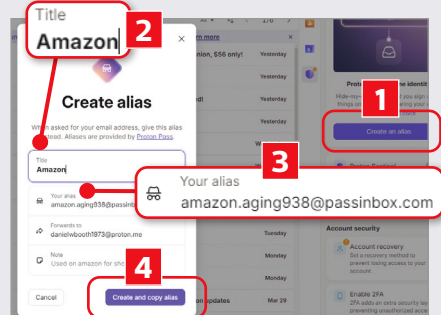
alert 'Temporarily Unavailable', which is what Vultur shows when you try to launch an app it has blocked.

To download the real versions of McAfee's app, ignore any text messages or emails and instead visit www.snipca.com/49972. You'll find links to both the Android and iOS versions (1 in our screenshot). Look at the URL (2) to check you're on the correct site.

New tools | Use email aliases in Proton Mail

Swiss-based security firm Proton keeps adding features that are advanced yet easy to use. The latest example is the 'hide-my-email' tool in Proton Mail, which creates fake addresses – or aliases – you can use when signing up to a service. Any newsletters or marketing offers they send will go to this alias within your Proton Mail account, without the service ever knowing your *real* email address.

Create an account at <https://proton.me/mail>, then click the 'Security center' shield icon on the right, followed by 'Create an alias' (1 in our screenshot). Now type a title for the alias (2, such as the name of the service you're using it for (eg 'Amazon' or 'Netflix')). You'll see this title added to an alias below (3). Now click 'Create and copy alias' (4), then paste this address



into the site you're registering with. To see and delete aliases, click the shield icon, then 'All aliases'.

You get 10 aliases to use for free, or unlimited if you upgrade – read Proton's blog for info: www.snipca.com/49971. Aliases were already available in Proton's password manager, called Pass. This recently added *passkeys* – see page 38.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers

Rude scammer 'from So Energy'

Three times in one day I received spam calls from the number 0330 124 5686. The caller claimed to be from So Energy, which I am a customer of. She also knew my surname and quoted the first two digits of my sort code. She tried to get me to sign up to a new tariff and also wanted me to install a smart meter. Her reason was that my meter wasn't reading properly. When I told her that I would check this by calling So Energy directly, she became rude and abrupt, hanging up soon after. She had obviously realised I wasn't going to fall for it.


Derek Trent

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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind


Digital payments can't replace a birthday tenner

 In response to Issue 681's 'Question of the Fortnight' (pictured right), one thing that digital payments will never replace is the thrill of opening a birthday card and seeing £10 flutter

out. Watching my grandchildren's eyes light up when this happens is still a highlight of my year. Of course, when I was growing up it used to be £1, and only then on milestone birthdays! My grandchildren understand a lot about technology, but thankfully they've yet to tell me that they only accept digital payments. I'm waiting for that fateful birthday when they say, "Can you transfer it into my PayPal account, Grandma?"


Karen O'Sullivan

I said no to illegal Amazon Fire Stick

 Peter Howell is spot on when he says people using 'cracked' Amazon Fire Sticks to avoid paying for TV don't treat it as a serious crime (Letters, Issue 681). Like him I turned down an invite to watch a sporting event that was being streamed for 'free' at someone's house via one of these dodgy sticks. When I told them I was uncomfortable with it morally, they simply couldn't believe it. I'm not sure this had even occurred to them. They certainly hadn't considered the risk of ever being caught, so the deterrent factor is negligible.

Martin Greenwood

When to wear antistatic straps


 I've just received Issue 681 and always go to the Problems Solved pages first. In your answer to Robin Gowing's question 'Should I fit more memory on my PC?' (page 66), you advise "to touch an earthed metal object

(like a radiator)" to discharge any static".

In my experience, in houses built since 2000, and probably many before that, radiators are fed by plastic piping not copper, so they won't run to earth. In these homes it's better to wear antistatic straps.

Don Palmer

Reach for the converted


 I read with amusement Malcolm Plant's complaint about *Computeractive* using the phrase 'rolling out' (Letters, Issue 681) because the grumpy old man in me also gets annoyed by some of the phrases that appear in general usage. For example, when did we stop contacting people and started 'reaching out' to them? I'm not a member of the Four Tops so I'll never be 'reaching out' to anyone. Another one is 'leverage', which seems to be used instead of implement. I could go on, but I have things to do.

Mark Storr

CA SAYS We couldn't agree more. Companies often use 'reach out' when they have a difficult message to tell their customers, or they've been forced into an apology. They hope it'll sound like they want to place a comforting arm around your shoulders, rather than send you an email containing information you're not going to like ("We're reaching out to tell you that your account has been hacked and all your details are now being sold to Russian hackers"). At least that's well

intentioned, but there's simply no excuse for 'leverage' which, as Mark says, appears everywhere – from jargon-stuffed press releases to atrociously written technology websites. Most of the time it can be replaced with the word 'use' or 'using'. As a recent example, take this headline from Microsoft's blog: 'Work smarter in Microsoft Teams by leveraging the apps ecosystem' (www.snipca.com/50008).

Poles being installed where cables already exist

 Many thanks for highlighting the problem of erecting telegraph poles for broadband (Issue 680, page 6). While poles may be necessary in some rural communities, the main objections in the towns you mentioned and many more, including Bolton where I live, is that they're being installed in areas already well served by underground cables.

The estate where I live is fully cabled, and broadband from Sky, BT, Virgin, EE and Plusnet are available. But a company called IX Wireless (aka 6G Internet/Opus Broadband) just appeared and installed 30-foot poles, sometimes directly outside houses. No notice was received by residents.

They've also installed 50-foot metal poles and huge cabinets. Residents do not want or need these eyesores. Councillors can't do anything as permission is not required. On my road these poles are approximately 25 metres apart. I can see eight from my lounge windows. Requests for poles to be removed are ignored.

Multiple Facebook groups exist where thousands of members can voice




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What's the Issue...?

 When did you explain how to record and send videos in WhatsApp?


Jean Grogan

CA SAYS Yes, in Issue 672, page 67.

CA SAYS In Issue 664, page 44.

 I think eBay has banned me because I use a VPN. Didn't you cover this in Problems Solved recently?

Mike Shearer

 When did you explain whether it's legal to share passwords for paid-for accounts?

Allan Connery

CA SAYS In Issue 668's 'Are you breaking the law online?' feature, page 60. Read it and the features above on our 2023 Back Issue CD/Stick: www.snipca.com/49617.

objections. Parliamentary debates just waffle about achieving 85-per-cent broadband coverage, not actually addressing the problem. If fibre ducts already exist underground they should be used – not as an option but enforced. The companies who have put up poles should have to remove them.

Martin Draper

How I block 'mystery box' email scams

✉ I was interested in the recent article about 'mystery box' scams (Issue 680, page 11). I've been receiving emails offering similar free gifts, purportedly from John Lewis, Screwfix and Boots. The common factor in all of these emails is that they're from the domain 'fathom.labs.io', which is always preceded by random letters. I've set up a rule in Outlook so that any messages from this domain are deleted.

I have Virgin broadband, and it would be helpful if they'd let you block emails from certain domains. At present you have to block individual addresses, which is impracticable as the random letters are never the same.

For some reason Outlook places most of my emails in the junk folder. Despite the extra hassle of transferring them to my inbox, it gives me the opportunity to check the sending addresses before moving the message to the inbox.

John Dickinson

I built a UK101 'Barbie' computer in 1979

✉ In response to Issue 679's request regarding old computers, I built a Compukit UK101 following instructions in a 1979 edition of *Practical Electronics* magazine. It has an 8K 6502 processor running at 1MHz. Programs are written in Microsoft Basic and stored on audio cassettes. They cost £219 in kit form or £269 fully assembled (not including the monitor). As you can see from my photo



(left), it's a big red box so I called it 'BRB', but after a few days it became 'Barbie' and that's still her name today. Many magazines published programs that could run on it, such as Connect 4, Minefield, Torpedo Run, Vocabulary

STAR LETTER

Shoppers to blame for Amazon not stating country of origin

✉ I've just entered my eighth decade and thought there was little left in this world that could surprise me. But I was stunned to read in Issue 681 (page 7) that Amazon doesn't

have to state the country of origin when listing products. I admit that I've never looked for this information when shopping on the site, but that's only because I buy from big-name brands who I trust.

In the current climate I can understand why Sir Iain Duncan Smith said that listing items made in China was a priority. I would include Russia also, though I doubt many items are made there. But regardless of the countries, how has Amazon and other websites got away with this? It's outrageous that they can bypass the law while all high-street shops have to check their products state the country of origin.

It sounds like regulators have been too soft on the likes of Amazon, but we consumers should take some of the blame also. We're happy to accept



ever-cheaper prices on Amazon without fully appreciating any of the consequences. If we really cared that much about where a product is made, we would have pressurised

Amazon into adding this information.

Threats of a boycott would have made them listen, but apart from the occasional petition or MPs sporadically raising concerns, this subject has barely been brought up in the 20-odd years that Amazon has been dominant. How tragic it would be if it took a life-threatening cyber-attack or, worse, military conflict to bring this issue to the attention of more people.

Phil O'Driscoll

CA SAYS We received many emails from readers who are angry that Amazon and other leading online retailers don't say where a product is made. There are ways to check this for yourself, as some readers have discovered – see 'Tip of the Fortnight' on page 40.



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

Test and Crossword Notepad.

Richard Godfrey

What Cocreator has drawn for me

✉ I use Corel Paint ShopPro 2023 (www.snipca.com/49948), but their AI tool Vision FX (£70 from www.snipca.com/49949) is too expensive for me. Instead, I use Microsoft Cocreator for free on my Windows 11 PC as you recommended in Issue 673 (page 49). Cocreator isn't yet on my other Windows 10 PC, so I've created images using Copilot's AI, available at www.bing.com/chat. I've sent you Cocreator's image (above right) when told to draw 'two tropical birds sitting on a flowering tree' **1**. The other image is Bing Copilot's interpretation of 'dog with ball and floral background' **2**.

Leonard Boyns



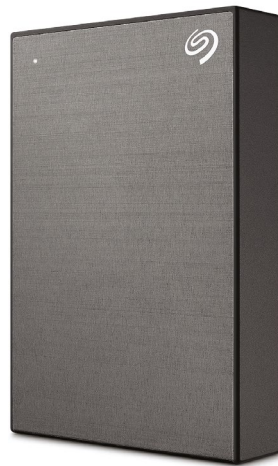
CA SAYS As Leonard has discovered, creating images from descriptions is one of the most productive ways you can use AI. To launch Cocreator on Windows 11, search for and open Paint, then click the Cocreator button on the toolbar and type a description in the box on the right. You can create 50 images for free. For Windows 10, visit the Bing link Leonard provides and in the 'Ask me anything' box at the bottom tell it to draw what you want. ChatGPT doesn't create images for free, but you can use it as an alternative to Google's search results – see page 60.



We stand up for your legal rights

Where's my replacement drive as warranty promised?

Q I purchased a Seagate 2TB portable drive from Currys in January 2022. I registered the warranty with Seagate, but after 11 months the drive failed. I returned it to Seagate's Rescue Data Recovery Services (www.snipca.com/49867) in order to recover the data and be sent a replacement. Seagate sent UPS return labels to me, but it says the drive has been missing since December. UPS sent me claim forms to report the missing drive and Seagate says it would investigate, but still nothing has happened. Can you help?



more time looking for it. Seagate might be waiting for John to fill in claim forms sent by UPS, but he won't be able to because he didn't pay for the drive to be returned, and so won't have the information required. We've asked Seagate to recognise that the drive has been lost for over three months and send a new one to John.

John Mulholland

A We'll do our best because John is entitled to a replacement drive, as stated in the terms and conditions of Seagate's warranty. UPS has confirmed that the drive has been lost, and John has sent Seagate proof of this. Seagate therefore shouldn't waste any

He might be able to claim compensation for the lost data, though he'll need to prove financial loss, which could be difficult. There's no point approaching Currys for help because John no longer has the drive, and the data-recovery promise has nothing to do with the retailer.

CASE ONGOING

Can I use Norton on other devices?

Q I bought Norton 360 Premium for 10 devices, but after being scammed I replaced some of my equipment and changed my email address. As a result, I've forgotten my product key and Norton won't allow me to download the software to my new devices. Can it do this?

Thomas O'Callaghan

A Legally, it's a grey area, but we think that Thomas should be allowed to transfer Norton antivirus to another computer unless the company's terms strictly forbid this. We've asked him to email these to us so we can study them.

We've also asked Norton to do more to help him. The product key is 25 characters long, so you can hardly blame Thomas for forgetting it.

Thomas bought the software from the *Computeractive* Software Store (www.snipca.com/33247), and Norton emailed the product key to him. But he changed his email address after being scammed, so can no longer access this account.

This is also why he can't retrieve his product key by logging into his Norton account online, as explained at www.snipca.com/49870.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Check if business contract includes email access



Ken Doyle, who runs a small firm in Birmingham, asked us whether he could seek compensation if his internet provider deleted his business's email address. He was responding to Barry Grieson's case against Virgin Media O2 (see Issue 681), in which we said customers aren't automatically entitled to compensation if their provider locks them out of their email accounts.

The short answer is: maybe. If Ken has a business account with his provider, it probably

includes a comprehensive service level agreement or, more broadly, a service level commitment. These are contracts that state which service a company will deliver, and the standards it must stick to. A commitment to provide a business email address can be part of these contracts.

But even if Ken loses access to his email, he's not entitled to automatic compensation. What we referred to in Barry's case is Ofcom's voluntary scheme for broadband and landline failures (www.snipca.com/50057),

and this doesn't cover lack of email service – business or personal. Ken should check whether his contract refers to his email.

Non-business customers can claim compensation for any service failing but need to prove they've suffered financial loss and take their complaint to the Communication Ombudsman (www.commsombudsman.org). Barry didn't lose any money, so we couldn't help him seek the £300 compensation he sought from Virgin. However, it has restored his @ntlworld email account.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

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

Is Amazon to blame for misleading PC listing?

Q I'm interested in buying an expensive computer from Amazon, but I'm not sure how reputable the manufacturer is. What are my rights if a listing on Amazon turns out to be misleading, and I don't get what I believe I should? Is it the manufacturer's responsibility or Amazon's? And can I keep the goods anyway?

Samantha Jones

A It depends which company is actually selling the computer. If it's being sold directly by

Amazon, then Amazon is legally responsible. But many retailers list their products on Amazon and use the company as the 'fulfilment agent', which means Amazon is responsible for delivering the items. In these cases, refunds and repairs are the responsibility of the retailer – even if these are often carried out through Amazon's customer support.

Either way, the law protects Samantha if the computer doesn't match the



description. Misleading information is a breach of the Consumer Rights Act and the Unfair Trading Regulations. She'll be able to treat the contract as null and void, meaning she can return the goods for a full refund.

Alternatively, she could keep the computer but seek a partial refund to reflect what's wrong in the listing – ie, if it overstates how much RAM it has, or the processor speed. She'd have to negotiate this with the retailer.

CASE CLOSED

Can I get refund for dodgy SSDs?

Q In February I bought two 1TB portable SSDs from Versik (www.versik.com) priced £35. But something's wrong with the SSDs because they can only save a few files. Versik sent instructions on how to fix the problem, but these didn't work and it's now ignoring me. Is there any way I can recover my money from the seller?

Daniel Barnes

A Daniel is entitled to a full refund, but we're not confident he'll get one. Versik's website seems respectable enough, but the company has terrible reviews on Trustpilot (www.snipca.com/49854, pictured), with 91 per cent giving the company just one star out of five (see screenshot).

All UK companies must list a geographical address on their website, but this is missing from Versik's site. It does list a phone number in the Doncaster area, but no

one answered when we rang it.

The website is actually registered in Iceland, which thickens the plot further. Iceland is a member of the European Economic Area, so it has adopted some EU consumer law. It also has a robust

consumer-protection agency (www.snipca.com/49855), which might be able to investigate the company.

In the meantime, Daniel should ask his bank for a chargeback on his Mastercard payment. You typically have 120 days to make this request.

CASE ONGOING



CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Be Quiet! sent me a new PC free from Germany

✓ I built my own PC housed in a Be Quiet! Silent Base 800 case (pictured), which I found well designed and of good quality. After nearly 10 years of daily use, the power switch had become a little unreliable. I went on their website (www.snipca.com/49832) and found that this case was no longer available.

I submitted a request for a spare part, not expecting much, and



received an automated reply. But within a day I had been contacted by their Manchester office to say they were dispatching one to me from Germany free of charge. The next morning I had confirmation it had been sent.

I consider this service above and beyond the normal and would have no

hesitation in using any of their products again.
Mark Vincent

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

Contact
Be Quiet!

- Email info@manchester-pc.co.uk
- Phone 0161 820 1992

Grow Your Family Tree



If your relatives sought a new life among mountains and maple trees, follow **Judith Batchelor's** advice to...

Find ancestors in Canada's censuses

Canada has long been a popular destination for Brits looking for work, land and a better life. If your ancestors were among them, you might find them in the country's censuses. The first national survey was taken in 1871 and the seventh (1931) was released online last year.

The 1931 census, which recorded Canada's population as 10,376,786, is full of rich genealogical information as citizens were asked 40 questions (17 in the Northwest Territories). Some were new questions about employment because it was carried out in the early years of the Great Depression. Bear in mind that many single men of working age were on the move in their search for jobs when the census was taken.

Search FamilySearch's free records

The Library and Archives Canada (LAC), FamilySearch and Ancestry collaborated to put the census online. To search it for free, first create an account at FamilySearch (www.snipca.com/49799). Next, visit its main page for the census (www.snipca.com/49819).

I knew that my ancestor Francis Hulbert Bullock emigrated to Canada,

1 Francis Hulbert
2 ATTACH TO TREE
3 1915

Francis Hulbert	0	500	S	W	4	No	Head	M	W	39	England	England	England	1915
Canada	English	Yes	No	6	-	Ch of Eng	W	-	Farmer	General farm	40	1000		

FamilySearch highlights the results in yellow to make them easier to identify

and FamilySearch found him as well as name variants like Frank, Frances and Bulloch. You can filter results by clicking the buttons at the top. The 'Birth' option is most useful – add year and place. Click the icons on the right to view the original document and to see what details it contains.

The original form is packed with dense handwriting, but you can use the top-left controls to zoom in or adjust the brightness or contrast. Helpfully, the relevant entry is highlighted in yellow (1 in our screenshot), so you can easily follow the information across the row. There's also an option to attach it to your family tree (2).

I learned that Francis arrived in Canada in 1915, while his wife Mabel followed in

1921 (3). He was a farmer in British Columbia and the family were members of the Church of England.

Browse all 17 Canadian censuses

To search all 17 Canadian censuses (national and regional) from 1825 to 1931, visit LAC's site: www.snipca.com/49823. Make sure you tick 'All Census years' in the When box (see screenshot below), so every census is ticked. In the Where box you can tick 'All provinces and territories' or individual regions. Add personal details in the Who box then click Search at the bottom.

Searching for Francis Bullock brought up results in four extra censuses (1861, 1891, 1911 and 1921) as well as 1931. If you get too many results, remove some censuses, provinces and territories by clicking their boxes at the top.

All Census years

When: All Census years

- All preconfederation
- 1825 (Lower Canada)
- 1827 (Ontario)
- 1851 (Lower Canada)
- 1857
- 1861 (Canada East)
- 1881
- 1891 (Canada West)
- 1891
- 1901
- 1911
- 1921
- 1931

Tick 'All Census years' to search every record held online from 1825 to 1931

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

I know my grandfather – born Derek Matthews – changed his name in his 20s. This has hindered researching my family history, so I'd like to know if there's any way of searching the records for name changes.

Iain Clarke

From the 20th Century, the most common way of legally changing your name was by deed poll, with a document drawn up

by a solicitor. Many people chose to announce the change in a newspaper, so search the British Newspaper Archive: <https://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>. Also try the archives of the *London/Edinburgh/Belfast Gazettes* (<https://thegazette.co.uk>) and *The Times* (www.thetimes.co.uk/archive).



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

SOFTWARE UNINSTALLER

Uninstalr 2.3

www.snipca.com/50052

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



When we wrote about Uninstalr in Issue 679 (page 19), we were amused by its bold claim to be the “best Windows uninstaller”. The developer has even compiled a comparison table and lengthy video (www.snipca.com/50051) to prove the new tool's superiority to established rivals such as BCUninstaller and HiBit Uninstaller.

As we pointed out, this assertion was undermined by Uninstalr's slow performance, so we're pleased that version 2.3 implements lots of improvements and fixes. Although it still takes several minutes to complete its initial scan for installed software, it's now faster at removal and does a particularly good job of detecting leftovers other tools miss.

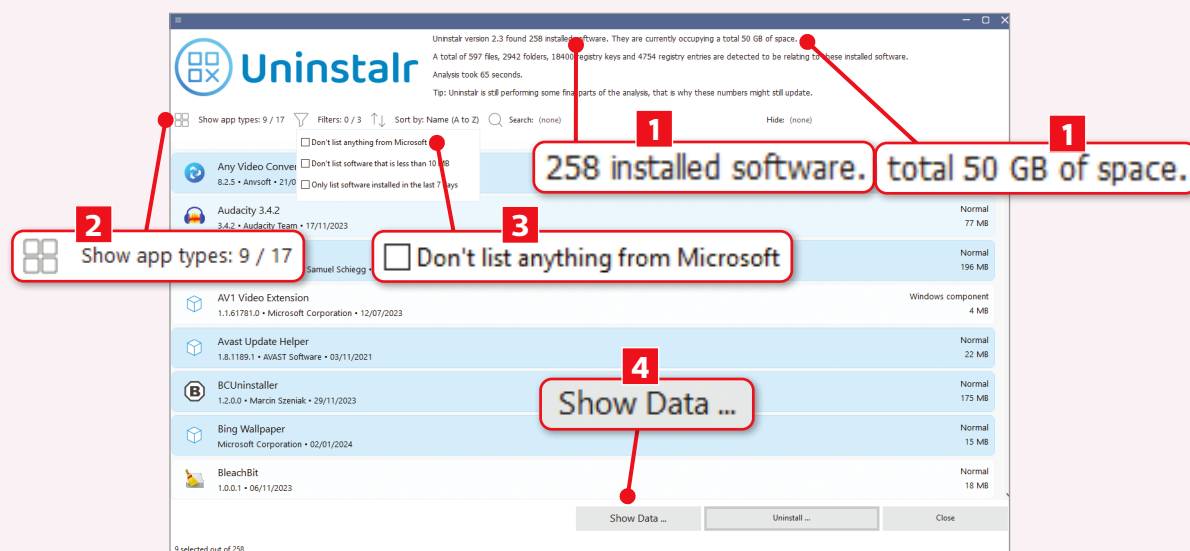
Uninstalr makes it easy to batch-uninstall multiple programs in one go without needing to confirm each one. Instead, you just select entries in its combined list of software, Microsoft Store apps and possible leftovers, then click the Uninstall button to begin the removal process. This will tell you how much space you'll save by uninstalling the

selected items, along with related folders and **registry keys**.

To avoid interrupting your work, you should untick the boxes to close all running programs before the uninstallation and to reboot your PC afterwards, though this may reduce its effectiveness. Click 'Start Uninstallation', then Yes to confirm. Uninstalr doesn't save backups – though it does create **system restore points** – so you should carefully review the list of data to be removed.

The updated program accurately detects antivirus and security tools, and warns you about uninstalling them, and tells you if OneDrive is syncing data in the background, which could lead to a removed app being restored. It also lets you select software according to its type and publisher.

Uninstalr isn't perfect – it's still a bit sluggish, takes too long to update its statistics and keeps suggesting you reboot your computer. But it's impressively thorough at removing junk and may soon justify its developer's boasts.

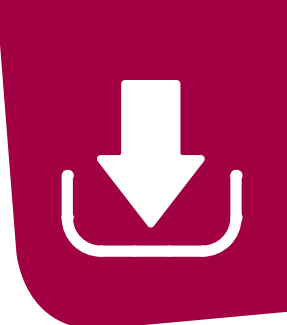


1 Once Uninstalr has completed its initial scan, it tells you how many software items it's found, how much disk space they're occupying and the number of related files, folders and registry entries. To update the list and information, press F5.

2 Click the 'Show app types' button to filter the combined list of installed software. You can include or exclude standard desktop programs by ticking or unticking Normal; apps from the Microsoft Store; and junk that came built into Windows.

3 By default, Uninstalr hides all Microsoft tools in its list to prevent you from accidentally uninstalling important system components. To show them anyway, click the Filters button and untick the option 'Don't list anything from Microsoft'.

4 Before you uninstall programs and apps from your PC, click the Show Data button. This will tell you the names and file paths of all the items Uninstalr will remove, including registry keys, and how much storage space you'll reclaim by doing so.



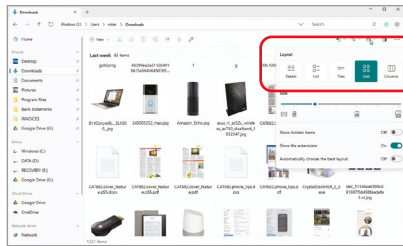
FILE MANAGER

Files 3.3

www.snipca.com/50045

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

The latest update to this brilliant alternative to File Explorer focuses on improving the program's design. The Layout options in the top-right corner of the main Files



window are now presented as a row of large tiles. This makes it easier to switch between the Details, List, Tiles, Grid and Columns layouts (see screenshot), depending on the number and type of items you're browsing. You can now adjust the size of files and folders using the Size slider, which is useful for enlarging thumbnail images of pictures and videos. To change the default layout for viewing folders, click the Settings cog and open the new Layout settings page. Here you can choose your preferred layout type and how items should be sorted – such as by name, date or size. As ever with Files, click the 'classic installer' link on the download page to get the free version.

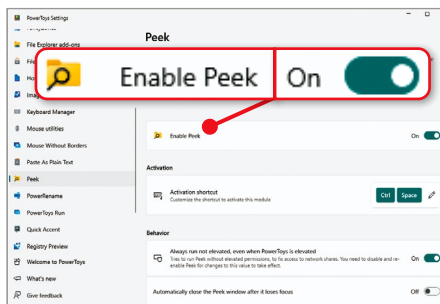
SYSTEM TOOL

Microsoft PowerToys 0.80

www.snipca.com/50046

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

One of our favourite PowerToys tools is Peek, which lets you preview files without needing to open them. The latest version of the system-utility suite makes Peek



even more useful by adding support for WebP images and WebM videos. Although these file formats (developed by Google) have been around for years, many image viewers and video players can't open them. Thanks to Peek, you can now select a WebP or WebM file you've downloaded from the web, and press Ctrl+Space to see what it contains. The feature now supports audio files, allowing you to listen to MP3s and other audio formats, without opening a media player. If previews aren't working, select Peek in the main PowerToys menu and ensure the Enable Peek option is switched on (see screenshot). You can also change the activation shortcut here.

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

Icecream PDF Editor Pro

www.snipca.com/50048

Price: £49.99 per year **Free trial:** N/A

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

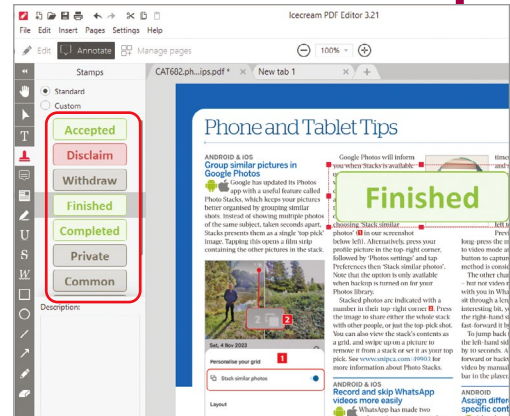
Like all Icecream programs, PDF Editor packs lots of useful features into a simple, attractive interface you can master in minutes. But it also adopts the same 'freemium' model, which requires you to pay to unlock certain features – it's actually the most expensive member of the Icecream family.

At first glance, it appears that the free version offers everything you need to create and edit PDF files. Unlike some PDF editors, which limit you to removing individual pages, it lets you delete and replace text and images in documents, and add annotations, shapes and stamps (see screenshot). You can also convert pages to PNG, JPEG and other image formats, extract text from documents and password-protect sensitive files.

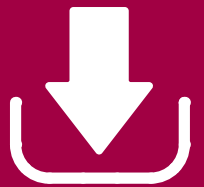
The main problem arises when you try to save your PDF, as Icecream will then prompt you to either save it with a watermark or upgrade to PDF Editor Pro to save without one. There are no other options, which is frustrating if you've spent ages editing your PDF.

Should you decide to fork out £50 a year for the paid-for version, you don't get much else for your money. The only extra features are the ability to combine the content of PDFs, and access to Icecream's 'premium' support.

You're much better off downloading PDFgear (www.pdfgear.com), which is completely free to use, has even more tools than Icecream PDF Editor and doesn't impose any pesky watermarks. See our feature in Issue 681 (page 60) for more information.



OUR VERDICT: Don't pay for it
Freemium restrictions are always annoying, but forcing users to pay a substantial amount just to remove a watermark is a black mark against Icecream's name. For that reason, we don't recommend installing either the free or paid-for version of the program.



What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

How do I annotate screenshots?

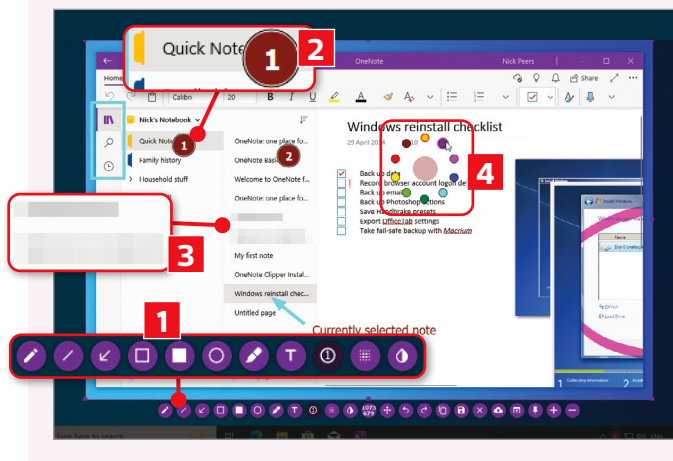
Q I use 'Snip & Sketch' in Windows to capture screenshots of my PC when I want to show friends and family instructions, but I find it tricky to annotate them with pointers, numbers and text. I've tried a few programs like ShareX (www.snipca.com/49834), but they're too complicated for my needs. I like the way these elements appear on your screenshots – so what do you use?

Colin Faulkner

A We annotate our screenshots using Adobe InDesign, which is even more advanced than the likes of ShareX. We do like ShareX, but we agree it packs a lot in, making it hard to use. A simpler alternative is Flameshot (www.snipca.com/49835). It's free, and you can download it to your desktop, or add it to your USB stick as a portable tool.

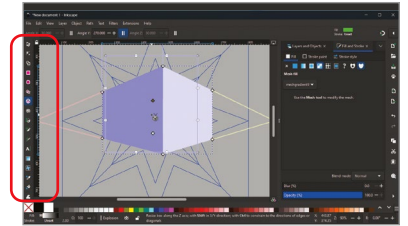
Whichever method you choose, Flameshot will appear in the system tray after you launch it. Prepare your screen for capturing, then click the program's icon. Click and drag the cursor around the area you want to capture. Once that's done, you'll see a range of tools appear below. On the left there are tools for annotating your screenshot **1** – most are self-explanatory, but two stand out: the 'auto-incrementing' tool that places numbered roundels on the screen **2** and a blur tool for redacting sensitive parts of an image **3**, such as passwords.

To change the colour of an annotation, right-click it to reveal a colour wheel **4**, then click the colour you want. Flameshot supports multiple undo (press Ctrl+Z) and redo (Ctrl+Shift+Z) options to quickly fix any mistakes.



How can I learn about vector graphics?

Q I'm currently learning how to design and edit vector graphics. Is there a decent free program that'll develop my skills? I don't want anything too advanced.



David Benson

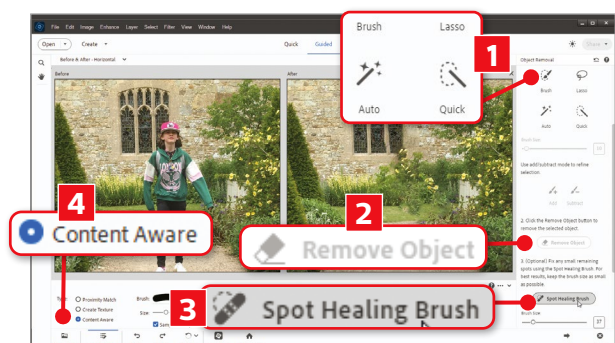
A Try the brilliant Inkscape (www.snipca.com/49836) – all the tools for creating shapes and freehand drawings can be found in the left-hand toolbar (see screenshot). It can be a little intimidating for people starting out, so we recommend reading the comprehensive Beginners' Guide: www.snipca.com/49794. You can read this online or download it as a PDF. It's also available as an EPUB for your ebook reader.

What's the best photo editor for removing unwanted elements?

Q In your expert opinion, which photo-editing program has the best 'Content-aware fill' tool for removing unwanted items? This is a dealbreaker for me when I'm deciding which photo editor to use.

Leonard Hollands

A Photoshop does this best. It's available in Photoshop Elements 2024 (£59.99 from the *Computeractive* Software Store: www.snipca.com/49795). Open 'Guided' mode, then select Object Removal and pick a tool to mark the unwanted object (**1** in our screenshot). Start with Auto, then use the others to fine-tune your selection. Once done, click Remove Object **2**, using Spot Healing Brush **3** and Clone Stamp to tidy things up. Make sure you click Tool Options and select 'Content Aware' **4** to improve how the tools work.



Named & Shamed



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

SOFTWARE WARNING!

Don't Touch My Phone's useless anti-theft 'protection'

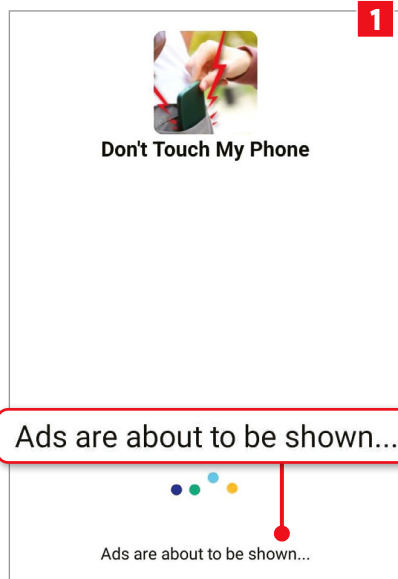
My last phone was nicked in a pub a few years back, and I'd try anything to stop that from happening again. But I'd still rather pay for a bodyguard armed with a bazooka than trust the dreadful 'Don't Touch My Phone' (www.snipca.com/49902).



The app lured me in due to its 4.4-star rating on the Google Play Store and the fact that it's been downloaded 10 million times. I didn't know anything about its Vietnamese developers Infinity Technologies Global, but I was curious about its "anti spy detector technology" and how it worked. Would it create a forcefield around my phone, vaporising thieving hands?

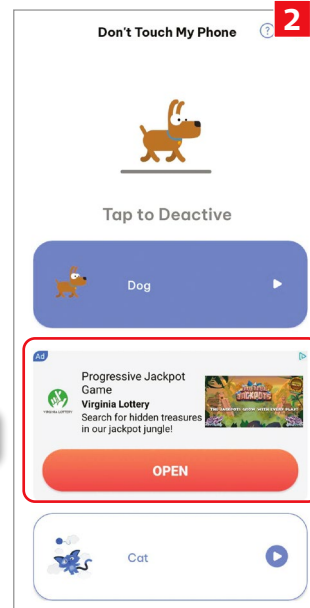
First impressions weren't encouraging – a loading screen told me that 'Ads are about to be shown' (see screenshot **1**). Oh joy. Next came one of the worst-designed home screens I'd ever seen, with inane animations of dogs and cats, and a ghastly ad for a 'Progressive Jackpot Game' **2**.

The cartoon canine is meant to be a guard dog, I suppose, though it looks so



How not to make a good first impression.

gormless it'd struggle to protect a half-chewed bone. Clicking the dog sets the alarm to go off when it detects movement, but this is a ridiculous barking sound. It also vibrates your phone and flashes the torch, but for only 15 seconds. Modern-day Artful Dodgers



This gormless dog couldn't protect a half-chewed bone, let alone Keumars' phone

don't tend to hang around that long.

Instead of wasting your time with this nonsense, keep your phone safely stuffed inside your pocket. And if it does get nabbed, try recovering it using the 'Find My' anti-theft measures built into Android and iOS.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?



WHAT THEY SAY

Bitwarden on its app redesign

www.snipca.com/49895

"The vertical navigation design achieves the visual scannability goal by consolidating primary and secondary navigation layers into a central location, while also providing a modern feel. Importantly, it is familiar to users by maintaining consistency with common industry tools and services."

WHAT THEY MEAN

Our app is easier to use. Shame it's not also easy for us to explain how.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Robert Temple

Look into my eyes, Robert. Imagine you've hacked two women's Snapchat accounts, sold their intimate photos online, then been arrested and sentenced to eight months behind bars. Now imagine that you tried to cover your tracks by setting up fraudulent **cryptocurrency** accounts in another person's name.

When I click my fingers, you'll come back to reality. One, two, three



– click – and, sorry Robert, but it looks like you really did hack those accounts and you really are paying for it in prison.

Temple, 36, from Bishop Auckland is a "comedy hypnotist" who has performed all over the world. He claims it's a "ruddy good laugh", but he clearly has a sick sense of humour. I doubt any of his fellow inmates will find him particularly funny.



MINI PC | £190 from GMKtec www.snipca.com/49869

GMKtec NucBox G3

Cost cutter

At less than £200, the GMKtec NucBox G3 is one of the cheapest mini PCs we've ever reviewed. It's powered by a 12th-generation Intel chip called the Processor N100, which is less powerful than even the lowest Core-i3 chip in the range, though it's still capable of running Windows 11. It's a four-core unit, so isn't designed to perform multiple tasks at the same time, but its price reflects this and so should your expectations.

“As long as your requirements are modest, this is a perfectly acceptable mini PC”

To keep the price down, GMKtec has skimped a little on RAM and storage, though not beyond what's acceptable. 8GB of memory is a bare minimum, but as long as you accept this PC is designed primarily for office and browsing tasks, and shutting things down when you've finished with them, then it's fine. It has a 512GB SSD, which is more standard and leaves plenty of room for your programs and files.



It's interesting to compare the performance of this with the Acemagic S1 (£240 from www.snipca.com/49205, reviewed in Issue 678), which has a slightly less powerful processor but more RAM (16GB in our test unit). That extra memory helped the S1 run Windows better in our benchmark tests. It didn't cope as well in our graphics tests, but we wouldn't recommend either PC or any machine at this price if you're serious about video editing or gaming.

Compared with our current favourite mini PC, the Minisforum UM780XTX (£709 from www.snipca.com/48917, tested in Issue 676 – see page 32), you're not quite getting what you pay for. The processor in the NucBox G3 runs at less than 20 per cent of the speed of the UM780XTX for 25 per cent of the price, so the latter is definitely better value for money, assuming your budget can stretch to it.

Connectivity options on the G3 are ample, with four USB 3.2, two HDMI and one 2.5Gb Ethernet port. It would have

SPECIFICATIONS

Four-core Intel processor N100 • 8GB RAM • Intel UHD graphics • 512GB SSD • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.2 • 1x 2.5Gigabit Ethernet port • 2x HDMI ports • 4x USB 3.0 ports • Windows 11 Pro • 44x115x108mm (HxWxD) • 265g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/49869

been nice to have a USB-C port, but leaving it out helps keep the price down. For wireless connections, it has Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.2 built in. It also comes with Windows 11 Pro.

The case is compact and lightweight, measuring just 44x115x108mm (HxWxD) and weighing 265g, and is available in grey or green. You can simply plonk it on your desk or – as it comes with VESA mounting options – attach it to the back of your monitor.

All in all this is a decent mini PC for the price. As long as your requirements are modest, you'll find this a perfectly acceptable option.

VERDICT Among the cheapest mini PCs we've ever tested, but you'll need to restrict yourself to simple office and browsing tasks



ALTERNATIVE

Minisforum UM780XTX £709 To run more than basic software you'll need to spend more money, but this model is worth its higher price tag



LAPTOP | £799 from Very www.snipca.com/49878

Lenovo IdeaPad 5i Gaming Chromebook Plus

Screen best

Chinese firm Lenovo may have slotted the word 'Gaming' into the name of this Chromebook, but we suggest you take that with a pinch of salt. It simply doesn't have the operating system or the graphical capabilities to run top games in its own right, so to play Microsoft Flight Simulator, for example, you'd need to subscribe to the Xbox Cloud Gaming service, which is part of the Xbox Game Pass Ultimate and costs £12.99 a month. Frankly, you'd be better off buying a Windows laptop. However, put aside its dubious gaming credentials and you're left with a stunning Chromebook that's good at everything else.

“It has the best Chromebook screen we've ever seen”

Let's start with the screen. Where most large-screen Chromebooks offer 15.6in 1080p panels, this has gone bigger, with a 16:10-aspect ratio 16in screen, and a higher resolution of 2560x1600 pixels. All this and a 120Hz refresh rate, a maximum 393cd/m² brightness level, 97-per-cent coverage of the sRGB standard and 70 per cent of the DCI-P3 standard. Put simply, it's the best screen we've seen on a Chromebook yet, and is



brilliant for working across multiple windows or streaming 4K video.

It's powered by an Intel Core i5-1235U processor and 8GB of RAM. That doesn't make it a powerhouse compared with some Windows laptops we've reviewed recently. Our current favourite – the Acer Swift Go 14 (£1,099 from www.snipca.com/49733, reviewed in Issue 677 – see page 30) more than doubled the IdeaPad 5i's performance speed in benchmark tests that push the processor to its limits. However, it's perfectly fine for running ChromeOS and will carry out most tasks you want from a Chromebook smoothly.

While we didn't have high hopes for its battery life due to the high quality of the screen, it surprised us by lasting over 11 hours in our video-playback test.

The design has a dash of gaudiness that's typical of gaming machines with a patterned lid and a keyboard that lights up in a range of colours. The keys are lovely to type on, however, with an enjoyably clicky feel. The touchpad is perfectly usable for everyday browsing and office work, with a smooth surface and generous 120x76mm expanse.

Around the outside edges it has one USB-C and two USB 3.0 ports (one on each side). There's also a microSD card slot, headphone socket and Wi-Fi 6E for fast networking.

SPECIFICATIONS

10-core Intel Core i5-1235U processor • 8GB RAM • Intel Iris Xe graphics • 16in 2880x1600-pixel screen • 512GB SSD • 1x USB-C port • 2x USB 3.0 ports • Wi-Fi 6E • ChromeOS • 19.9x357x253mm (HxWxD) • 1.9kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/49878

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 superb Chromebook for everyday tasks with a stunning screen, long battery life and decent performance



ALTERNATIVE

Acer Swift Go 14 £1,099
A Windows 11 laptop that's more expensive, but offers much more power and the ability to run a wider range of software



MONITOR | £329 from Asus www.snipca.com/49898

Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS

Flying colours

If you're looking for an improvement on the image you see while working on your PC, then a 27in monitor is something of a sweet spot. It's large enough so you have the space to work on multiple things at once, but it won't take up too much room on your desk.

“A cut above when it comes to speed, accuracy and all-round visual impact”

While you can get 1080p monitors at this size for less – such as the AOC 27P2C (£250 from www.snipca.com/41609, reviewed in Issue 655) – it's always worth considering a 1440p (2560x1440 pixels) monitor like this one. These cram more pixels into the same space, which makes everything look that much more detailed. This is especially handy if you tend to sit close to your monitor.

The Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS is around £80 more expensive than the 27P2C, but this is fair enough when you consider the extra features that take it above and beyond the most basic models.

These include a 180Hz refresh rate. Most cheaper 27in monitors have a maximum of 144Hz. It also has a one-millisecond response rate, which is the amount of time it takes to change the colour of a pixel. Higher rates combat problems like motion blur when displaying fast-moving images. Its IPS technology is also superior to the VA panels found on most affordable models.

The 180Hz refresh rate response time is impressive, but only gamers will feel the benefit. Everyone appreciates smooth graphics, but it's when you've cranked the graphical settings up in a game such as Microsoft Flight Simulator that this will really shine. You'll still need a powerful PC with a decent graphics card to make the most of it, though, particularly if you also want to make full use of its 1440p resolution.

At the end of the day, the ROG Strix may not be the cheapest high-refresh 1440p panel out there. However, it's clearly a cut above lesser alternatives when it comes to everything from speed to accuracy and all-round visual impact.

In fact we really liked the overall quality of the screen. The colours are vibrant, punchy and pop out of the screen. It's accurate, too, capable of reproducing 133 per cent of the sRGB colour standard and 97 per cent of DCI-P3. Its brightness can reach a maximum of 400cd/m², which is more than enough to produce a clear image on even the sunniest day.

If you know a thing or two about monitors, you might be wondering if an OLED monitor would be a better option. The short answer is yes, but while the ROG Strix isn't the cheapest 27in screen around, nor is it the most expensive we've seen. OLED screens of this size tend to cost a lot more, with the cheapest we could find at the time of writing costing just over £600. That might provide you with a leap in quality, but it may not be worth paying almost twice as



much for the privilege.

On the outside the ROG Strix has two HDMI, one DisplayPort and a USB-C port. The latter has power delivery but it's only 7.5W, which would charge a smartphone or tablet, but isn't powerful enough to charge any laptop connected to it. This is a shame.

The stand is high quality and well built. It can be adjusted in a wide variety of ways, including height, tilt, swivel and pivot into portrait mode. There's also a slot at the front, into which you can lie your smartphone while you charge it using the USB-C port.

SPECIFICATIONS

27in IPS screen • 2560x1440-pixel resolution • 16:9 aspect ratio • 180Hz refresh rate • 1ms response time • 2x HDMI ports • 1x DisplayPort • 1x USB-C port • 513x642x219mm (HxWxD) • 6.61kg • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/49898

VERDICT A great-value 27in 1440p resolution monitor, but its most impressive features are intended for gaming



ALTERNATIVE

AOC 27P2C £250

A cheaper 27in monitor with a lower 1080p resolution



TABLET | £250 from Honor www.snipca.com/49958

Honor Pad 9

Works like Magic

The Honor Pad 9 is a sleek and stylish device offering the same 16:10 **aspect ratio** screen as most of its Android rivals. That said, Honor has created the most iPad-like experience we've seen to date on an Android tablet, thanks to the MagicOS operating system developed by fellow Chinese company Huawei.

In particular, it's resolved many of the user-interface problems that typically limit the appeal of Android tablets. For example, simple three-finger gestures now drop you straight into multitasking modes (including running two windows of the same app) with ease, while swiping up from the bottom to flip between apps is now fast and fluid. You can also use it with a keyboard (pictured below), but this adds £100 to the price.

“It has a bright, accurate screen, long battery life and a sleek, lightweight design”

The Pad 9 is even slimmer than the 10th-generation iPad (£371 from www.snipca.com/44098, reviewed in Issue 646), albeit only just – 6.9mm to the iPad's 7mm. Both have an identical 180mm height (in landscape mode). The Pad 9 is 29mm wider to accommodate its 12.1in screen versus 10.9in on the iPad.

And it's an excellent screen, covering almost 100 per cent of the sRGB standard and around 75 per cent of DCI-P3 with solid colour accuracy. That's similar to the iPad, and they share the same peak brightness of around 500cd/m². Where the Pad 9 surpasses its rival is with its



120Hz **refresh rate** – twice that of the iPad. Everything looks smooth as a result.

However, it isn't as powerful as either the 9th- or 10th-generation iPads. Qualcomm's Snapdragon 6 Gen 1 is enough for basic productivity tasks and light gaming, and it's great for watching films, but when you run resource-intensive apps or open up multiple browser tabs, you can feel it buckling under the strain. Our impression was confirmed by **benchmark** tests that push the processor to its limits. The Pad 9 runs 40-per-cent slower than the 10th-gen iPad. It only has **Wi-Fi 5**, not **Wi-Fi 6**.

Battery life is excellent, lasting 11 hours 26 minutes in our video-playback test, which is on a par with the iPad. It supports charging up to 35W, but the 8,300mAh battery takes a couple of hours to recharge.

However, although this tablet comes close in all but raw performance, we think the similarly priced 9th-generation iPad is still a better buy because it offers a wider range of superior apps.

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 6 Gen 1 processor • 8GB RAM • 256GB storage • 12.1in 120Hz 2560x1600-pixel IPS touchscreen • 13-megapixel rear camera • 8-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5.1 • Android 13 with MagicOS 7.2 • 180x278x6.9mm (HxWxD) • 555g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/49958

VERDICT A good Android tablet at a reasonable price, but it still can't quite match the similarly priced iPad



ALTERNATIVE

Apple iPad (9th Generation) **£316**

A faster tablet that's only slightly more expensive and offers a greater choice of apps for a larger screen



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Energy-efficiency ratings



What are they?

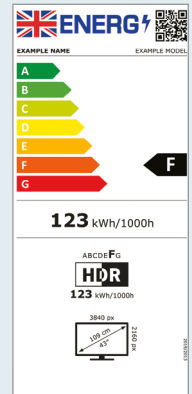
If you've ever been in the appliance department of your local Currys or John Lewis you'll be used to seeing the energy-efficiency labels that appear on fridges and washing machines. However, these labels also appear on screens, including those on TVs and PC monitors.

How do they work?

Products on sale should display a label similar to the one pictured right. When buying online you may have to click a link to see it.

The multi-coloured graph shows how efficiently a product uses energy, with A being the most efficient and G being the least.

On PC monitors the specified power consumption will also be displayed. This may include a rating for HDR mode if applicable, though this is more likely on a TV. The screen size and resolution is also shown.



What are the specs?

Even the most energy-efficient monitors use a lot of power, so you're unlikely to see devices rated as A, B or C. If you shop around you might find a D rating, but most monitors are rated E or F. Monitors rated D, E or F are considered energy efficient. Avoid monitors rated G, though, because they're classed as inefficient and will cost more to run.

Can I change it later?

You can't change the amount of power that a monitor needs to run, though you may be able to use less power if you dim the screen using its controls. Look for energy-efficient settings or options for dimming any backlighting.

PHONE | £319 from Nothing www.snipca.com/49930

Nothing Phone 2a

Clear winner



You might recall us reviewing the first phone from oddly named UK manufacturer Nothing back in Issue 639. The Phone 2a is the second upgrade since then – the Nothing Phone 2 was significantly more expensive, launching at £629 (though it's now down to £519 from Nothing at www.snipca.com/49931). And there's no doubt the lower starting price certainly bolsters the appeal of the Phone 2a.

As with previous models, the design of the 2a is one of its stand-out features. Its inner workings are visible through its clear plastic shell, while flashing 'glyphs' (essentially LEDs) communicate information about notification alerts, incoming calls and more without you needing to glance at the screen. It has fewer lights than previous models (three instead of five) but they can be customised and this unique system works well once you get the hang of it.

It comes with Android 14 but has Nothing's own operating system laid on top, which consists of alternative Camera and Media Player apps alongside a selection of additional features. For example, you can replace all the usual app icons with two-tone dot-matrix style options,

which makes the home screen look as distinctive as the phone's rear.

Nothing has moved away from Qualcomm's Snapdragon processors, turning instead to the MediaTek Dimensity 7200 Pro chip. This offers a modest jump in performance from the Snapdragon 778G used in the Phone 1. The basic £319 phone comes with 8GB of RAM and 128GB of storage, but you can boost this to 12GB and 256GB respectively for an extra £30 when you buy from Nothing's website, which we'd recommend.

We tested the 2a by making video calls and using Google's online office software, without any glitches or lag. We also tried several games, including Marvel Snap on its highest settings – and it performed perfectly smoothly.

To test its battery life we put the 2a through a demanding day of use, with a mix of gaming, video streaming, working with office apps and web browsing. All this used a fraction more than 50 per cent

SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core MediaTek Dimensity 7200 Pro processor • 8 or 12GB RAM • 128 or 256GB storage • 6.7in 120Hz 2412x1080-pixel AMOLED screen • 50-megapixel rear camera • 32-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.3 • Android 14 with Nothing OS 2.5 • 162x76x8.6mm (HxWxD) • 190g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/49930

of the charge.

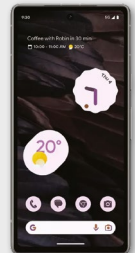
You'll be hard-pressed to find a better 50-megapixel main camera in a similarly priced phone. It performed well when taking portraits and produced high-quality images in low light, though the camera on the Google Pixel 7a is still superior.

VERDICT An attractive and distinctive Android phone that makes Nothing's unique design more affordable



ALTERNATIVE

Google Pixel 7a £449
We still prefer Google's mid-range phone for its superior operating system and brilliant camera



WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best portable backup for my photos?

Q I'm going on the trip of a lifetime and I'm looking for a portable backup device for SD cards to store my photos. Most devices I've found online are no longer available. I don't want to lug a laptop around, so a self-contained battery-powered unit would be ideal. What would you suggest?

Allan Branch

A Like you, the only devices we can find online are either discontinued or from

companies that have gone bust.

We suspect the reason is that the price of memory cards has dropped to a point where there's no real reason not to simply buy as many as you might need. You can get a 512GB SanDisk card for £80 from Currys at www.snipca.com/49940. When it was still available, the 1TB WD My Passport Wireless SSD (a portable 1TB SSD with a battery and SD card slot) used to cost \$499 (around £400). You can now buy five 512GB SD cards (adding up to 2.5TB of storage) for the same price.

If you opt for this then it's worth getting a sturdy case for your cards. There are plenty of options on Amazon but we like the look of the Kiorafoto SD Card Holder Case (£10 from www.snipca.com/49941, pictured), which holds 12 cards and has thousands of positive reviews.



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

Transform your conservatory in just one day



BEFORE



AFTER



2 FREE PANELS

*QUOTE CA0424

Is your conservatory TOO HOT in summer and TOO COLD in winter?

WARMER IN WINTER

"There is no doubt the conservatory is much warmer, and not darker either!"

David Birch, Chichester

TRANSFORMED CONSERVATORY

"We're so proud of our transformed conservatory that we have recommended Green Space to many of our friends and relatives."

Mr and Mrs Davies Somerset

COOLER IN SUMMER

"You could have fried an egg on the table in there in the summer, I now look upon the conservatory as a new room. It is quiet, restful and cosy."

Carol Doyle, Surrey

REDUCES ENERGY BILLS

"I've already turned the underfloor heating down. Lovely job guys, thank you!"

Anne Bird, Bristol

QUIETER IN BAD WEATHER

"For the first time we do not have to close the door to the conservatory when it rains to hear the TV."

Mr & Mrs Bailey-Webb, Warsash

"What a difference a day makes and yes, that's all it took to install."

Mr & Mrs Barber, Wells



For a free no obligation quote call

0800 65 25 157
[greenspaceconservatories.co.uk](https://www.greenspaceconservatories.co.uk)



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VIDEO DOORBELL | £200 from Amazon www.snipca.com/49911

Ring Battery Video Doorbell Pro

Motion sickness

If this Ring doorbell seems familiar, it's because it looks identical to the Ring Battery Video Doorbell Plus (£130 from www.snipca.com/46930, reviewed in Issue 664). Changes have been made on the inside, however, with higher-resolution video, improved colour night vision, and 3D motion detection and tracking as seen previously in the Ring Outdoor Camera Pro Battery (£130 from www.snipca.com/48652, reviewed in Issue 674).

The video footage is very high resolution at 2048x1536 pixels, which provides a

SPECIFICATIONS

1536p video recording • 150-degree field of view • Two-way talk • Colour night vision • Compatible with Alexa smart devices • 128x62x28mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/49911

top-to-toe view of your visitors, including any parcels they drop on your doorstep. The 3D motion detection uses radar to more precisely locate people near your property. If you live on a busy street this can help reduce false-positive notifications when people pass your house without entering your front garden.

These are worthwhile additions to the options on the Plus doorbell, but it also retains many of its predecessor's handy features, including its removable battery and long life. Like the Plus, however, it works best with a Ring subscription, which costs £4.99 a month for the basic service. This stores all your footage online for watching at your convenience.

There are alternative doorbells with internal storage that don't require this



ongoing cost (see below) but they also lack some of the Pro's best new features.

VERDICT A sophisticated, rechargeable video doorbell, but top-end features mean a top-end price



ALTERNATIVE Eufy Video Doorbell E340

£160 A cheaper option with more built-in storage and doesn't require an online subscription



SMARTWATCH | £320 from Withings www.snipca.com/49914

Withings ScanWatch 2

Old times' sake

The Withings ScanWatch 2 isn't your typical smartwatch. While most offer modern, high-tech designs, this one has an elegant, timeless appearance. It's made from stainless steel and topped with sturdy sapphire glass. It has two illuminated hands that sweep around the watch face, while a small analogue dial tracks your steps.

In fact, the only indication that there's more to the ScanWatch 2 than a regular mechanical watch is the little black circle on the upper half of the face. Twist the rotating crown or simply raise your wrist, and this 0.63in greyscale OLED display springs to life. By default, it shows the time and the date, but you can cycle

SPECIFICATIONS

0.63in greyscale OLED screen • 282 ppi • Bluetooth Low Energy • 30-day battery life • Water resistant to 5ATM • 42x42x12.9mm • 53g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/49914

through other views showing your heart rate, distance covered, breathing exercises, workouts and more.

This does mean it's more limited than other smartwatches. It can't pick up calls, respond to notifications, control your music or run apps. But this is by design: it's intended for quietly tracking your activities, with no distractions or interruptions.

And it monitors your activity with a wealth of sensors. As well as tracking your movements, it can measure your respiratory rate and blood-oxygen levels; detect abnormal heartbeat; record an ECG and much more. It supports a wide range of workout methods, including surfing, yoga, pilates and various competitive sports. Some are automatically detected, others you'll need to set up manually.

The only downside is that it doesn't

have built-in GPS, so it can't track your location without a linked smartphone.

VERDICT A classy smartwatch that looks and acts more like an analogue piece, but has many of the key features you'll want from a connected device



ALTERNATIVE

Fitbit Charge 6 £120 Our favourite Fitbit is a great way to track health data at a fraction of the cost



TV | £200 from Amazon www.snipca.com/49979

Amazon Fire TV 32in 2-series HD

Small set to go

This 32in model is the cheapest in Amazon's Fire TV range, which also includes the 4-series (from £300, www.snipca.com/49980) and Amazon Fire TV Omni QLED (from £350 from www.snipca.com/47091, reviewed in Issue 664). It comes with a 720p resolution, but is also available with a 40in screen with a Full HD 1080p resolution, which costs £240.

“A budget TV with a decent screen, but its operating system is clunky”

When compared with its pricier stablemates, the 2-series has plenty to live up to and probably lacks the specifications to seriously compete. That said, it's a great option for anyone needing a smaller screen and has a limited budget.

Picture quality is a mixed bag. Watching standard-definition and HD broadcasts, we found textures were detailed enough and the screen did a fine job of upscaling lower-resolution content, such as daytime TV programmes viewed via Freeview.

With higher-resolution streaming services, its colour accuracy and brightness levels were pretty impressive. This was confirmed by our tests, which showed the screen can display 74 per cent of the DCI-P3 colour standard.

However, that can't quite match the 82 per cent of LG's LQ63 32in TV (£179 from www.snipca.com/49989 – see Alternative right). The 2-series screen's biggest limitations were revealed when testing contrast, with the darkest blacks looking decidedly grey.

Audio quality, on the other hand, was better than we expected. There isn't much difference between the various sound modes offered, such as Standard



and Music. The Entertainment setting has the best balance between high and low frequencies, making dialogue crystal clear while still packing a punch. If you're using this as a main TV you may still want to buy a decent soundbar, but as a secondary TV its built-in speakers should suffice.

Smart TV services come courtesy of Amazon's Fire TV OS. This offers access to a wide range of apps and customization features, but also displays too many recommendations on its home menu. Navigation also felt occasionally slow and clunky, with long pauses and freezes while loading web pages and streaming apps.

SPECIFICATIONS

720p 1366x768-pixel resolution • 32in Direct LED screen • 60Hz refresh rate • Supports HDR10, HLG • 3x HDMI ports • 431x726x82mm (HxWxD, without stand) • 3.6kg (without stand) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/49979

VERDICT Amazon's smallest smart TV is fine for tight budgets, but there are even cheaper rivals offering superior screens and better operating systems



ALTERNATIVE

LG LQ63 £179 This 32in set is a little older than the 2-series, but offers brilliant picture quality and great smart TV software for a lower price

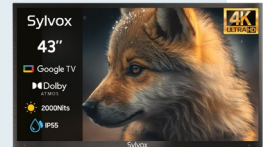


DO I REALLY NEED...

An outdoor TV?

What is it?

As we head towards a great summer of sport, with the Euros football tournament and Olympics looming, you might be thinking of moving your TV outside to watch it all. Alternatively, you could buy a TV specifically designed for viewing outdoors, such as the new Sylvox 43in Google TV for Full Sun (www.snipca.com/49986, pictured).



What does it do?

Outdoor TV screens are brighter, so you can still see them even on the sunniest of days. And they're also protected from rain. The Sylvox TV has a peak brightness of 2,000cd/m² and an ingress rating of IP55.

What's the catch?

They're expensive. The Sylvox model costs a cool £2,259. That's more than twice the price of a top-end indoor TV of the same size.

So can I do without it?

If you live in the UK, almost certainly. The Great British weather just isn't suited to a permanent outdoor TV.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 8 May

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus

The latest Intel processor in a reasonably priced laptop



Kobo Libra Colour

A colour ebook reader that lets you write on it as well as read

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

LAPTOP

Acer Swift Go 14
£1,099 from www.snipca.com/49733
Tested Issue 677



With the 32GB Swift Go (£1,300) out of stock, we're recommending the 16GB model instead. It's great value and has one of Intel's Ultra processors, making it the fastest laptop we've ever tested. Has an OLED 14in screen and 1TB SSD.

ALTERNATIVE Honor MagicBook X 16 2023 Has a 16in screen and is good value, though nowhere near as fast. £700 from www.snipca.com/47868

DESKTOP PC

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



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

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

APPLE IPAD

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



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

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

ANDROID TABLET

PRICE DROP

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



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

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

APPLE IPHONE

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



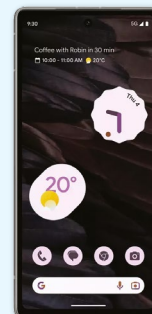
Now £200 cheaper than its 2021 launch price, the iPhone 13 has a superb screen, long battery life and an excellent camera – particularly for taking quick snaps without blurring. You could pay £799 for the newer iPhone 15, but we're not convinced it's worth the extra money.

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

ANDROID PHONE

PRICE DROP

Google Pixel 7a
£383 from www.snipca.com/46332
Tested Issue 660



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

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

Now's the time to tackle your smartphone

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

Find out more...

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

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

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

Do the manufacturers do it on purpose?

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

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

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

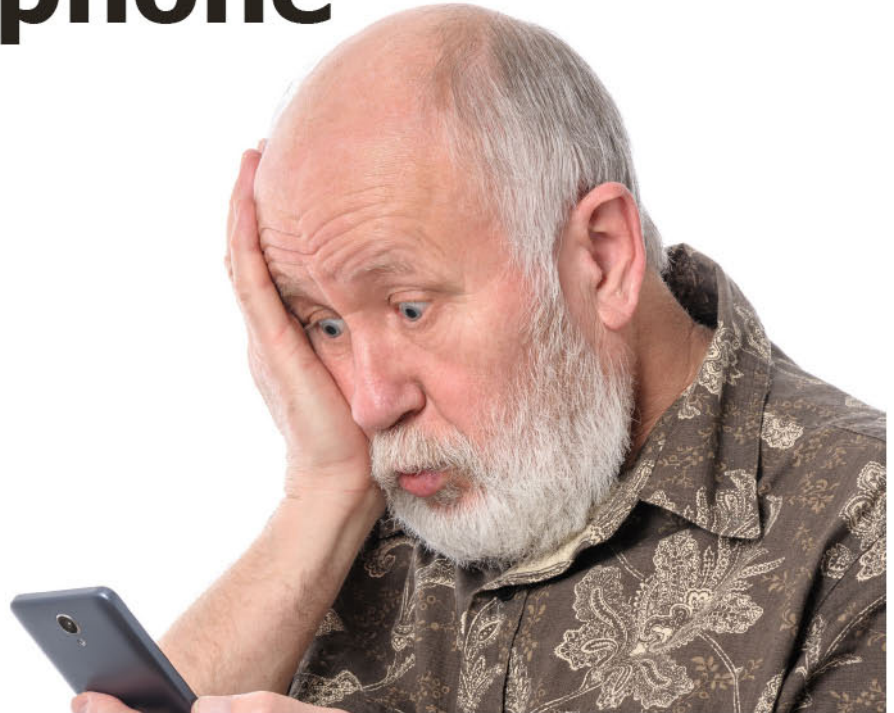
Plain English... and that's not all

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

What's covered?

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

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



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

- Video phone calls – a great way to keep up with family who live a long way away.

And obviously, you can make phone calls and send and receive text messages. ("Voicemail" is covered, too). All explained nice and simply. (Find out more in the free infopack – read on...)

What one reader had to say:

"Thanks for a fantastic smart phone book. Very pleasant staff as usual.

I think this book should be sold with every smart phone. I have learnt so much from it, the info you get with the phone is non-existent.

Smart phones are quite complex, and your books speak in plain English."

Only half the story

That's only half the story, but I don't have room to explain here. I've put together full information on the books – who they're for, what they cover and so on. What's more, the books also come with a

free gift – no room to explain that here either.

Don't buy now, do this instead

The books aren't available in the shops or on Amazon. Instead, send off now to get a completely free, no-obligation information pack. It'll explain what the books cover, who they're suitable for and so on.

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Buy It

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

MINI PC

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

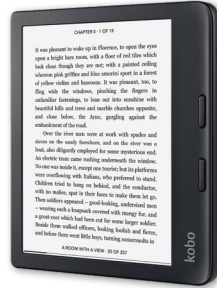


This powerful machine costs only £80 more than the Beelink SER6 Pro, but has twice the memory, twice the storage and a superior processor. These help it run PC tasks faster and handle graphics more smoothly. Ports include USB-C, USB 3.0, HDMI, DisplayPort and Gigabit Ethernet.

ALTERNATIVE Beelink SER6 Pro 7753HS Has 32GB RAM and a 500GB SSD for slick Windows performance. £699 from www.snipca.com/46416

EBOOK READER

Kobo Libra 2
£170 from www.snipca.com/40645
Tested Issue 624

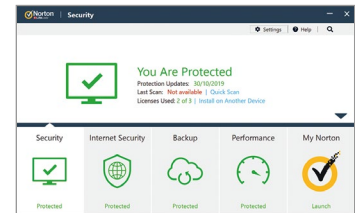


A fantastic 7in screen, 32GB of storage and Bluetooth connectivity make this a rival to Amazon's Oasis ebook reader, yet it's much cheaper. Battery life is superb – we managed 54 hours of use per charge. It supports OverDrive, so you can borrow ebooks from libraries.

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
£72 from www.snipca.com/41104
Tested Issue 608



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

ALTERNATIVE Anker PowerConf C300 Good image quality, crisp audio and lots of features. £90 from www.snipca.com/41105

PC MONITOR

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



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

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

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

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



In our tests, this M.2 SSD hit speeds of 7,364MB/s and 6,870MB/s when reading and writing data – astonishingly fast scores. It's compatible with the new PCIe 4.0 standard, which is twice as fast as PCIe 3.0. The 1TB model costs £94; 2TB costs £144.

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

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 2 AOC CQ27G2S/BK PC monitors

Winner of a 'Recommended' award in Issue 681, AOC's CQ27G2S/BK is a stunning PC monitor that's especially ideal for gaming. Its curved 27in screen wraps around you, so you can jump straight into the action.

It has a stunning QHD resolution (2560x1440 pixels), and uses VA panel technology for deeper blacks and a high contrast for extra vivid



and bright images. The 165Hz refresh rate (well over twice the industry standard of 60Hz) keeps games silky smooth, while AOC's Low Input Lag guarantees fast-paced and realistic battles. You'll feel your reflexes become one with the action.

You can adjust the height, tilt and swivel to create the perfect gaming position. There's also a VESA mount on



the back if you want to attach it to your wall.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/50050 and submit your details. It runs until midnight Tuesday 7 May.

You can buy AOC's CQ27G2S/BK PC monitors for £199 from www.snipca.com/49800. For more AOC monitors and accessories, including mice and keyboards, visit <https://aoc.com/uk>.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830
£230 from www.snipca.com/48962
Tested Issue 676



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

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £160 from www.snipca.com/49863

SMART TV

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



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

ALTERNATIVE LG OLED42C3
LG's 42in TV is more than double the price, but unlike TCL's model it has an OLED screen, boosting picture quality considerably. £845 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. £239 from www.snipca.com/49161

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14 pages of easy-to-follow workshops and expert tips

35 Use your tablet as a second PC monitor

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42 Browser Tips: Force all websites to use dark mode

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44 Phone & Tablet Tips

46 Make Windows Better

47 Make Office Better

48 In the Club: Pin important messages

HOW TO...

Use your tablet as a second PC monitor

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Spacedesk **Time required:** 30 minutes

What do you do if your monitor feels a bit cramped, but you don't want to pay for a new, bigger one? Or you need to keep an eye on a website or video stream while working on something else? Fortunately, if you have a tablet or smartphone going spare, you can expand your desktop space without spending a penny.

Spacedesk, which is available for both Android and iOS, can turn your unused phone or tablet into an extension of your computer screen. It does this by using two programs: one which sends images to your tablet or phone from Windows, and one on your mobile device that makes it behave like a connected monitor. It works by making Windows think the

remote device has a physical connection, just like your monitor. That way, you can drag program windows on to your device's screen and work on them as you would on your primary display. Note that we'll refer to tablets in these instructions because the bigger screen makes them more suitable as second monitors, but our steps work just the same for phones.

1 Install Spacedesk on your PC

Start by downloading Spacedesk's PC software from www.snipca.com/49815, where you'll find options for 64bit and 32bit Windows in the section called 'Spacedesk Driver Software for Windows Primary PC (server)'. Most modern PCs will need the 64bit version, but if you're not sure, open Settings by pressing Windows key+I, then click System followed by About, and check the version beside 'System type'.

Click through the installation instructions and, when you reach the Firewall Configuration page, leave the box ticked beside 'Add an exception to the Windows firewall for spacedesk' (see screenshot right). If you disable this, connections between your PC and your tablet will be blocked and you won't be

able to use the device as an extension of your main PC screen.

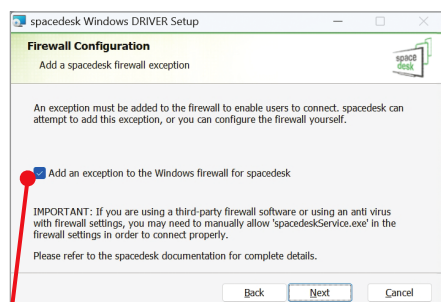
When you've completed the last screen of the instructions, it will proceed with the installation. This throws up a User Account Control alert asking if you're happy for the program to make changes

to your PC. On our machine, this alert was minimised in the taskbar, so it wasn't easy to spot and gave the impression the process had stalled. Keep an eye on your taskbar in case this happens. Once installation has completed, click Finish.

2 Install Spacedesk on your tablet

You now need to install Spacedesk's app on your tablet – download it from www.snipca.com/49813 (Android); www.snipca.com/49812 (iOS, iPadOS); or www.snipca.com/49814 (Kindle Fire). Once it's installed, launch it and, if you've already installed the server program on your PC, dismiss the message that tells you to download it.

The app will now start searching your local network for your PC and, when it recognises it, will display its



Add an exception to the Windows firewall for spacedesk
Leave this box ticked so Spacedesk can bypass your firewall and communicate with your tablet



The IP address shown on Spacedesk's software matches the one detected by our tablet

IP address. This is a unique number assigned by your router to each of the devices on your network. It's made up of four sets of digits, with the first three sets generally being the same across the whole network, while the final set will be anything between 0 and 254 (to accommodate a maximum of 255 devices on your network).

Our tablet found a PC using the IP address 10.0.0.68. We checked this was correct by comparing it to the information shown in the Spacedesk Driver Console software that we just installed on Windows. You can launch this from the Start menu and, when it appears, check the address in the Communication Interfaces section. In our screenshot above, we can see the same IP address – 10.0.0.68 **1**.

To double check, we make sure our computer's name (GOGOL **2**) is displayed at the top of the right-hand column in Driver Console, as well as at the top of the home screen on the Spacedesk app on our tablet.

3 Move windows to your tablet

Tap the computer's address in the app and the two devices will be connected, with your tablet's display

Why I wish I'd used Spacedesk

I used to have multiple monitors running side by side, each connected to a single PC, so I could arrange my windows the way you can with Spacedesk. Ultimately, I found it wasn't a great solution for me because I had to disconnect them all whenever I wanted to work elsewhere, so I bought a larger screen that would fit everything side by side. If I'd been using a system like Spacedesk, the cables wouldn't have been a problem, and I could have saved myself the expense of upgrading my primary monitor.

Nik Rawlinson



How do you set up multiple monitors?
Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

behaving like a touch-sensitive extension of your computer screen.

You can now drag windows from your PC to your tablet. However, because Spacedesk can't automatically work out where your tablet is sitting in relation to your computer screen, you may need a little trial and error the first time you do this. We found that dragging windows to the right edge of our main display, slightly above halfway, transferred them to the tablet's screen, even though our tablet was sitting to our left, flat on its back.

Once the window is on your tablet's screen, you can control it by clicking with the mouse or by tapping it with your finger. If you want to use your fingers on the tablet and your mouse and keyboard to control your computer, you don't need to make any more changes, as long as you're happy with how the two screens are configured relative to each other.

4 Reconfigure your screens

If however you want to move your cursor off the edge of the main screen nearest to your tablet screen so that it travels directly toward it, it

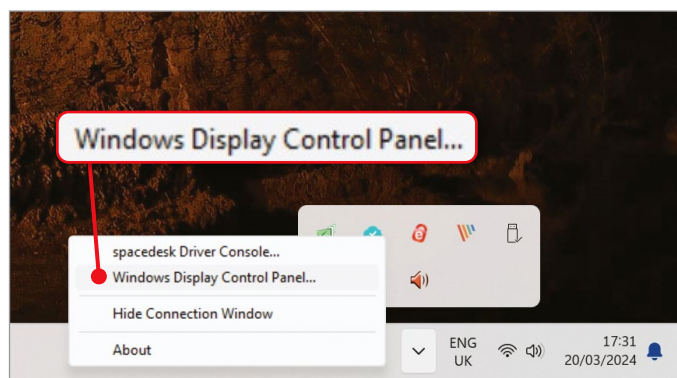
makes sense to tell Windows where they sit in relation to one another. This makes working much easier when sweeping the cursor off your PC's screen and back again.

To do this, click the up-arrow on your Windows taskbar to reveal your hidden icons, then right-click the Spacedesk driver icon, followed by 'Windows Display Control Panel' (see screenshot below left)

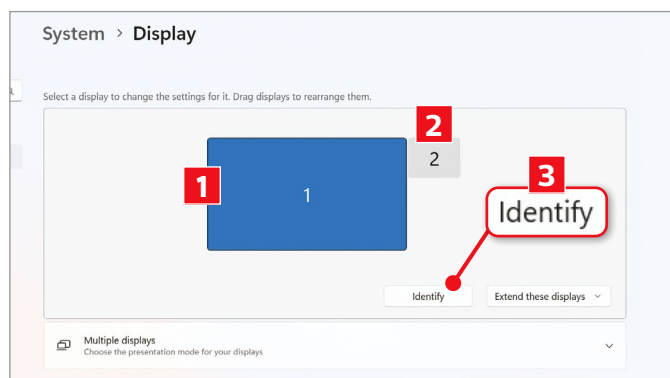
This will take you to the Display pages of the Windows Settings program, where you'll see a basic graphic of your two screens. The larger of the two (labelled 1 – **1** in our screenshot below), is your PC screen. The smaller screen **2** at its top-right corner (labelled 2) is your tablet.

If this is less clear in your specific setup, you can ask Windows to identify each one. Click the Identify button **3** and it will display the relevant numbers in the corner of each display, so you can see them at a glance.

Use your mouse to click and hold the number 2 (tablet) box in the Settings window, then drag it around the number 1 box. Let go when its location roughly equates to your tablet's position relative

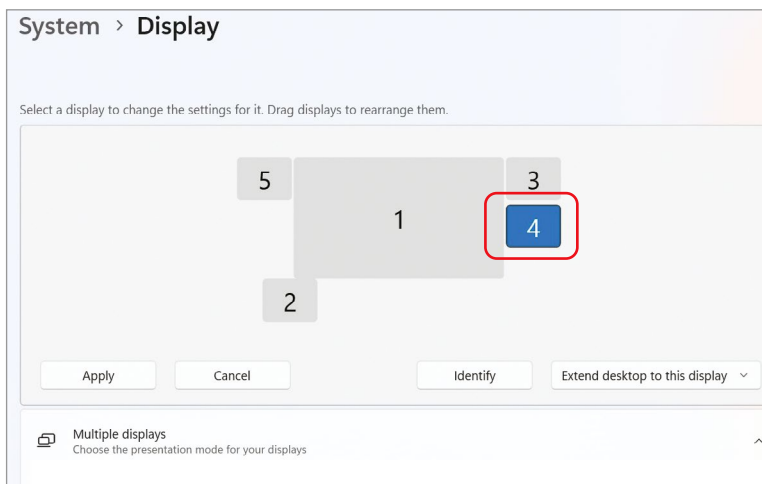


To reconfigure your two screens, click Spacedesk's taskbar icon followed by 'Windows Display Control Panel'



Windows's default configuration put our tablet screen (number 2) at the top-right corner of our PC screen, but we can change this

By running Spacedesk on multiple phones and tablets we could spread Windows across several screens



to your PC screen. When you've finished, close Settings.

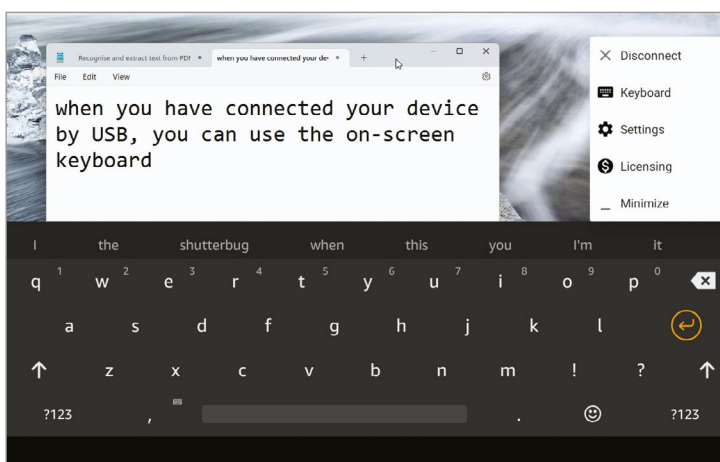
In case you were wondering, you're not restricted to connecting just one external tablet, nor to working with tablets. We installed Spacedesk on an iPad Pro, Kindle Fire 8 tablet, Google Pixel 5 phone, and iPhone 15 Pro, and set them all running simultaneously.

You can see the result in our screenshot above where our primary monitor is surrounded by four smaller screens. This allowed us to move both our cursor and – when practical given size restrictions – program windows from one to the other.

5 Use programs on your second screen

Now that you're all set up, you can use your second screen as a place to put programs that might otherwise get in your way. You could drag across your music player, for example, so you have an interface you can tap to select songs, reclaiming the space it would have taken on your main screen. Or, you could use it to stream live TV, or keep track of social-media posts.

Use the Kindle Fire's on-screen keyboard to type into Notepad



If you prefer not to use your finger to control a program on your tablet screen, you can use your mouse, as we explained earlier. Your PC's keyboard will work just as well in any program on the second screen: just make sure the program is active and selected. It makes no difference which screen is hosting it.

Spacedesk also has its own on-screen keyboard, which lets you type on your tablet. You'll find it by tapping the three-line menu button on the tablet screen, followed by Keyboard (you can move this menu around by tapping, holding and dragging it to any position you want). However, using the on-screen keyboard in wireless mode is a premium-only feature, which requires an upgrade to the £13.99 commercial business licence on an Android device.

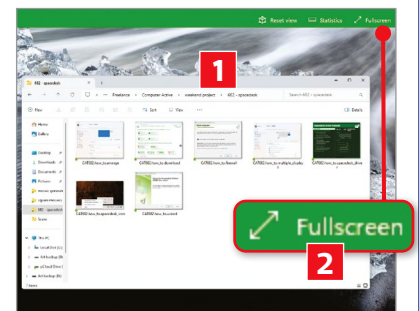
Spacedesk hasn't yet added this licence to the iPad, iPhone or Kindle Fire editions of the software, though you can use the keyboard for free on Android or Kindle Fire by connecting via USB rather than wirelessly.

If you do connect with USB, open the

USE AN OLD LAPTOP AS YOUR SECOND SCREEN

At the start of this feature, we downloaded Spacedesk to our primary PC (or 'server' in Spacedesk terms). This server handles the sharing of the virtual display connection with a secondary device (called the 'client'). So far, we've only used a phone and tablet as the client, but if you have an old laptop with a working screen you could also use that. Rather than download another copy of the server software to the laptop, go to the Microsoft Store at www.snipca.com/49820 and install the client software.

Once launched, it should spot your main PC across your wireless network. Click the primary PC's IP address in the Spacedesk client on your laptop and the two will connect, with the Windows desktop of your main machine extending into the window now shown on your laptop (1 in our screenshot). Hover over that window and click the Fullscreen button (2) so it fills the whole display.



Spacedesk Driver Console software on your PC and click the Communication Interfaces header in the left-hand column. Now untick the box beside Local Area Network, and click in the box below it next to USB Cable Android.

When the connection has refreshed, tap the three-line menu button at the edge of your screen on your device, then tap Keyboard. Tap within the window of your active program and you can use the on-screen keyboard in place of the keyboard attached to your PC. In our screenshot left we're using the on-screen keyboard on a Kindle Fire tablet to type into Notepad in Windows 11.

Save passkeys using Proton Pass

What you need: Proton Pass

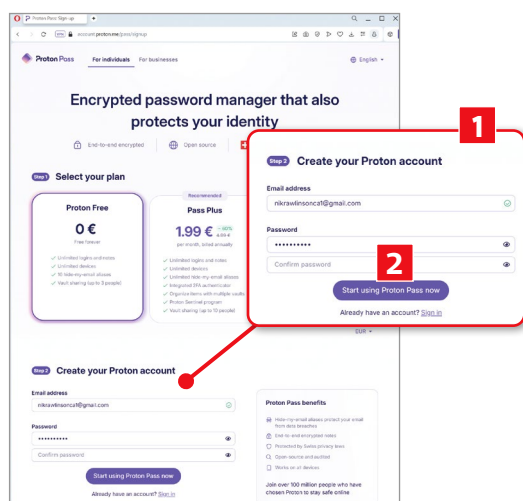
Time required: 30 minutes

Passwords are on the way out. Major tech companies like Google, Amazon and Microsoft are increasingly adopting passkeys, which let you unlock your account using a string of **code** stored on a device such as your phone or PC. They're hard to fake but easier to use than passwords because you don't need

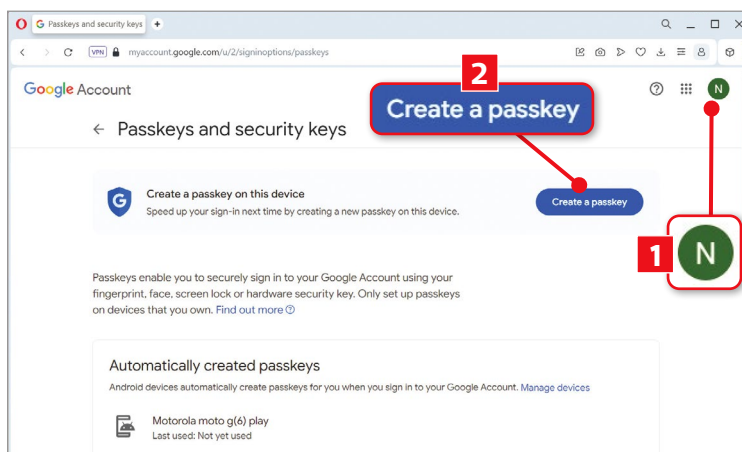
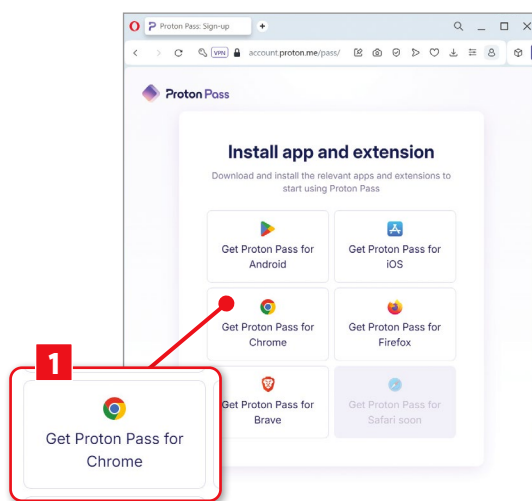
to remember them. The free Proton Pass password manager has just added support for passkeys, which means you can sync passkeys across any devices on which it's installed, including your computer and smartphone. That way, when you've set them up once, they should work anywhere.



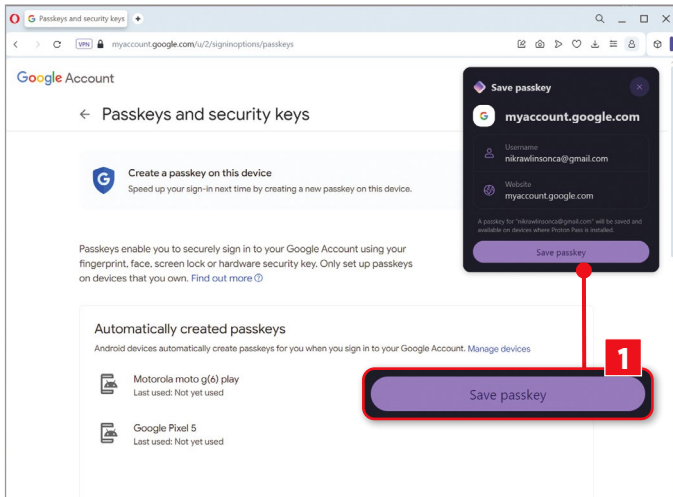
STEP 1 If you don't have a Proton account, visit www.snipca.com/49891, click Proton Free, and type an email address and password into the boxes below Step 2 **1**. Make sure the password is something nobody would guess because you'll use it to secure all the other passwords and passkeys you save to Proton. Click 'Start using Proton Pass now' **2**. Proton will send a code to your email address to make sure it's valid, so open your inbox, copy the code from the message, and paste it into the box that appears on the Proton site. Click Verify.



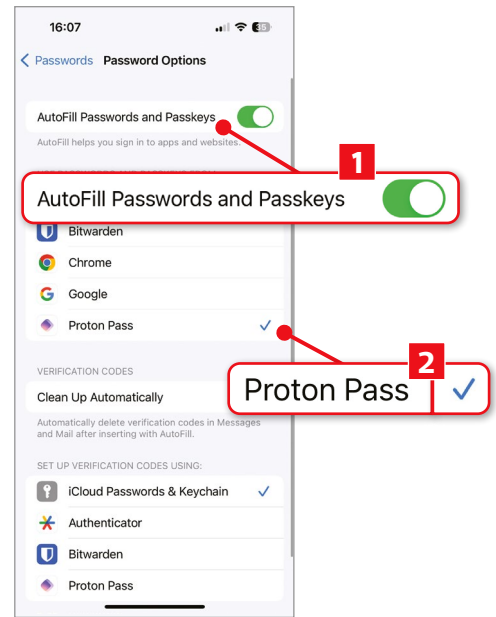
STEP 2 Now, install the extension for your browser. Proton Pass offers a choice of extensions, including for Chrome, Firefox and Brave. We're using Opera, which isn't listed, but because it's a Chrome-based browser we can use the Chrome extension. Click the button for your browser (we're clicking 'Get Proton Pass for Chrome' **1**), then click the 'Add to' button that appears on the next page, followed by the 'Add' button that appears on the pop-up message. A new page will load with instructions for pinning the extension to your toolbar.



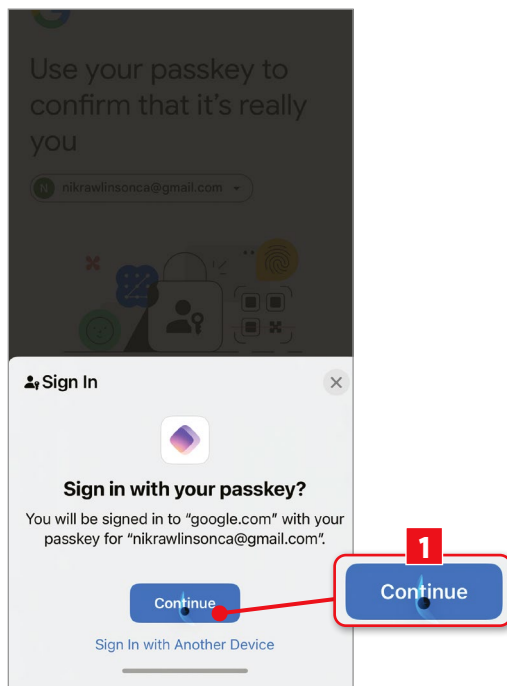
STEP 3 You now need to connect your Proton Account to the extension. Click 'Connect your Proton Account' and, because you've already logged in through this browser, the extension will be activated. You're now ready to create and save your first passkey. To show you how this works, we'll use a Google account. Log in at www.gmail.com, then click your account icon in the top right corner **1**, followed by 'Manage your Google Account'. Click Security, then scroll down the main pane and click 'Passkeys and security keys'. Finally, click 'Create a passkey' **2**. To learn how to create and save passkeys for your Microsoft account, follow the instructions at www.snipca.com/49956.



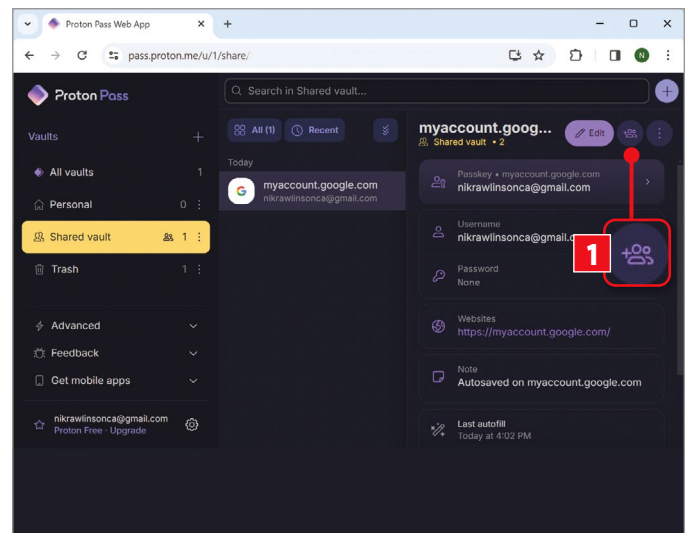
STEP 4 The Proton Pass extension pops up a box showing the details of the passkey you've just created. Click 'Save passkey' **1** and it will be sent to your online Proton Pass account, from where it will be accessible by every other browser running the Proton Pass extension that's logged into the same account, as well as by the Proton Pass app on your phone. To check that it works, install the app (Android www.snipca.com/49893; iOS www.snipca.com/49894) on your phone or tablet.



STEP 5 Launch the app and tap 'Sign in', then use the email address and password you specified in Step 1 to log in. Now, on an iPhone, open Settings and tap Passwords followed by Password Options. Tap the slider next to 'AutoFill Passwords and Passkeys' **1** if it's not already green, then select Proton Pass **2** as the app to use passwords and passkeys from. On Android, after logging in, tap the 'AutoFill with Proton Pass' button, then select Proton Pass on the following screen, and tap OK. Now tap 'Enable fingerprint lock' followed by 'Start using Proton Pass'.



STEP 6 Still on your phone, open your browser and navigate to www.gmail.com. Enter your email address and, when you reach the password page, tap 'Try another way' followed by 'Use your passkey'. On iOS, you'll be told that the next stage is to check your fingerprint or face ID, or to enter your screen lock code. Tap Continue and, when prompted to 'Sign in with your passkey?', tap Continue **1**. On Android, you'll be prompted to unlock your account using your usual **biometric** method or a code, after which the passkey will be detected and applied, and you'll be logged in.



STEP 7 If you want to share your login details with someone you trust, return to your browser, click the Proton Pass extension, then click the login you want to share, followed by the share button **1**. Click 'Create new vault to share', and enter the email address that the person with whom you want to share the login used when they set up their own Proton Pass account. Press Enter, followed by Continue. Finally, click 'Share vault'. When they log in, you'll be asked to confirm their access, after which they'll be able to use the login details you've just shared.

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Find out if items are made in China

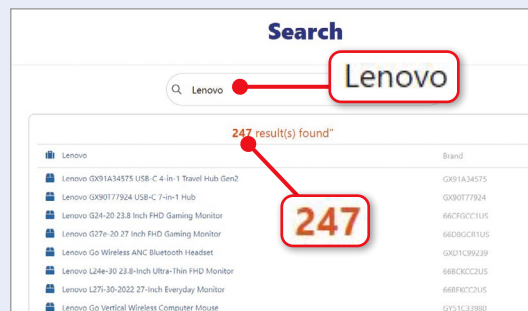
I agree with calls for Amazon to state which country products are made in, so we can avoid buying from those places if we so wished (Issue 681, page 7). One site that can help is ProductFrom (www.productfrom.com), which has 120,000 products you can search. The results tell you where each item was made.

I use it by clicking the top-right Search icon then typing a brand name. It'll suggest lots of results as you type. Search for 'Huawei', for example, and you'll see 21 items listed, while Lenovo

produces 247 (see screenshot).

Those are both Chinese firms, but it also lists products from non-Chinese firms that outsource their manufacturing to China. It finds 501 by Apple and 378 by Dell (both US companies), and over 1,300 from both Epson (Japanese) and Samsung (South Korean).

It also contains pages listing items made in specific countries – you'll see UK products at www.snipca.com/49885. I'm not sure how up to date



the information is, but it's a good place to start.

Dick Matthews



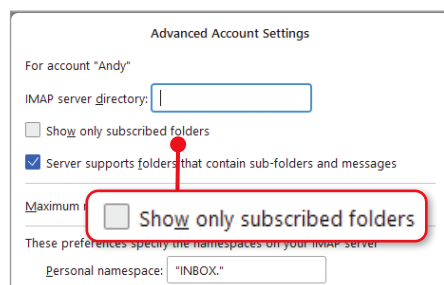
Dick wins a copy of our 2023 Back Issue CD

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

EMAIL

Stop deleted folders reappearing in Thunderbird

I read with interest Peter Norman's question in Issue 679 (page 65) about deleted folders reappearing in Thunderbird. I've had similar problems and discovered that it seems to go beyond



a simple question of the folder not being deleted on the online mail server. Sometimes when a folder is deleted on both the client and the server, it subsequently reappears as a 'phantom' folder (greyed out in italics and with no tick box to let you unsubscribe).

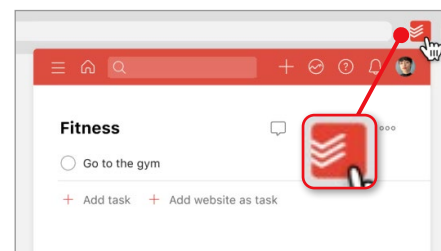
However, I've managed to find a solution on the Thunderbird support forum (www.snipca.com/49844). Click 'Tools' on the top bar, then click Account Settings. Now select Server Settings under the associated email account and click Advanced. Untick the 'Show only subscribed folders' box (see screenshot left). This doesn't sound very intuitive, but it does seem to fix the problem.

Andrew Perry

APPS

Use Todoist to organise tasks

I'd like to recommend Todoist (<https://todoist.com>), which is an excellent task manager that I've used for many years. There's a free version which will probably be suitable for most people, as well as Pro and Business versions for those who need more



Why I stopped using...

Fibre broadband

I switched from fibre broadband because it was extremely unreliable and my provider wasn't interested in working with Openreach to fix the problems. I even took the matter to the Communications Ombudsman, who ruled that a provider is under no obligation to provide a reliable service.

And what I use instead...

I switched to mobile broadband, the benefits of which you explained in Issue 680's feature (page 60). I bought

my own unlocked mobile router, and pay for rolling monthly SIM-only packages through Silux Mobile. Currently I get unlimited 4G/5G data and calls on the Three network for £15.95 a month (www.snipca.com/49859), which is half what I was paying for fibre broadband.

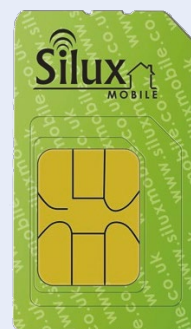
I get decent speeds and the service so far has been solid. Also, because my router has a phone socket, I can use the mobile number associated with the SIM as a home phone.

One downside, though, is that mobile networks don't provide a public-facing IP address for the router, which means

that you can't use port forwarding to access some devices like security cameras.

Alan Racherer

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



advanced functionality (compare features and prices at <https://todoist.com/pricing>).

You can use it solely online, and it has a browser extension (www.snipca.com/49884, pictured below left). You can also download it to launch from your PC, or install the apps (Android and iOS). It's constantly being updated and improved and I use it as a basis to manage my business. Highly recommended.

Andy Hunt

ROUTERS

Turn off extra features to connect smart plugs

✓ I had a similar problem to Frank Lake, who couldn't get his Meross MSS315 smart plugs to connect (Issue 681, page 71). I solved it by temporarily disabling my router's **MAC address filtering**, **parental control** and **firewall** features. These were all activated on my BT Smart Hub router, though I don't recall turning them on.

I'm not sure which of these three settings was causing the problem. I didn't turn them off one by one to check. I just disabled them all and – hey presto! – my smart plugs connected.

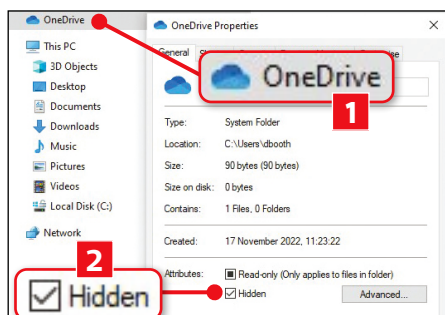
Cliff Thorndike

WINDOWS

Remove OneDrive from File Explorer

✓ Further to your tip on uninstalling OneDrive from Windows 11 (Issue 681, page 57), you can also keep OneDrive on your computer but stop it showing in File Explorer. I have a OneDrive account on my Windows 10 laptop, but I don't need to access it very often, so I see no reason to have it taking up File Explorer space. You just need to right-click OneDrive in Explorer (1 in our screenshot below), then click Properties, open the General tab, and tick 'Hidden' 2. I've also removed the OneDrive icon from my notification area – click the icon followed by the top-right cog, then select Quit OneDrive.

Douglas Baines



Reader recommends...

Dell Inspiron 24 all-in-one PC

£649 from www.snipca.com/47627

✓ I was interested in your positive review of HP's 27-cr0014na all-in-one PC (Issue 681, page 22) because I wondered whether it's better than the Dell Inspiron 24 that I've been using for the past few months.

I bought this machine after you recommended it in Issue 668 (page 22) because £649 seemed like a good price for 16GB RAM, 1TB SSD and a 24in screen. A decent screen was my priority, so I've been delighted with the 1920x1080-pixel resolution.

Space is very limited in my flat, which is why I've used laptops for many years. But the Inspiron is thin enough to fit snugly on my desk. It's barely noticeable. It's fast too – much speedier than the ageing Lenovo laptop it has replaced.



The SD card slot makes it easy to transfer phone photos, and four USB 3.0 ports are more than enough. It's worked out as a brilliant buy. When I read about the more expensive HP all-in-one in Issue 681, I'm convinced I got a bargain.

Tony Charles

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

TV

Get thicker coax cable for better Freeview signal

✓ Issue 679's feature on Freeview (page 62) had a lot of useful information. Here's a further tip for readers who may struggle to get good reception. When we moved to our current home the TV reception was awful. It failed to detect most channels, even though Freeview rated the signal strength 'Good' – and despite the previous owners installing a masthead amplifier.

After much head scratching I resorted to replacing our Wilko 5m socket-to-TV coax cable with a top-quality, thicker version. I chose a RG6 specification, which is 7mm in diameter – nearly three times that of the Wilko cable. A 25-metre cable drum costs £7.13 from Screwfix: www.snipca.com/49805. We now receive unbroken and reliable transmissions of all channels.

Readers will have to fit their own coax connectors, which needs some care. I've done many and it's always very fiddly. Avoid the RG59 specification because it's inferior.

Tom Borg

✓ I had some trouble with my Freeview reception. There was no 5G interference, and visiting Restore TV

(www.snipca.com/49487) didn't help. The TV aerial is communal, and some neighbours were having the same problem. Our landlord sent an AGS Tech aerial contractor, who said the aerial amplifier needed adjusting. He did that, and also fitted a 5G filter – and the reception is now fine.

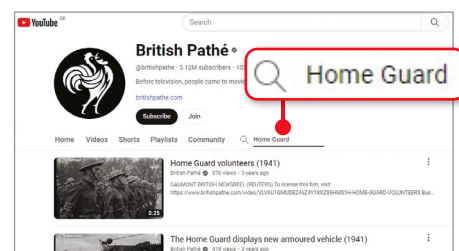
Robert Greenall

YOUTUBE

Watch British Pathé's Home Guard videos

✓ I loved the 'Grow Your Family Tree' column on the Home Guard (Issue 681, page 16), and applaud you for sneaking in mentions of Private Pike and Captain Mainwaring. Another source of Home Guard info is British Pathé's YouTube channel: www.snipca.com/49699. Find the videos by clicking the magnifying-glass icon and searching for 'Home Guard' (see screenshot below).

Bill Patterson



Browser Tips

BRAVE

Access AI features from your right-click menu

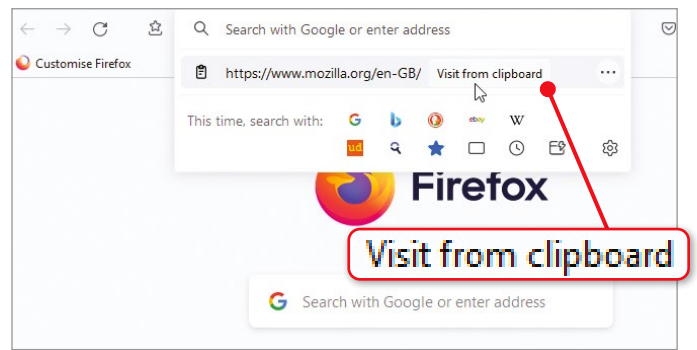
Brave 164, released in March, makes further improvements to the browser's AI assistant Leo. When you click the 'Show sidebar' button in the top-right corner, the chatbot now launches by default, which saves you having to open the sidebar first to click the Leo button.

Brave has also added Leo to its right-click context menu, to give you easier access to its AI features – including options that aren't available in the sidebar. Highlight a section of text on a web page, then right-click and move your cursor to the new 'Leo AI tools' sub-menu (1 in our screenshot below).

Under 'Quick actions', you can ask Leo to summarise the content of the selected text or explain it to you, by providing

context and clarification. The options in the Rewrite section let you use Leo to paraphrase and improve the text; change the tone of the content to academic, casual or funny 2; and either expand or shorten its length. You can even get Leo to generate a social-media post from the text, including any appropriate hashtags.

If you can't see the new AI options in your right-click menu, open Brave's Settings, select Leo and switch on 'Show Leo in the context menu on websites'. See our Workshop below and our feature on page 60 for more about AI tools.



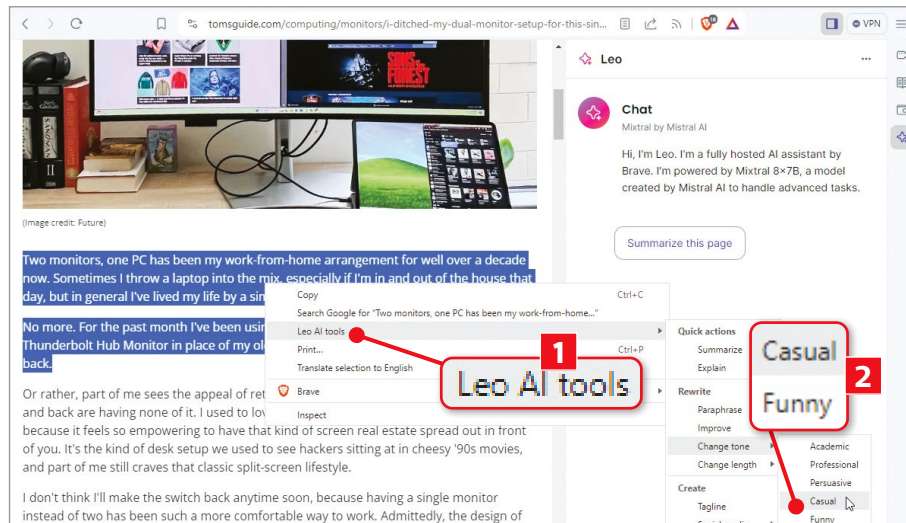
FIREFOX

Open links directly from your clipboard

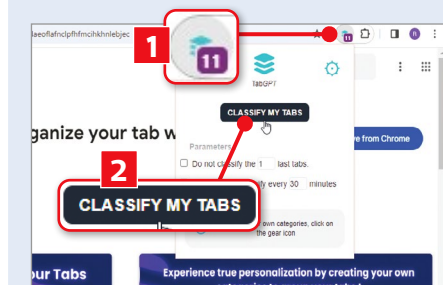
Firefox 125, released 16 April, introduces the browser's URL Paste Suggestion feature, which opens links you copy to your clipboard more quickly. When we wrote about this new option in Issue 678 (page 42), it was still a hidden experiment, but it's now officially available for all Firefox users.

Previously, you needed to paste a copied URL into the browser's address bar and press Enter to open the web page – or right-click the bar and choose 'Paste and go'. But with URL Paste Suggestion, you simply copy a link then click the address bar. Firefox reads the URL from your clipboard and auto-completes it as an address bar 'suggestion'. Click 'Visit from clipboard' (see screenshot above) to open the page without pasting anything.

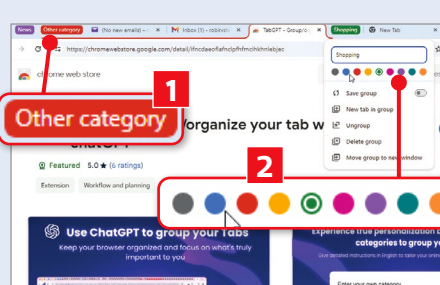
That may sound counterintuitive – why not just click a link to load the page in the current tab, or right-click it and choose 'Open Link in New Tab'? But it's useful for opening links that aren't in clickable



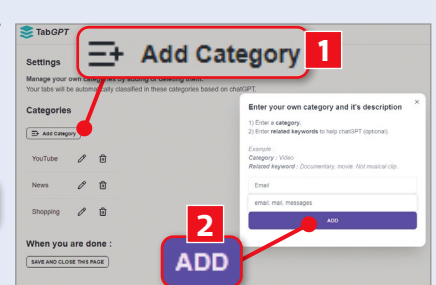
WORKSHOP Organise your tabs into groups using AI



1 Install the extension TabGPT from the Chrome Web Store (www.snipca.com/49883) – you don't need a ChatGPT account to use it. Right-click its button and choose Pin to pin TabGPT to your toolbar, then click the button 1 and select 'Classify my tabs' 2.



2 TabGPT will use AI to sort your tabs into themed groups such as News, Shopping and YouTube – tabs that don't fit these categories are labelled 'Other category' 1. You can change the name and colour assigned to a group by right-clicking its title 2.



3 To add more categories, click TabGPT's toolbar button then the Settings cog. Click 'Add Category' 1, enter a name for the tab group and related keywords, then click Add 2. Click 'Save and close this page' and TabGPT will use the new category to classify relevant tabs.

Secret settings and the best extensions

BEST EXTENSION FOR...

Customising Reddit's design

UI Changer for Reddit

Chromium

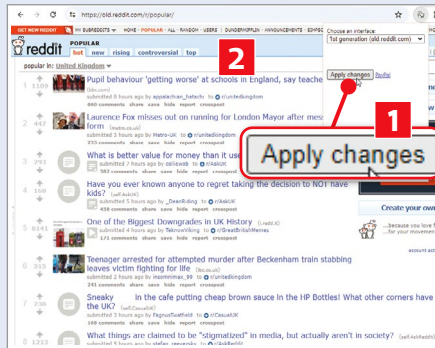
www.snipca.com/49888

Firefox

www.snipca.com/49889

Reddit was recently redesigned with a more modern look – its first major update for over a decade. Many users are unhappy with the revamp because of the amount of empty space, its strange presentation of images and its unnecessary left-hand menu (see www.snipca.com/49887).

'UI Changer for Reddit' is designed to appease disgruntled 'redditors' by letting



you restore the site's previous layout. Simply click its toolbar button, choose '2nd generation (new.reddit.com)' and click 'Apply

changes' (1 in our screenshot).

To go back further, to Reddit's original design 2 – which some long-time users still believe was the best – select '1st generation (old.reddit.com)'. You can revert Reddit to its latest look by choosing '3rd generation (sh.reddit.com)'.

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

www.snipca.com/49890

This more advanced extension lets you fine-tune different aspects of Reddit's design, including theme colours, image sizes and the width of posts.

format (provided they start with 'https://'), or that you've copied to your clipboard from another source, such as a document, email or different browser.

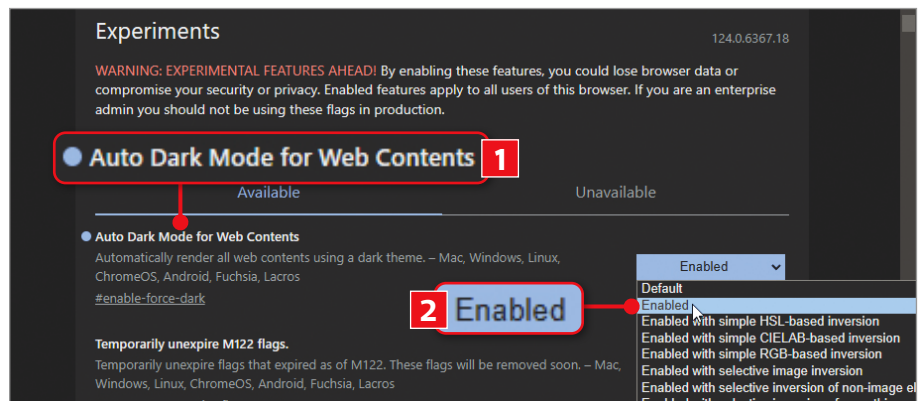
CHROME

Force all websites to use dark mode

Like most browsers, Chrome offers a **dark mode** to reduce eye strain when you're browsing at night. To activate it, go to Settings then Appearance, and select Dark in the Mode dropdown menu. However, this only inverts the colours of Chrome's own toolbars, menus and pages – including the New Tab page – not the content on websites you visit.

The browser *does* have a proper dark mode you can apply to all web pages, but it's tucked away in Chrome's Experiments section. Contrary to what several tech-news sites have reported (or blindly repeated), this isn't a new or restored experiment – it's been in testing for several years. However, many users aren't aware of the option, and the fact that Vivaldi recently introduced a similar feature (see Issue 680, page 43) could mean it will soon – finally – be added to Chrome.

In the meantime, to try the experimental dark mode, type <chrome://flags> into the address bar and press Enter to load the Experiments page. Find the entry **Auto Dark Mode for Web Contents** (1 in our screenshot above right) and select Enabled in its dropdown menu 2 – ignore the variations on this option. Click 'Relaunch' and



when Chrome reopens, all websites you visit will now use dark mode. This works independently of the Appearance setting, so to switch the experiment off you'll need to choose Disabled in its menu.

One Chrome feature that's genuinely new is the ability to use AI to organise your tabs into themed groups. Annoyingly, like the browser's other new AI tools (see www.snipca.com/49882) this is currently limited to the US, but you can replicate it using an extension called TabGPT. See our Workshop left to find out how.

EDGE

Magnify images on web pages

Microsoft has added a useful feature to Edge that lets you magnify images on web pages. Quietly introduced in version 123, released in March, this option saves you having to right-click a picture and choose 'Open image in new tab' to view it at a larger size.

Instead, you can either right-click the image and select 'Magnify image' or hover your cursor over it and press the Ctrl key twice. This will open a bigger version of the picture in a pop-up image viewer. Click the controls in the bottom-left corner (1 in our screenshot left) to zoom in and out, and to reset the zoom level. You can also zoom in by double-clicking the image.


Right-clicking the image in the viewer gives you options to save it 2, copy it to your clipboard, open it in a new tab, and use Edge's Visual Search feature to look for similar pictures on Bing Images.

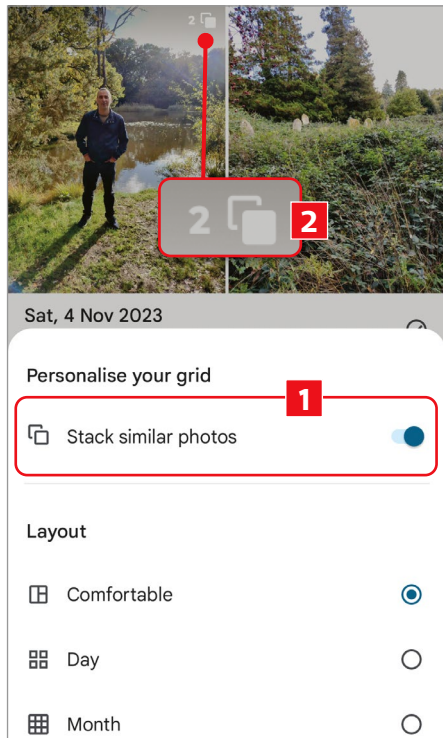


Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID & iOS

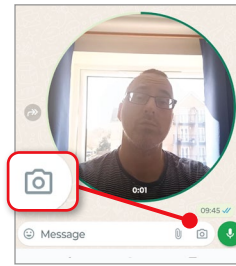
Group similar pictures in Google Photos

 Google has updated its Photos app with a useful feature called Photo Stacks, which keeps your pictures better organised by grouping similar shots. Instead of showing multiple photos of the same subject, taken seconds apart, Stacks presents them as a single 'top pick' image. Tapping this opens a film strip containing the other pictures in the stack.



Google Photos will inform you when Stacks is available on your phone or tablet, and will enable the feature by default. You can switch it on and off manually by tapping the three-dot icon at the top of your photo feed and choosing 'Stack similar photos' (1 in our screenshot below left). Alternatively, press your profile picture in the top-right corner, followed by 'Photos settings' and tap Preferences then 'Stack similar photos'. Note that the option is only available when backup is turned on for your Photos library.

Stacked photos are indicated with a number in their top-right corner (2). Press the image to share either the whole stack with other people, or just the top-pick shot. Swipe up on a picture to remove it from a stack or set it as your top pick. See www.snipca.com/49903 for more information about Photo Stacks.



your video note – this can be up to 60 seconds in length.

Move the slider upwards to lock your screen, so you can record your message hands-free, or slide it to the left to cancel the recording. Previously, you needed to long-press the microphone icon, switch to video mode


and then hold the camera button to capture your note, so the new method is considerably faster.

The other change applies to videos – but not video notes – that people share with you in WhatsApp chats. Rather than sit through a lengthy clip to get to the interesting bit, you can now double-tap the right-hand side of the video to fast-forward it by 10 seconds.

Double-tap the left-hand side to rewind the video by 10 seconds. Alternatively, you can go forward or backward in a WhatsApp video by manually dragging the progress bar in the player.


ANDROID & iOS

Record and skip WhatsApp videos more easily

 WhatsApp has made two welcome improvements to how you share and watch videos in chats. You can now record and send video messages simply by long-pressing the camera icon next to the text box (see screenshot above). This starts a three-second countdown timer, then lets you capture and send

ANDROID

Assign different ringtones to specific contacts

 A handy new feature in the Contacts app on Android phones – get it from www.snipca.com/49912 if it isn't installed – reveals who's calling you without you needing to look at your screen. It lets you assign different ringtones to individual contacts, without needing to edit their information.

BEST NEW APPS

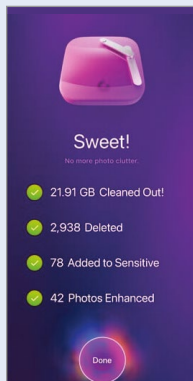
What you should install this fortnight

CleanMyPhone

Free*

iOS www.snipca.com/49915

Previously called Gemini Photos, this app uses AI to declutter your device of



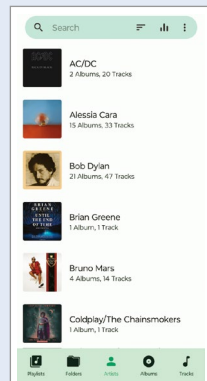
unwanted images. It scans for duplicate shots, blurred photos and old screenshots, lets you remove them with a single tap, then tidies up the remaining pictures in your library. You need to pay £25 a year to unlock all its features.

Fossify Music Player

Free

Android www.snipca.com/49913

This ad-free music player lets you listen to audio files on your phone or tablet without



any distractions. It identifies and organises songs by title, artist and album; lets you easily add tracks to playlists; and offers an equaliser for perfecting the sound quality. You can also use the sleep timer to gradually fade music as you nod off.

Video Summarizer

Free

Android www.snipca.com/49916

iOS www.snipca.com/49917

Share a YouTube video to this app, or paste its URL from your clipboard, and it will use AI to generate a summary of the



content, broken down into 'chapters'. You can then ask the chatbot follow-up questions about the video, share its summary to other apps and re-summarise the content using simpler or more detailed language.

*Contains in-app purchases

← Contact ringtones



Add a custom ringtone to individual contacts to help you recognise who's calling. To manage the default ringtone for this device, visit [Settings](#).


[Add contact ringtone](#)

To change the default ringtone for a specific person, tap the 'Fix & manage' tab in the Contacts app and select the new 'Contact ringtones' option in the 'Other tools' section. Press 'Add contact ringtone' (see screenshot above), choose the relevant contact and tap Sounds.

You can now select which ringtone to assign to that person. If you don't like the options provided by your phone, choose 'Add ringtone' to use a custom audio file stored in Google Drive. Press 'OK' to save the ringtone and quickly identify that person when they next call.

Go back to the 'Contact ringtones' screen to view a list of all the people to whom you've assigned special ringtones. To revert them to the standard sound, tap the Delete button next to their name, or tap the Edit icon to change their ringtone again.

ios **Make your screen dimmer than the minimum brightness level**

 When you use your iPhone or iPad at night the brightness of the screen can prove dazzling, even at its lowest setting. Not only does this risk hurting your eyes, but it may also disturb anyone else in the room.

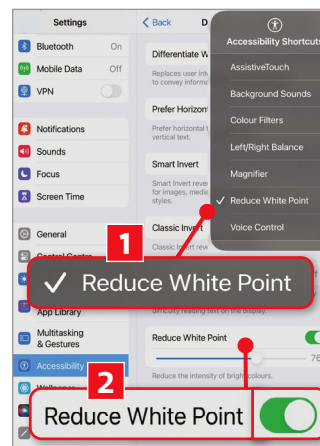
You can fix this problem using a secret accessibility setting called Reduce White Point, which lets you dim your display more than the minimum brightness setting will allow. By creating a shortcut for the option, you'll be able to switch it on and off at the touch of a button, and use your device more comfortably at night.

To activate the feature, open the Settings app on your iPhone or iPad and

tap Accessibility then 'Display & Text Size'. Switch on the Reduce White Point option (1 in our screenshot right) and drag the slider to your desired brightness level – the higher the percentage, the dimmer your screen will be.

To create a shortcut for the setting, tap Control Centre in the Settings app and tap the plus icon next to Accessibility

Shortcuts. Go back to the Accessibility



screen, tap Accessibility Shortcut and select Reduce White Point to add it to the Shortcuts menu.

Open the Control Centre by swiping down from the top-right corner of your screen and press the Accessibility Shortcuts tile – this looks like a man inside a circle.

Tap 'Reduce White Point' (2) to turn the option on and off, and adjust your screen brightness accordingly.

BEST APPS FOR...

Browsing TV-streaming services

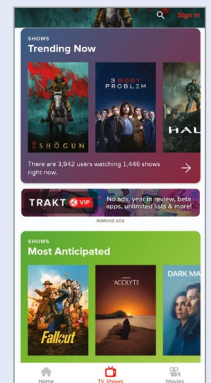
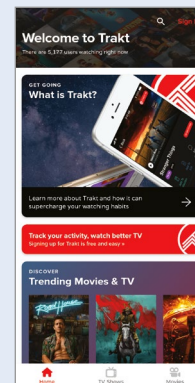
Trakt Free*

Android www.snipca.com/49918

iOS www.snipca.com/49919

Trakt helps you keep track of the TV series and films you watch on different streaming services, across all your devices. You can add titles you're interested in to a personal watchlist, browse recommendations from other Trakt users, see statistics about your viewing habits and tap to play shows and movies in the relevant apps.

Best For Tracking what you watch



Watchworthy

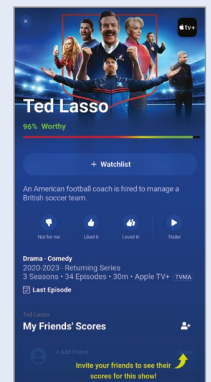
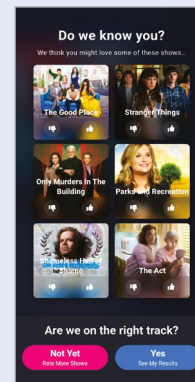
Free

Android www.snipca.com/49922

iOS www.snipca.com/49923

Tell Watchworthy which streaming services you use, and whether you like the TV shows and films it suggests, and it will provide tailored recommendations based on your tastes. The app is biased towards US content but recently added the useful option to ask your friends what they think of its ideas.

Best For Deciding what to watch next



JustWatch

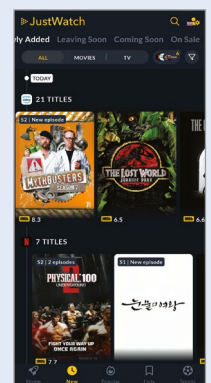
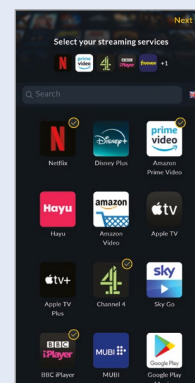
Free*

Android www.snipca.com/49920

iOS www.snipca.com/49921

JustWatch lets you search for TV shows and films to stream, rent and buy across dozens of free and paid-for services. It highlights new and popular content, reveals which titles are leaving and coming soon to your favourite services, and lets you compile watchlists. Connect the app to your smart TV for instant viewing.

Best For Finding out where to watch shows



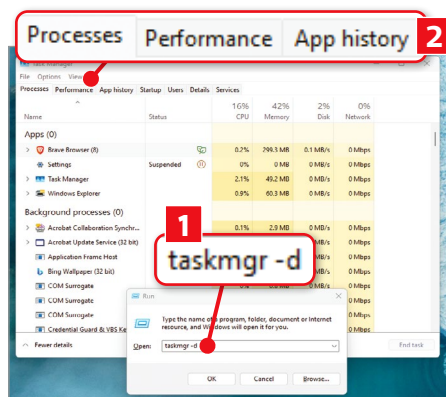
*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 11

Restore the old Task Manager

Microsoft redesigned Task Manager in Windows 11 22H2 by moving the tabbed options from the top to the left, and adding icons to represent each one. If you don't like this design, you can easily go back to the old Task Manager – as still seen in Windows 10.

First, make sure Task Manager isn't running on your PC. Then all you need to do is press Windows key+R, type `taskmgr -d` (1 in our screenshot below) and click OK. You'll see the old design appear, with the tabs (Processes, Performance etc) along the top (2).



WINDOWS 11

Use 'Voice access' across multiple monitors

Windows 11's Moment 5 update, now installed on all PCs, has added the ability to use 'Voice access' across all your connected monitors.

This feature lets you use your voice to perform tasks like opening programs or going to the desktop. Press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click Accessibility (1 in our screenshot below). Scroll down and click Speech, under the Interaction heading. Now click the 'Voice access' slider to On (2), and the 'Voice access' bar will appear at the top of your screen. You'll need to click Download (3) if you've not used it before.

It's in 'Sleep mode' by default, so you'll need to activate it by saying "Voice access wake up". Visit Microsoft's site for a list of voice commands: www.snipca.com/49858.



WINDOWS 10 & 11

Create keyboard shortcuts that can open software

PowerToys version 0.79, released in March, updated the

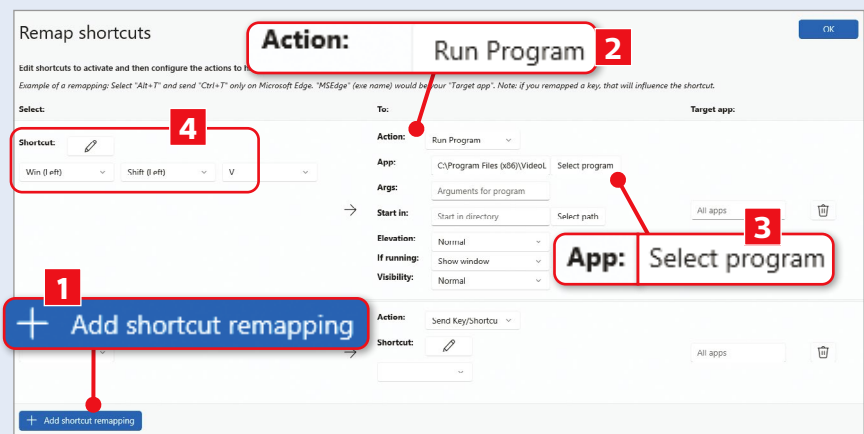
Keyboard Manager tool to let you create shortcuts to open web pages (see Issue 680). You can also now create a shortcut to open a program you have installed. In our example, we're going to set Windows key+Shift+V to launch VLC media player.

Open PowerToys, then click Keyboard Manager. Set the Enable Keyboard Manager slider to On then click 'Remap a shortcut'. Now click 'Add shortcut remapping' (1 in our screenshot). We chose Run Program in the Action dropdown menu (2). Next to App, we clicked 'Select program' (3). We

then navigated to 'VLC.exe' in File Explorer and clicked Open.

Next, we clicked the pencil icon, then turned the 'Allow chords' slider to On (this lets you create a shortcut with one or more **modifier keys** and two non-modifiers). With this box still open, hold down the shortcut you want – Windows key+Shift+V in our case. Click OK and you'll see the shortcut confirmed top left (4). Click OK top right to close Keyboard Manager.

If you don't use PowerToys, download it from www.snipca.com/49658. If you've got it but haven't yet upgraded to 0.79, open the program and look for an 'Update available' button top right.



WINDOWS 11

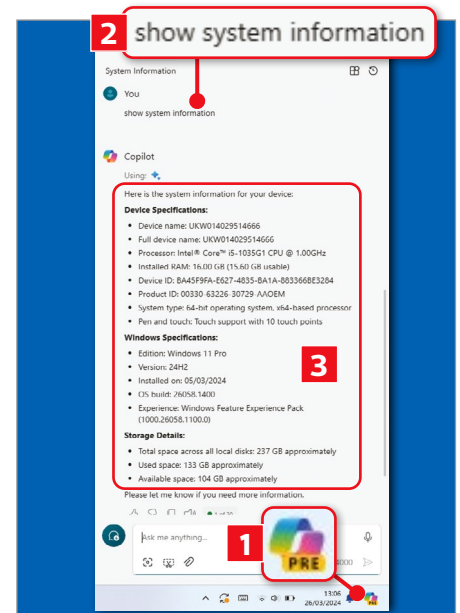
Use new commands in Copilot

The Moment 5 update has also added several new PC commands that you can type in Microsoft's Copilot. The AI assistant will respond to these commands by performing the task.

First, click the Copilot button on your taskbar (1 in our screenshot right) or press the Windows key+C shortcut. Now type your command and press Enter.

In our example we typed `show system information` (2), and it gave us full details of our laptop, Windows version and storage details (3). This meant we didn't have to look for them in Settings.

Other new commands include `empty recycle bin`, `show IP address`, `show startup apps`, `show battery info` and `show available wifi`.



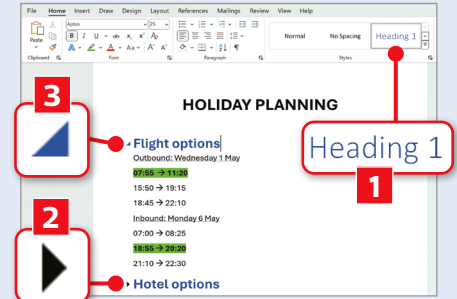
MICROSOFT WORD

Create collapsible headers in documents

When you're working on a lengthy Word document with lots of headings, it's a good idea to make them collapsible. That way, you can expand and read only the sections you want, rather than scrolling endlessly through the document to find what you're looking for.

You can do this by choosing a heading style from the Styles section in the ribbon

menu – we chose 'Heading 1' (1 in our screenshot). When a heading is collapsed, all the text below will be hidden. This will be indicated by an arrow to the left pointing at the text, as with our 'Hotel options' heading (2). When a heading is expanded, it will rotate 45 degrees, as in the 'Flight options' header (3). Simply click these arrows to expand or collapse your sections.



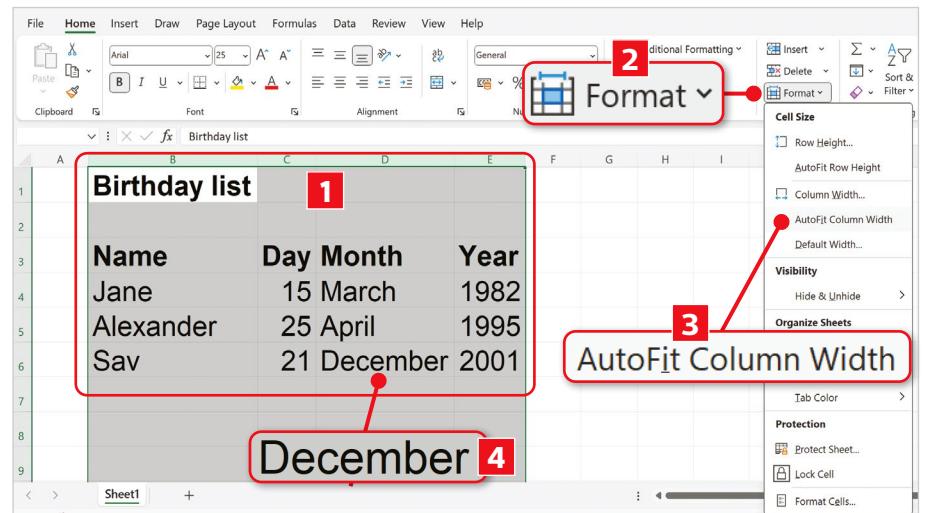
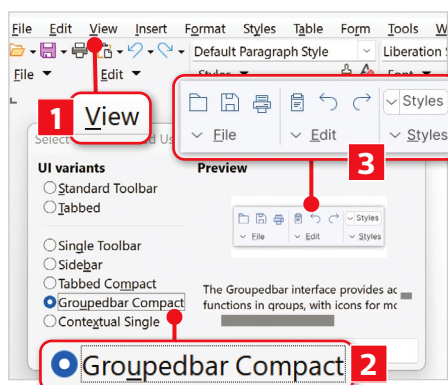
LIBREOFFICE WRITER

Use more options in Notebookbar layout

One of the best new features in LibreOffice 24.2, released in February, is a revamped 'Notebookbar' layout in Writer. Unlike several larger menus on the toolbar, this view rearranges the buttons, tools and options into tabs, similar to the way the current Microsoft Office arranges them in the ribbon menu.

In LibreOffice Writer, there are three styles of notebookbar layout: Tabbed, Tabbed Compact and Groupedbar Compact. These layouts have been improved by adding more options in sections at the top, including Format and Tools. 'Print preview' also appears under File in the new version.

In our example, we've set Writer to Groupedbar Compact. When using the Standard Toolbar view, we clicked View (1 in our screenshot below), then 'User Interface...'. In the box that appears, we chose the Groupedbar Compact option (2). We clicked 'Apply to All', then Close. LibreOffice shows you a preview of what Groupedbar Compact looks like (3), helping you decide whether it's right for you.



MICROSOFT EXCEL

Autofit your data into spreadsheet cells

You can use Excel's Autofit tool to make sure your data fits neatly into spreadsheet cells. When you've typed all your data, highlight the columns that you need to fit to size (1 in our screenshot above). Click Home at the top, then the Format dropdown menu (2). Click 'AutoFit Column Width' (3) and the width of your columns will change to fit the largest word or number. In our example, that's 'December' in cell D6 (4).

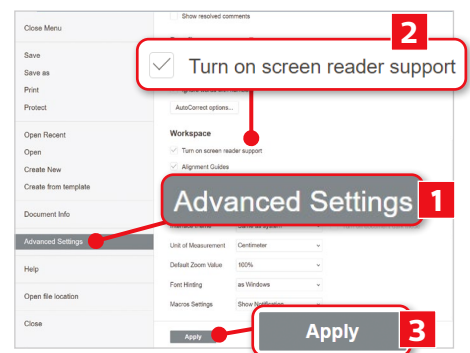
details of what you can do with readers in OnlyOffice.

You'll need to install a screen reader to use the feature. OnlyOffice recommends Jaws (www.snipca.com/49831) and NVDA (www.snipca.com/49842). Whichever you install, click the File tab at the top of any OnlyOffice tool, followed by Advanced Settings (1 in our screenshot below). Now look for the Workspace heading and tick 'Turn on screen reader support' (2). Click 'Apply' (3) to confirm. When you need the screen reader, press the Ctrl+Alt+Z keyboard shortcut to launch it.

ONLYOFFICE

Use a screen reader

OnlyOffice added the ability to use screen-reading software last year, but initially only in beta. It released this option fully in version 8.0 in January, and introduced some new features based on user feedback, including using Tab for OK/Cancel buttons in system boxes on screen, or the Space bar for Yes/No. Visit www.snipca.com/49843 for



In The Club



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

Pin important notes in video meetings

All video-chat tools let you type messages that appear in panels next to the video, which can be helpful when asking questions or posting website links. But because they appear in the order they're posted, it's easy to lose track of important messages.

Google recently fixed this problem by letting you 'pin' messages in its video-chat tool Meet, so they remain at the top for everyone to see. What's especially useful is that anyone joining the meeting late will also see the pinned messages. They won't be able to see any normal, unpinned messages that were posted before they joined.

Google tends to first roll out features to users who subscribe to its paid-for Workspace suite of tools, but happily it has immediately made pinned messages available to everyone for free. However, it only works on computers at the moment, not phones or tablets.

Click the pin icon

First, launch a video meeting at <https://meet.google.com>, or by signing into Gmail then clicking the top-right 'Google apps' icon (a 3x3 grid of dots) followed by the Meet icon.

Now click the 'Chat with everyone' speech-bubble icon, then type your message and press Enter. It'll appear in the panel on the right. Now hover your cursor over it and click the pin icon that appears on the right. Click 'Pin this message' and you'll see that it's been

Pin a message in Google Meet and it'll appear at the top of the chat panel

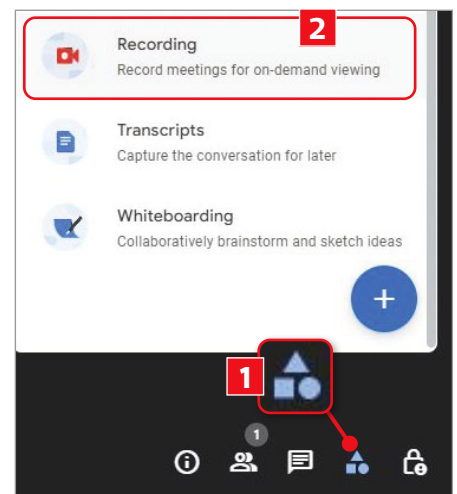
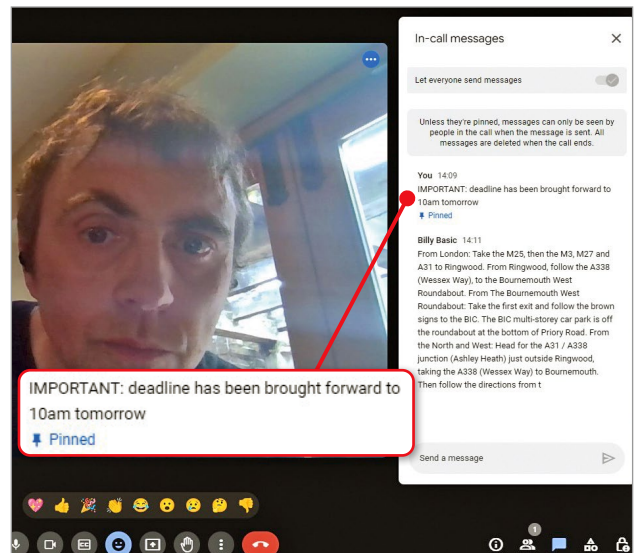
pinned (see screenshot right). This means it'll appear at the top of the chat panel no matter how many messages are posted subsequently. To unpin it, hover over it again and click the 'Unpin message' icon.

Anyone joining the meeting later will see the message as a notification at the bottom right of their screen (see screenshot below left), and also at the top of the panel. It also appears if you leave and then rejoin the meeting.

Save messages and pin poll mentions

Anyone can pin and unpin their own message, but only meeting hosts can unpin messages from other people. Note that all messages – pinned or not – are deleted when the meeting ends. You can save any by copying them, then pasting them into another program, such as Google Docs or Microsoft Word.

Alternatively, you can pay £10 a month for the Business Standard version of Workplace, which lets you record video meetings and any messages that are posted. Start a chat, then click Activities at the bottom right (1 in our screenshot above right), followed by Recording (2). Choose a language for captions (if you want them), then click 'Start recording' followed by Start. Click 'Stop recording' and when the meeting has finished you'll be emailed a video recording, plus any messages to

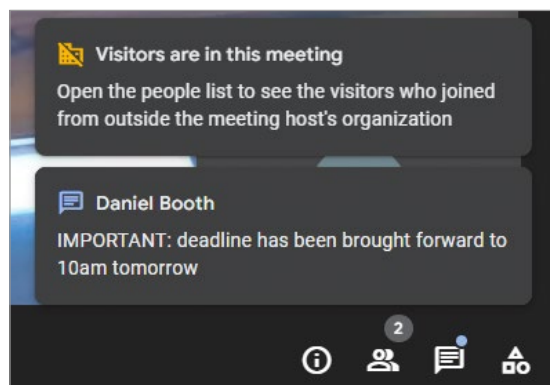


If you record a video meeting, any messages posted will be saved too

open in Google Docs. These will also be saved in your Google Drive account.

Another useful feature in Business Standard is creating a poll. You can't actually pin this to your chat, but you can at least pin a message telling people you'd like them to answer the question. Create a poll by clicking the Activities icon again, followed by Polls.

If you're interested in paying for Business Standard, first compare it to the two other Business plans: Starter (£5 a month) and Plus (£15). See the Meet tools each offers at www.snipca.com/49988.



Latecomers will see the pinned message pop up when they join the meeting

What's All the Fuss About...



Windows 11's 'All apps'

Microsoft is finally making a change that many users crave

What is it?

A list of all the apps and programs you've got installed on your computer. You can see them by clicking the Windows 11 icon at the bottom left of your taskbar, followed by the 'All apps' button. They're listed alphabetically in a list you can scroll down (pictured below). This might seem simple enough, but many people think it's poorly designed.

What's wrong with it?

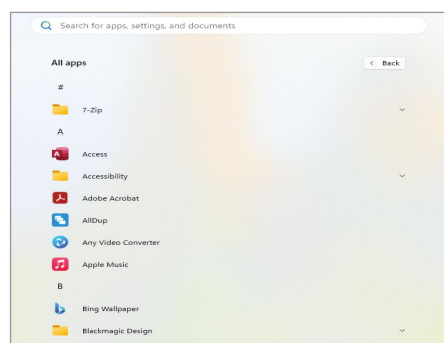
Critics say it has too much empty space because there's only one app listed per line. Also, if you have a lot of apps installed, it takes a lot of scrolling to see them all. Many users think it would be better to show the apps in a grid of rows, and Microsoft now seems to agree.

Is it changing the design then?

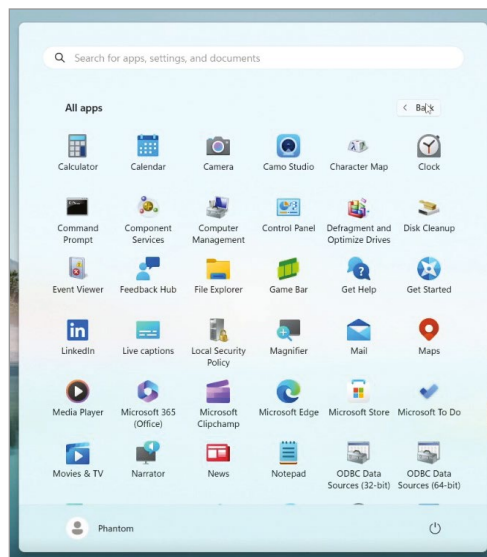
Looks like it. A new preview build of Windows 11, available only to Insiders, has a hidden feature showing a grid of apps in rows of six, similar in design to Microsoft's Launcher for Android devices (www.snipca.com/50015). They're still listed alphabetically, but you can see more of them – at least 30 – without having to scroll, and the icons are bigger (see main screenshot). The change was first spotted by PhantomOcean3, who posted a video on X (formerly Twitter): www.snipca.com/50014.

Is it also changing in Windows 10?

Not sure. Microsoft has continued to add new features to Windows 10 despite



An A-Z list of apps is not to everyone's liking



previously saying it wouldn't, but this might be one change too many. One solution is to open File Explorer and type `shell:AppsFolder` into the bar at the top. This shows your apps as a grid, though it takes more effort than clicking a button in the Start menu.

Does that also work in Windows 11?

Yep – exactly the same. This is actually much easier than activating the new grid view, which is a bit of a faff. First you have to update to Windows 11 Insider Preview Build 22635.3420, then install the specialist third-party software ViVeTool (www.snipca.com/48739, see Issue 676, page 35), and type complex instructions in Command Prompt. We advise waiting until Microsoft brings the grid view to the full version of Windows 11.

Will Microsoft definitely do this?

We think so – or at least offer the grid view as an alternative to the alphabetical list. It's keeping the layout hidden for now so it can keep testing it, but we reckon some version of it will appear this year. The grid would certainly be a popular addition to Windows 11. More than 1,500 people have 'upvoted' the suggestion on Microsoft's Feedback Hub (press



The grid would certainly be a popular addition to Windows 11



Windows key+F, select Suggestions under Filter, and search for `grid of icons`).

Can't you also customise the Start menu using software?

Yes, using third-party tools such as Open-Shell (free, see Issue 668, page 38) and Start11 and StartAll Back (£9.99 and £4.99 respectively). But such extremely useful programs might soon stop working.

Really? Why?

Because it looks like Microsoft will block them in version 24H2 of Windows 11, expected this autumn. Early users of 24H2 say that StartAllBack doesn't run in it, nor does Explorer Patcher (www.snipca.com/46794), which lets you customise the taskbar (see Issue 663, page 51). Getting round this is easy – you just need to rename the program's `EXE` file – but it's a sign that Microsoft is cracking down on software that lets you tweak how Windows looks and works.

Isn't that a bit extreme?

Some will think so, but Microsoft would say these programs cause Windows to crash. Regardless, we'll continue to test them and recommend those that work reliably. After all, any changes Microsoft ends up making to the Start menu won't suit everyone.

EVERY DEVICE YOU MUST STOP USING

Manufacturers can end support for their products without you realising. Robert Irvine reveals which PCs, phones, routers and other devices are now obsolete and unsafe



WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Check if your PC's processor still receives updates
- Discover the remaining lifespan of your **SSD**
- Learn if your laptop is now a 'legacy' product
- Find out when security updates end for your phone
- Ensure your TV is still supported by its manufacturer
- Upgrade an obsolete router to protect your network

One of the drawbacks of buying tech products is that you assume devices will last much longer than the manufacturers do. When you spend hundreds of pounds on a new PC, phone or TV, you expect to keep using it for several years – or at least until it stops working properly. But companies often end support for their goods long before they start misbehaving, usually in the hope that you'll splash out again for one of their newer models.

We think you should eke as much life out of your products as possible, and there's no shame in hanging on to an old gadget that's served you well, but sometimes you have to admit defeat.

Devices that no longer receive software and security updates can become slow, unreliable and unsafe to use, because hackers can exploit unpatched flaws to steal your data and spread malware. Unsupported products also miss out on the latest features and may be incompatible with newer technology.

Here, we reveal which devices are now considered obsolete or on borrowed time, so you can replace them before it's too late. We look at everything from PCs and phones to smart TVs and speakers, to explain the type and length of support provided for the hardware itself rather than the operating system it runs.

DESKTOP PCs & LAPTOPS

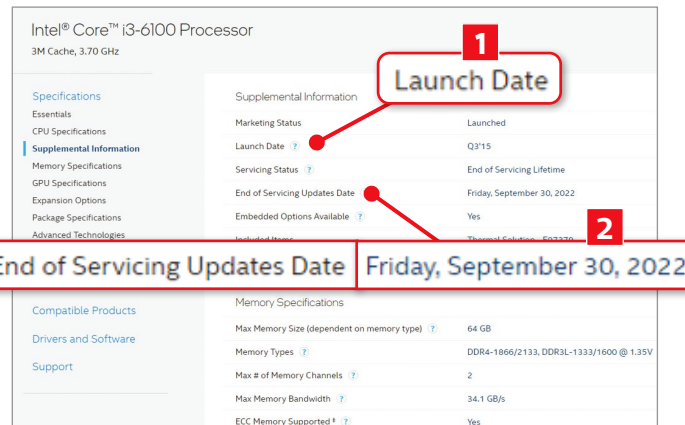
PCs with obsolete processors

The average lifespan of a desktop PC is between five and eight years, while for a laptop it's four to six years, but that mainly depends on the condition of its processor. A CPU that's kept at a safe temperature – generally 40 to 65°C – can comfortably last for a decade, and most processors have built-in protection mechanisms that prevent them from overheating. However, those PC users – typically gamers – who **overclock** their CPUs by increasing the **clock speed** and/or voltage beyond that set by the manufacturer risk reducing their device's lifespan by a significant amount.

Even an apparently healthy CPU can cause problems if it's unable to support new hardware and software. Microsoft's strict upgrade requirements for Windows 11 initially insisted you have an Intel 8th-generation processor or higher, and though this was later expanded to include older CPUs – see the latest list at www.snipca.com/49925 – an obsolete or soon-to-be-obsolete processor is a strong reason to upgrade your PC.

You can check the age of an Intel CPU, and whether it's still supported by the manufacturer, by visiting the Processors section of Intel's Product Specifications site (www.snipca.com/49927). Either browse the processor categories or type the model number in the search box top-right to find the details for your CPU.

Scroll down the Specifications page to the Supplemental Information section (see screenshot above right), and check the Launch Date **1** (when PCs containing that processor went on sale) and the 'End of Servicing Updates (ESU) Date' **2**



Discover the age of your Intel processor and whether it's still receiving support on the company's Product Specifications site



Intel ended support for the i3-6100 processor in this Dell PC in 2022

– which is when Intel stopped supporting that CPU with **driver** and software updates. For example, the ESU for an Intel i3-6100 3.7GHz processor, as found in a Dell OptiPlex 3050 (pictured above right), was 30 September 2022 (www.snipca.com/49932), so that PC is now effectively obsolete. In contrast, our Buy It recommendation, the Acer Swift Go 14 (www.snipca.com/49733), has a new Intel Ultra 9 processor that will last for many years.

If no ESU date is mentioned, your processor remains supported even if it's shown as Discontinued (which means it's no longer being manufactured). CPUs will continue to work after their 'End of Servicing' date, but will be more likely to suffer performance and compatibility issues, and unpatched security flaws.

AMD doesn't provide ESU dates for its processors, but you can find out when your CPU went on sale and when it last received driver and software updates.

Visit the 'AMD Drivers and Support' site (www.snipca.com/49929) and either select your processor in the dropdown menu or browse to it via the category lists, then click Submit.

Open the section of information for your operating system and check the Release Date for the most recent driver and software updates. Scroll down to the Specifications section to learn the Launch Date of your CPU and its approximate age. If the page says "the product has been moved to a legacy support model", no further software updates will be released.

PCs with outdated graphics cards

You can also use the 'AMD Drivers and Support' site to check when the drivers for your AMD **graphics card** were last updated. An outdated GPU can result in a pixelated or flickering picture, incorrect colours and resolution, and other visual problems on your monitor or laptop screen.

Usefully, AMD provides a list of graphics cards that have moved to its legacy support model – and are therefore obsolete – at www.snipca.com/49933.

These include the Radeon HD 5000, R7 300 and R9 Fury series. Last November, the company announced that it was reducing driver support for its Polaris and Vega graphics cards, but these will continue to receive security and 'functionality' updates (see www.snipca.com/49934 for details) for the time being.

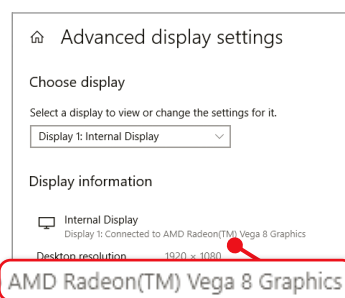
Similarly, you can search for your Nvidia graphics card on the company's Download Drivers site (www.snipca.com/49935) to see when its drivers were last updated, or just check its page of legacy GPUs (www.snipca.com/49936).

In March, Nvidia confirmed it was

How to check your CPU and GPU models

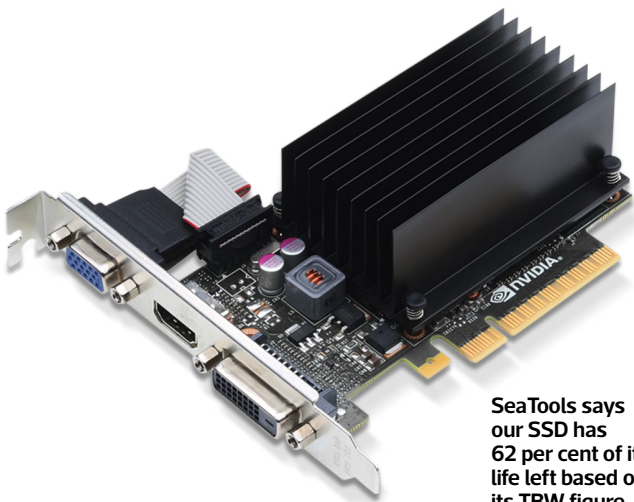
The quickest way to check which processor your PC uses is to open the Windows Settings app and select System, then About. You'll find the processor details in the 'Device specifications' section below the name of your computer.

To see which make and model of graphics card you have installed, select Display in the System menu.

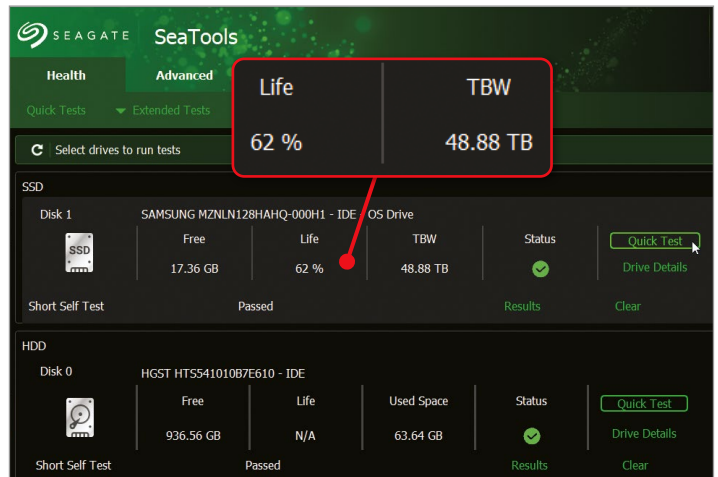


Click 'Advanced display settings' and check the details under 'Display information' (see screenshot). You can also get this information, and other useful data about your hardware, using the free system-analysis tool

Glow (www.snipca.com/49138). See our 'Take the ultimate PC health check' feature in Issue 677 (page 62 – get it from www.snipca.com/49951) for details.



SeaTools says our SSD has 62 per cent of its life left based on its TBW figure



Nvidia's Kepler series of GeForce graphics cards no longer receive driver updates

retiring its GeForce GTX line-up (www.snipca.com/49937) to focus on its RTX series, though support for the most recent devices is likely to continue for a while.

The independent site Endoflife.date provides details of when support ended for different Nvidia lines (www.snipca.com/49938), if you can decipher the company's confusing naming scheme. For example, Nvidia graphics cards in the now obsolete Kepler series include most but not all GeForce GTX 600 and 700 GPUs, such as the GT 720 (pictured above). These no longer receive driver updates but will get security patches until September.

Although an unsupported graphics card can be replaced, the cost and hassle of doing so – especially in a laptop – may convince you to buy a new computer instead.

PCs with failing hard drives and SSDs

Solid-state drives (SSDs) may eventually render traditional hard drives (HDDs) obsolete, but many users currently benefit from having both in their PCs – the former for speed and the latter for storage. SSDs generally last longer than HDDs – up to 10 years, compared with seven years – because their lack of moving parts safeguards them against mechanical failure.

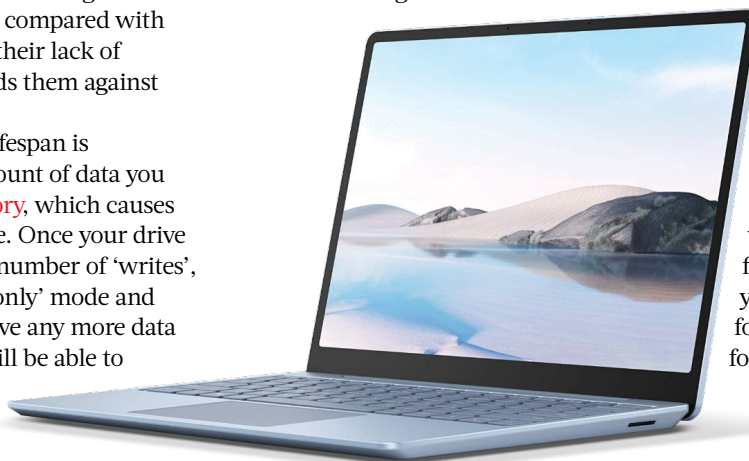
However, an SSD's lifespan is determined by the amount of data you write to its **flash memory**, which causes it to wear out over time. Once your drive exceeds its maximum number of 'writes', it will switch to 'read-only' mode and you won't be able to save any more data on it – though you'll still be able to retrieve existing files. A 1TB SSD will typically keep

working until you've written at least 600TB of data to its memory.

To check the health of your SSD and/or HDD, download and run the free tool CrystalDiskInfo (www.snipca.com/49942). This uses SMART (Self-Monitoring, Analysis and Reporting Technology) to detect and report useful information about each drive on your PC, including its current temperature, how many hours it's been in use for and an overall Health Status score. For SSDs, it should also tell you how much data has been written to the drive and the percentage of its life that's remaining.

If you don't see those details, download Seagate's free SeaTools software (www.snipca.com/49943), which works with most makes of SSD and gives you a reliable lifespan estimate based on how many terabytes of data have been written (in TBW – terabytes written) to the drive.

According to SeaTools, the Samsung SSD in our HP Pavilion laptop, which we bought in 2019, has 62 per cent of its life remaining, having written 48.88TB of data (see screenshot above). The program also lets you scan your SSD and HDD for bad sectors – corrupt parts of the drive that can't store or read data – and fix them with a single click.



Legacy Microsoft Surface laptops

Most PC manufacturers don't give their devices a shelf life, outside of the warranty period, presumably because a 'five years maximum' admission would deter you from your purchase. But Microsoft has a habit of forcing users to upgrade their computers to run the latest version of Windows, so it's unsurprising that its Surface laptops have expiry dates.

Surface devices that went on sale before January 2021 receive driver and **firmware** updates for at least four years, after which they'll be regarded as 'legacy products'. Losing these updates after the 'end-of-servicing' date isn't as serious as the end of security updates or the operating system. However, it still means the laptops will lose some functionality, affecting features including Bluetooth connectivity, video and audio playback, and compatibility with other devices.

Because the Surface range was launched in 2013, more than a dozen models are now essentially obsolete, including the 5th-generation Surface Pro (released 2017), which expired on 15 January. And pity the original Surface Laptop Go (from 2020, pictured left), which will stop receiving updates in October.

It's better news if you own a Surface laptop that went on sale after January 2021, such as the Surface Laptop Go 3 (www.snipca.com/50004). Following a change in Microsoft's policy last November (see www.snipca.com/49944) this will continue to get driver and firmware updates for at least **six** years. Visit www.snipca.com/49945 for details of end-of-servicing dates for all Surface models.

The original Microsoft Surface Laptop Go will stop receiving updates in October

Soon-to-expire Google Chromebooks

All Chromebooks have an Auto Update Expiration (AUE) date, after which they no longer receive updates from Google. This means some features and apps will stop working, and the device will be susceptible to security threats and performance problems.

The AUE used to be five years from the date the Chromebook went on sale, which was later extended to eight years. From June this year, all Chromebooks released from 2021 onwards will receive 10 years of automatic updates (www.snipca.com/49946), no matter which company made them. Some devices from before 2021 are eligible for extended updates, but you'll need to 'opt in' for them (see www.snipca.com/49952) and will lose access to the Google Play Store and any Android apps you've installed.

Google's extension of the AUE to 10 years is obviously welcome, but it's still important to check when your



Google ended automatic updates for the HP Chromebook 13 G1 in June 2023

Chromebook is set to expire – especially if you bought it refurbished or second-hand. Visit Google's 'Auto Update policy' page (www.snipca.com/49953) and select a manufacturer to see when automatic updates end for its different models. Alternatively, click the clock in the bottom-right corner of your Chromebook screen, then the Settings cog. Choose

'About ChromeOS', followed by 'Additional details' and check the 'Update schedule' to see when your Chromebook will receive its last update. The new support policy means the latest Chromebooks are covered until 2034, but 13 devices expired last year and are not eligible for extended updates, including the HP Chromebook 13 G1 (pictured).

PHONES, TABLETS & E-READERS

Unsafe Android phones and tablets

Unlike iPhones and iPads, which can install the latest software and security updates from Apple as soon as they're available, Android phones and tablets are at the mercy of the manufacturer. This means the frequency of updates, and how long you receive them for, varies between makes and models.

Last September, Google announced that it will provide software support for its own Pixel 8 and Pixel 8 Pro phones for seven years (until 2030), including system and security updates, and 'feature drops' (www.snipca.com/49954).

"No major smartphone brand offers this committed level of support and longevity", it boasted, though support for older Pixel devices is more limited.

For example, system updates for the Pixel 6 and Pixel 6 Pro (launched in 2021) end in October – security updates continue until 2026.

Samsung provides five years of security updates to Galaxy phones and tablets launched in 2021 or later,



Samsung has now stopped issuing software updates for the Galaxy S20

and four years of updates to 'select' devices from 2019 onwards (see www.snipca.com/49955). It also guarantees four years of software updates (three for pre-2021 models) to ensure your phone or tablet has the latest version of Android. In January, Samsung pledged that it will match Google by offering seven years of software and security updates for its new Galaxy S24 series (www.snipca.com/50006), but two months later it ended support for most of its Galaxy S20 range (from 2020, pictured below).

Other manufacturers are less generous, so visit the support sections of their websites to check when your phone or tablet will become obsolete. Motorola lets you select a device at www.snipca.com/49957 to discover when its security updates will end. Many of its older phones were only supported for two years (the Moto e32 expires on 1 May), but newer models, such as the Moto G54 (www.snipca.com/50007), are covered for three.

Although unsupported phones and tablets continue to work beyond their expiry dates, your apps will gradually lose some functionality because developers will stop updating them, and you won't receive any new features. More worrying is that without security updates your mobile



Apple has added the iPad Mini 4 from 2015 to its list of vintage products

device will be at greater risk from hackers, malware and data theft.

Obsolete iPhones and iPads

Before Apple considers its iPhones, iPads and MacBooks to be obsolete, it brands them 'vintage'. These are products that it stopped making more than five years ago, but less than seven, though there are some exceptions – the 4th-generation iPod Touch is still classified as vintage, despite being discontinued in 2013. The iPad Mini 4 from 2015 (pictured above) is the most recent addition to the vintage

category. Apple continues to support these devices during this period, but admits it may be difficult to find replacement parts for them.

The company's Obsolete category is more final. These are devices that Apple stopped making more than seven years ago, and has now ended all hardware support for – at the start of April, the iPhone 6 Plus was added to the list. Your obsolete iPhone or iPad may still get security updates (Apple doesn't impose a time limit on these), but you won't be able to install the latest version of iOS – the oldest device to support iOS 17 is the iPhone XR from 2018, and for iPadOS 17 it's the 6th-generation iPad (also 2018).

You can find out which Apple devices are vintage and obsolete at www.snipca.com/49959. Apple also provides help for identifying your model of iPhone (www.snipca.com/49960) and iPad (www.snipca.com/49961).

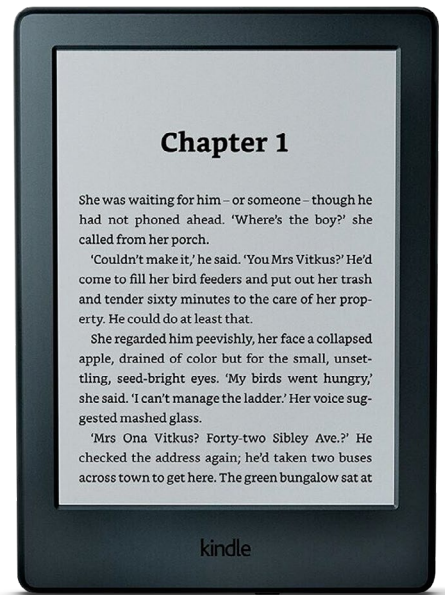
Unsupported Amazon Kindles

Amazon guarantees software and security updates for “at least four years” after a Kindle e-reader is last available to purchase on its website (as a new

product, not a **refurbished** one). Once support for that model ends, it will be left unprotected, won't get any new features and may lose access to the ebook store. You'll still be able to buy books on your computer and download them to the device, and read any titles already stored on your Kindle.

Amazon's support page on this topic (www.snipca.com/49962) says all the listed devices will receive software security updates until at least 2028. The oldest one mentioned is the 10th-generation Kindle from 2019, which means earlier devices are no longer supported. You can identify your Kindle model using Amazon's guide at www.snipca.com/49965. Similarly, the support page for Kindle Fire tablets promises updates until 2028, but the oldest listed is from 2022 (www.snipca.com/49963).

To discover which Kindles are definitely obsolete, visit the Kindle section at Endoflife.date (www.snipca.com/49964) and check the Service Status column. Notable examples include the 6th-generation Kindle Paperwhite and 7th-generation Kindle Voyage, which haven't received updates since 2019



The 8th-generation Kindle from 2016 is no longer supported by Amazon

and 2021 respectively. Several newer devices, such as the 8th-generation Kindle from 2016 (pictured above), were last updated in June 2023, and since they don't appear on Amazon's list they are now unsupported.

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SMART TVs & STREAMING STICKS

Smart TVs with outdated software

Most televisions last for between seven and 10 years, providing up to 100,000 hours of screen time. But though their hardware may be reliable, the internet-connected software used by smart TVs limits their lifespans if it's not regularly updated. This can adversely affect their performance and picture quality, cause them to lose important features and apps, and pose privacy and security risks.

Last year, it was reported that some TV manufacturers only guaranteed software updates for a measly two years – starting from the date their devices went on sale, not when you bought them – and failed to inform their customers about the restriction. This problem has been addressed by the UK Government's Product Security and Telecommunications Infrastructure (PSTI) Act, which comes into force on 29 April.

The new legislation states that details of minimum security update periods must be made available to consumers in a "clear, accessible and transparent manner" (www.snipca.com/49966). Manufacturers must disclose "the minimum length of time security updates will be provided, along with an end date", so you'll know when support for your TV is about to finish.

The PSTI Act requires companies to publish software-update information on their websites, rather than include it with their devices or reveal it at the point of sale, but it's still a step in the right direction. We're writing this feature at the beginning of April, so most manufacturers haven't yet updated their sites to comply with the new rules, but here are some examples of current update policies.

Sony issues software updates for its Google TV-powered Bravia range every six months, and continues to do so for eight years after the device goes on sale. However, Bravia TVs only receive security updates for the first four years (www.snipca.com/49967). This means that if you bought a Sony Bravia KD-43X80J (pictured above right) in 2021 (or later), it won't be protected after March 2025. Additionally, Sony has just removed some features from old Bravia TVs made in 2013 and 2014, including 'TV Guide and Search' (www.snipca.com/49990).

Samsung says your smart TV will receive updates "every once in a while"



This Sony Bravia TV from 2021 will stop receiving security updates next March

and get new features "for about two years", which is disappointingly vague from the world's most popular TV brand. More reassuring is that your set is guaranteed to get security updates for at least three years from launch, and that Samsung will provide "critical updates and security patches" after this period (www.snipca.com/49968).

LG promises to provide software and security updates at least once a year for a minimum of two years after your TV goes on sale (www.snipca.com/49969). Although that sounds stingy, it's possible the information on its website is out of date. The product-information sheets for LG's latest smart TVs, such as the LG OLED42C3 (www.snipca.com/47271), state that the "minimum guaranteed availability of software updates" is eight years.

Unsupported streaming sticks

As we explained in our 'Don't buy a new TV' Cover Feature in Issue 678 (get it from www.snipca.com/49970), one of the benefits of streaming sticks is that their low cost makes them cheap to replace when they stop working. But it's still reassuring to know that the device you're using is being actively updated with the latest features, bug fixes and security updates.

As with its Kindles (see page 54), Amazon promises that all streaming



The first two generations of Fire TV Stick are no longer updated

sticks and TVs that use its Fire OS operating system – including sets from Toshiba, Panasonic and TCL – will receive software and security updates for at least four years. According to its list at www.snipca.com/49973, even devices from 2021 such as the Fire TV Stick Lite are supported until 2028.

However, the first two generations of Fire TV Stick (from 2014, pictured below left, and 2018) and Fire TV Cube (2018 and 2019), and the original Fire TV Stick 4K (2018), are no longer updated because they run obsolete versions of Fire OS. To check your device's model, see Amazon's guide at www.snipca.com/49975.

In 2023, Google ended support for its original Chromecast device (pictured below, launched in 2014) and warned users they may experience "a degradation in performance". It continues to issue firmware and security updates for later Chromecasts (see www.snipca.com/49977), though only 'Chromecast with Google TV' models (www.snipca.com/49991) get new features. Google doesn't say how long support for these devices will last.

Earlier this year, Roku's streaming devices went out of stock in the UK, which led us to fear the entire range had been scrapped. Happily, most are now back on the shelves – except the Roku Express 4K – but Roku doesn't reveal its minimum update period. Check whether your device is still supported or is now a discontinued 'legacy' model at www.snipca.com/49978.

Google ended support for its original Chromecast dongle in May 2023



ROUTERS & SMART DEVICES

Routers with outdated firmware

As the gateway between the internet and all the devices connected to your home network, it's essential that your router has the latest software and security updates from its manufacturer. Hackers frequently target routers with known vulnerabilities in their firmware. In March, more than 6,000 outdated Asus routers were infected with malware by a botnet (www.snipca.com/49981).

Your router should automatically install updates as soon as the manufacturer makes them available, but this won't happen if the device is no longer supported. Because most obsolete routers keep working regardless, you may not even realise your network is at risk.

If you have an Asus router, check the company's 'End-of-life product list' at www.snipca.com/49983 to see if your device is no longer supported for firmware updates. You'll usually find the model number on the label stuck to your router. For example, the Asus RT-AC52U (pictured right), which we reviewed back in 2015, is no longer updated and is now unsafe to use. Consider upgrading to our current Buy It recommendation, the Asus RT-AX7800 (www.snipca.com/47586, see page 33).

TP-Link has a similar list at www.snipca.com/49984, and says once your router has reached the end-of-servicing status, it "will not help with anything, including fixing bugs and security problems". Netgear provides a list of end-of-life products at www.snipca.com/49985. If you can't find a list for



We recommended this Asus router back in 2015, but now it's not safe to use

your router's manufacturer, visit its support site, search for the model number and check the date of the last firmware update – if it was more than a year ago, it's likely the router is no longer supported.

It's trickier to check whether the branded router supplied by your internet provider is now – or soon will be – obsolete. If you've had the device for several years, and are worried about its security, contact your ISP and ask for a replacement – most will send you one for free if you commit to a new contract.



Software and security updates for the original Ring Video Doorbell end this year

Unsupported smart doorbells and cameras

If you're paying £50 a year for a smart-doorbell subscription, as Amazon's Ring customers now do – see our feature in Issue 679 (page 60) – you should expect your device to be totally secure, so that hackers can't access your video feed. But like all smart gadgets, video doorbells and home-security cameras are only supported by their manufacturers for a limited time.

Ring guarantees at least four years of

Make your printer last longer

In 2022, some owners of Epson printers were alarmed by a warning that said a part inside their devices was "at the end of its service life". Epson has since reworded the message to clarify that it relates to the waste ink pads in your printer. Once the printer reaches the cycle count set by the manufacturer, it regards these pads as no longer able to absorb ink – even if they still work fine.

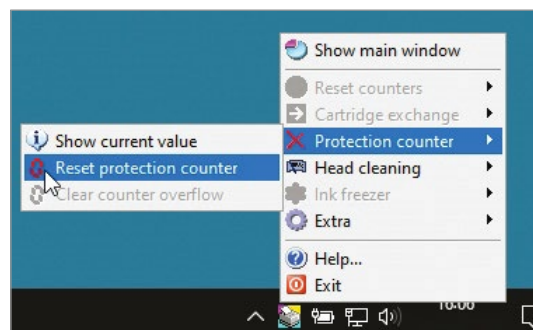
This leaves you with two options: either contact Epson about its "low-cost ink pad replacement service" or reset the cycle count – labelled the 'protection counter' – yourself using the free tool SSC Service Utility (www.snipca.com/50009, see

screenshot).

Although this hasn't been updated for 10 years, it still works with many old Epson printers. If your ink pads really have stopped absorbing, you can buy new ones from Amazon for less than £2 (www.snipca.com/50010).

Epson doesn't provide a list of printers it has discontinued, but you can find one at the third-party store Ink Factory (www.snipca.com/50011), and buy new ink cartridges for the old model.

Canon's official page for discontinued printers usefully offers technical support



and drivers for models it no longer makes (www.snipca.com/50012). HP's list of retired products (www.snipca.com/50013) is less helpful, because once a product is retired, it removes the relevant support articles and drivers from its website.

**EVERY DEVICE
YOU MUST
STOP USING**

software updates for its doorbells and cameras, and security updates for “as long as we can (subject to technical and other limitations)”. Check its list of devices at www.snipca.com/49987 to see how long yours is supported for. Software updates for the original Ring Video Doorbell (pictured left) end this year, but the 2nd-generation device (www.snipca.com/49993) is supported until 2028.

Google provides support for its Nest security cameras for at least five years after launch, as does Eufy for its video doorbells, while Amazon’s Blink range receives updates for four years after devices go off sale. Ezviz is the least flexible of the main smart-camera manufacturers, with only two years of guaranteed software updates, but potentially three if a “very serious vulnerability is discovered”. Check its list of end-of-life products at www.snipca.com/49992.

Owners of Hive View security cameras will permanently lose support on 1 August 2025, and their devices will stop working. This follows Hive’s decision to abandon non-energy smart products in 2022, and the end of the three-year support period it subsequently offered customers. Hive should have informed you about this deadline, but it’s worth remembering in case you’re tempted to buy a refurbished or second-hand Hive camera – see www.snipca.com/50003 for details.

Obsolete smart speakers

“Alexa, are you still working?” is a pertinent question, because it’s now eight years since Amazon launched its Echo smart speaker in the UK. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it no longer provides software and security updates for the original device (pictured above right), nor the second and third-generations from 2017 and 2019, or the earliest versions of its Echo Dot speakers and Echo Show smart screens.

Old Echo devices may still respond perfectly well to your voice or touch, but they’re more likely to suffer performance



The first Amazon Echo was a groundbreaking device that’s now been retired

problems, won’t receive any new features and may not be compatible with certain apps. There’s also a security risk if hackers are able to exploit vulnerabilities in the unpatched firmware to eavesdrop on you, control your other appliances using voice commands and even make purchases from your Amazon account. Cybersecurity company Trend Micro warned about such a flaw in 2022: www.snipca.com/49994.

As with its other smart devices, Amazon supports Echo speakers for at least four years after they go on sale. All the devices on its list at www.snipca.com/49995 will be supported until 2028, including the spherical 4th-generation Echo from 2020 (www.snipca.com/49996).

Google launched its Home smart speaker (pictured above right) in 2016,



The Google Home speaker is long-discontinued but still receives occasional fixes

discontinued it in 2020 and rebranded all its Home products as Nest. However, it’s still providing occasional firmware updates, containing bug fixes, for the original device and all the Google Home and Nest speakers and smart screens that followed (www.snipca.com/49997).

Last December, Google fixed a widely reported problem that caused old Home and Home Mini devices to ‘brick’ (become unresponsive), though not before a flippant tech-support person declared “not everything we have lasts forever” (www.snipca.com/49999).

Curiously, Google hasn’t updated its Nest/Home range for three years – the most recent addition was the 2nd-generation Nest Hub in 2021 (www.snipca.com/50001) – so either it’s lost interest in smart speakers or it’s planning something new (probably involving AI). **ca**

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Give up Google For ChatGPT

Powerful AI tool ChatGPT often gives you more detailed answers than Google – and with no adverts. **Daniel Booth** explains how to use it

For the first time in nearly 25 years Google is worried that it might be dethroned as the world's top search tool. The reason – as we explore on page 10 – is the sensational rise of ChatGPT. Launched in late 2022, it's an AI tool that answers typed questions in plain English, usually taking just a few seconds. It's one of the few AI tools that happen to justify the soaring hype surrounding the technology.

Using ChatGPT has been easier since

the start of April when OpenAI – the research body that runs the tool – opened it up to be used without registering for an account. All you need to do is visit <https://chat.openai.com> and start typing in the 'Message ChatGPT' box at the bottom. When done, click the 'send message' button (arrow pointing up) or press Enter. Note that this is rolling out to users worldwide (as explained at www.snipca.com/50049), so it may still ask you to sign in for the time being.

OpenAI isn't a charity, and it knows there's big bucks to be made from ChatGPT. Therefore it charges from \$20 a month for the 'Plus' version, giving you more accurate results, newer AI technology, the ability to save your chats and other features like **plug-ins**. But in our experience the free edition is good enough for most people.

It's also easy to share results with others. Click the 'Share link to Chat' icon top right (1 in our screenshot left), then Copy Link (2) and paste the link

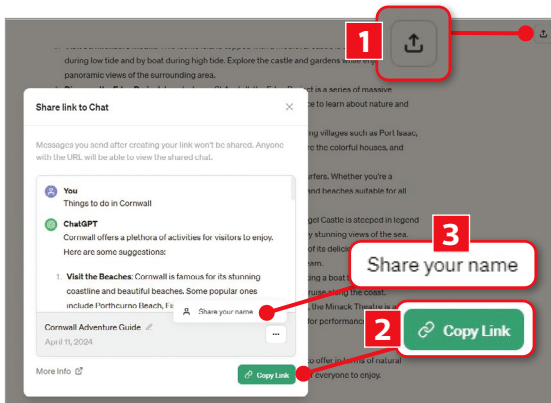
into a messaging app or email. By default chats are shared anonymously. To add your name instead, click the three dots and select 'Share your name' (3).

The biggest drawback of the free ChatGPT is that it relies on information that was last updated in January 2022. This means you shouldn't use it for weather forecasts, news updates or the latest buying advice. But it beats Google in plenty of other ways, as we'll explain.

Definitions of technology jargon

We asked ChatGPT 'What is end-to-end encryption?' (1 in our screenshot below) and it gave us an answer that struck the perfect balance between brevity and detail: "A method of secure communication that prevents third-parties from accessing data while it's transferred from one end system or device to another" (2). We then asked what 'E2EE' means, and it said: "Apologies for the repetition, but 'E2EE' is simply an abbreviation for 'End-to-End Encryption... as described in the previous response'". Clever *and* polite.

We've found it to be just as precise

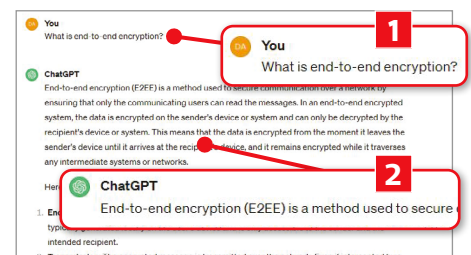


Share ChatGPT's answers with others, either using your name or anonymously

How ChatGPT differs from Google

It's important to remember that ChatGPT isn't a search engine. When you ask it something, it's not using algorithms to present links to websites based on the keywords you typed. You can't therefore use it to find the URL for a

website. However, it has been 'fed' information from all over the internet to make its answers relevant. It draws upon this information when analysing your question, attempting to make its response sound human-like.



ChatGPT gave us a clear and precise definition of 'end-to-end encryption'

when defining other types of technological jargon. Asking Google about end-to-end encryption brings up pages of links, but there's no way of knowing which is the easiest to understand. You can click 'People often ask' options for more info, but these are less detailed than ChatGPT's responses.

Newsletters and event invites

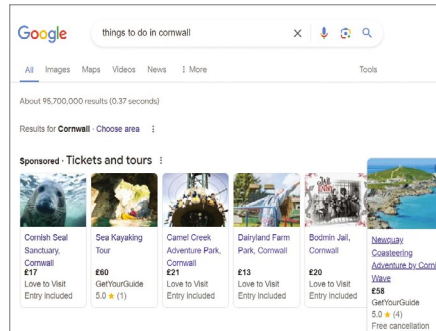
ChatGPT effortlessly satisfied our request for a newsletter template inviting club members to an AGM. We liked the result, but asked it for a friendlier version, and it instantly made the text more chatty and less formal. This demonstrates one of ChatGPT's strengths: it can respond to follow-up requests with amended answers. It really is like engaging in conversation, and is more natural than the mediocre **chatbots** you often have to deal with online. This proves especially useful when you don't understand the original answer, because you can ask it for a simpler reply.

Asking for a newsletter template on Google again produces lots of links that might prove helpful, but you'll have to guess which one is right for you.

Templates for consumer-rights letters

Knowing how to complain effectively is key to getting the results you want when dealing with companies. You stand a better chance if you use a template letter that contains the correct wording and legal information. Google has links to numerous sites offering templates, including the excellent Citizens Advice Bureau (www.snipca.com/50054), but ChatGPT can write them for you – and tweak the words for specific purposes.

We asked it to write a letter to Amazon's customer service outlining our right to return a faulty item. The result was a little vague, so we asked it to rewrite and mention the UK's Consumer Rights Act and Distance Selling Regulations. It did this, correctly stating what rights they give you.



Ask Google for things to do on holiday and adverts spread over your screen

Holiday plans

Google makes most of its money from online adverts, so it's no surprise that searching for 'Things to do in Cornwall' produces a row of adverts that spreads across your screen when clicked (see screenshot above). It looks horrendous.

Asking ChatGPT the same question gave us 10 predictable suggestions – beaches, castles, villages, boat trips and so on. Once again, its strength lay in responding to requests for more detail. We asked it to be more specific about beaches, then to exclude those on the south coast and any that are difficult for people in wheelchairs. Finally, we asked it to suggest the best pubs near those beaches. It gave increasingly specific answers each time. ChatGPT also provides detailed itineraries for trips involving different destinations and periods.

How-to instructions

'How to' searches are so popular on Google they're normally included in its annual top 10s of 'trending' results. You'll see links to sites and videos giving instructions, but it's quicker to use ChatGPT. We typed 'How to bleed a radiator', and it explained the process in 10 steps, along with materials needed and safety precautions. It added more detail when we asked for it (see screenshot below), and highlighted what could go wrong.

ChatGPT doesn't give you video

5 things ChatGPT won't do

1. Give criminal advice, such as how to lie to the police, or conceal evidence. Nor will it respond to questions about using drugs.
2. Reveal information about other people that invades their privacy.
3. Make predictions about the future, such as financial forecasts or who'll win sporting fixtures.
4. Engage in "hate speech" or promote any form of harmful content.
5. Give its opinion on issues such as culture, politics, entertainment, social problems and more.

instructions, so depending on the complexity of the task you may need to visit YouTube for guidance. But it's still the perfect starting point when you need advice for practical tasks.

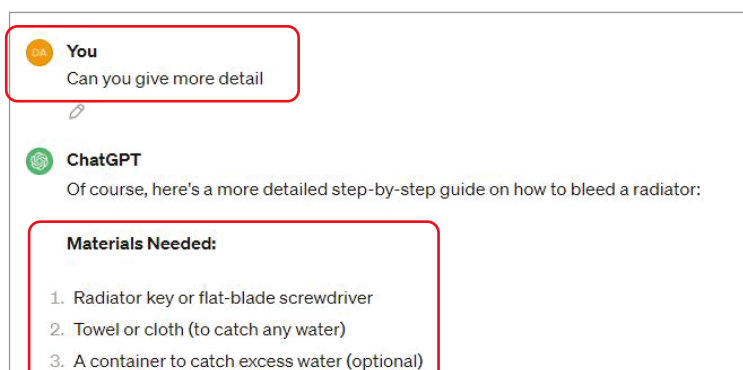
Quiz questions

This is another example where Google suggests pages of sites, while ChatGPT gives you direct results. We asked it for questions on films, history, geography, astronomy and literature, which we made more specific by narrowing the category – eg Oscar-winning films in the 1950s and Wars of the Roses. We asked for the questions to be harder or easier until we got the balance right. It created a 'guess the quote' round for us, and even several dingbats, using **emoji**-style icons. But it can't do anagrams or picture rounds.

Write stories and poems

While ChatGPT offers practical help, it also knows how to have some fun. Ask it to write a story or poem and it will create something relevant, entertaining and often surreal. It can cope with plenty of detail, including subject matter, location, themes and style. For example, we asked it to write "a spy thriller about a paranoid badger called Bob in the style of John le Carré set in Berlin". It produced three chapters of *The Burrow's Dilemma*, then another two when we asked, before giving us a tragic ending when we requested it.

These stories aren't going to replace real writers – at least, we hope not – but it's amazing to watch ChatGPT create work from your commands. It's also fascinating to see how far you can push its creativity with ever more obscure and specific commands. **ca**



You can ask ChatGPT to give you more detail when explaining 'how to' instructions

Master Your BT DIGITAL VOICE PHONE



Switching from a traditional landline to a digital one can seem daunting and confusing. **Robert Irvine** explains how to make a stress-free transition to BT's Digital Voice service



BT's plan to replace its ageing copper landline network with its VoIP service, Digital Voice, hasn't gone as smoothly as intended. Originally due to be completed by the end of 2025, the rollout has been paused several times and may be postponed until 2027 – partly because BT failed to realise the effect the switch-off would have on users of telecare devices. However, many BT customers have already been moved to Digital Voice, albeit without much guidance from the company.

Here we explain how to enjoy the same benefits on your digital phone that you got from your old landline.

Use your own phone with Digital Voice

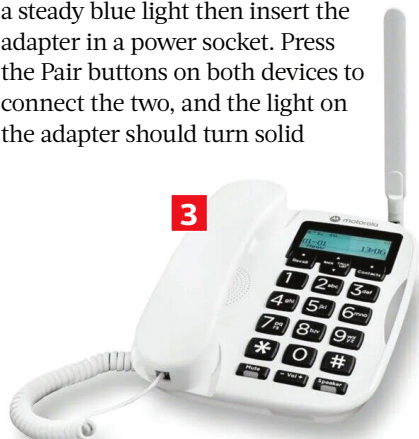
When you move to Digital Voice, BT will send you a Smart Hub 2 router if you don't

already have one, but you'll need to provide your own phone. You can either buy a BT Essential Digital Home Phone (£30 from www.snipca.com/50036, pictured below left **1**), Advanced Digital Home Phone (£45 from www.snipca.com/50035, also pictured **2**) or FW500 Hybrid Back Up Phone (£80 from www.snipca.com/50037, pictured below **3**) – or continue using your current landline phone. Just plug this into the phone port on the Smart Hub to make and receive calls as you would normally – BT claims that 99 per cent of handsets are compatible with Digital Voice.

If your phone isn't compatible, or it's a corded model that will tether you to the hub, buy a BT Digital Voice Adapter (£20 from www.snipca.com/50032). Set up your Smart Hub first, wait until it shows a steady blue light then insert the adapter in a power socket. Press the Pair buttons on both devices to connect the two, and the light on the adapter should turn solid



BT's Digital Home Phones only work with its Digital Voice service



You can also use the FW500 Hybrid Back Up Phone on BT's Digital Voice service

green. You can now plug in your phone and move the Digital Voice Adapter to another power socket in your home.

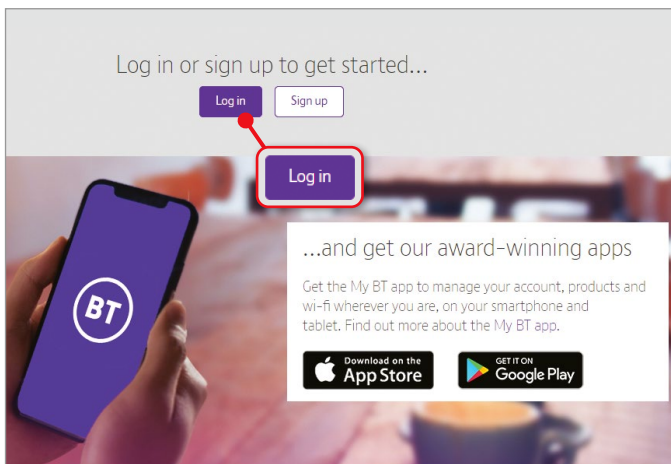
Configure your Digital Voice voicemail

Voicemail is enabled by default for BT Digital Voice, and will store messages for up to 60 days (30 days once you've listened to them) before deleting them. As on your old landline, you can access your voicemail inbox by dialling **1571**, or by pressing the cassette button on a Digital Home phone and following the voice-menu instructions.

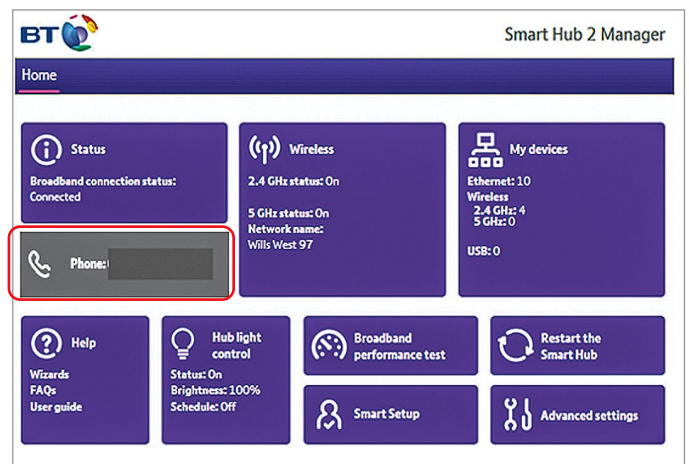
The screen on the handset will show you when you've received a new voicemail message. If you've plugged your own phone into your BT Smart Hub, you'll hear an interrupted dial tone when you receive a new message.

To change the number of rings before a caller is diverted to voicemail, press **4** in the voice menu and specify the amount. If you're on a call when someone phones you, BT's Call Waiting feature will beep to notify you – if you decide not to answer, the new caller will be sent to voicemail after 21 seconds.

To record a personal greeting for your voicemail, press **2** then **1** in the phone menu. You can listen to messages while you're away from home – select option **3** in the menu and set up a four-digit PIN. Dial your home number from another phone, press the ***** (asterisk) key and enter the PIN to access your voicemail.



Sign into your My BT account to check and configure your calling features



Export and import contacts through your BT Smart Hub Manager

The Voicemail Essential service is free with Digital Voice, but you can get extra features – including ‘do not disturb’, a larger mailbox and allocated VIP numbers – by paying £4.03 a month for Enhanced Voicemail.

Access the Digital Voice calling features

Most BT calling features – including Call Waiting and Call Barring – work in the same way with Digital Voice as they did on your old landline. You can check and configure these options by logging into your My BT account at www.snipca.com/50025 (pictured above) and clicking Manage on the Digital Voice tile. You can also access Digital Voice settings in the My BT app (Android www.snipca.com/50040; iOS www.snipca.com/50041).

Certain features, such as Call Diversion, have been improved in line with the new handsets and technology. To divert calls from a Digital Home phone, select Calling

Features in the on-screen menu, followed by Call Diversion, then Set Up. Enter the number you want to divert calls to, and press Set Up again. To access the feature from a non-BT phone connected to your Smart Hub, dial *21*, enter the number you want to divert to and press the hash key (#).

BT has enhanced its Call Protect feature for Digital Voice using “AI-powered screening technology”. This means your phone will now warn you about nuisance calls and display the names of legitimate businesses that call you. Press the Call Protect button on an Essential or Advanced Digital Home phone to block a nuisance number and access your junk-voicemail inbox – on other handsets, you need to dial 1572. Digital Voice also introduces a new feature called Multi Call, for BT customers who have more than one Digital Home phone connected to their Hub. This lets two people in your household make outgoing calls at the

same time, and receive incoming calls when the other line is in use.

Back up and restore your Digital Voice contacts

One significant change with Digital Voice is that your contacts are stored on the BT Smart Hub, not on your phone. When you browse to a contact to make a call, or add a new contact to your list, the details are retrieved from or saved to the hub.

Frustratingly, this means that if you have to replace your Smart Hub or perform a factory reset, you’ll lose all your contacts information – unless you back it up first. To do so, you need to export a file containing your contacts from your BT Smart Hub Manager. Open a web browser on your PC and type either 192.168.1.254 or <http://bthomehub.home> into the address bar. Press Enter and sign into your hub using the admin password (you’ll find this on the back of the Smart Hub).

When your Hub Manager opens, select Phone (see screenshot above) then Contacts. Click ‘Export’ to back up your contacts list to your PC as a VCF (vCard) file. After you’ve replaced or reset your Smart Hub, you can restore your saved contacts by clicking Browse to select the file, then Import. See www.snipca.com/50053 for more information.

This method also lets you add your Google Contacts to your Smart Hub, so you can access contacts from your Android phone on your Digital Voice phone. Go to <https://contacts.google.com> in your PC browser, click the Export arrow in the top-right corner and select ‘vCard (for iOS Contacts)’ – even though it’s for Android. Click ‘Export’ to save a VCF file then import it into your BT Smart Hub Manager. To export contacts from your iPhone, sign into iCloud in your browser and choose Contacts then ‘Export vCard’. **ca**

Keep using your phone in a power cut

The biggest concern about Digital Voice is that, because your internet-connected phone depends on the mains-powered Smart Hub, if there’s a power cut you won’t be able to make or receive calls – including emergency ones. The rather glib advice on BT’s website that “you’ll still be able to use a mobile phone” isn’t much help if you live in an area with poor 4G and 5G reception, or your mobile’s battery has run out.

BT addressed these concerns last year by saying it wouldn’t ‘proactively’ switch customers to Digital Voice if they’re aged over 70, live in an area with no mobile signal or only use a landline phone – but



it’s unclear how long this pledge will last.

One solution is to buy the FW500 Hybrid phone mentioned opposite. Not only does this let you switch to EE’s 4G network when Digital Voice goes down, but it also provides up to eight hours of battery backup in case there’s a power cut. BT’s separate Battery Back-up device for Digital Voice (pictured) offers “a minimum of one hour power” and costs £85 from www.snipca.com/50033. Vulnerable customers can request a free backup unit by calling BT customer service on 0800 800 150, and by recording their vulnerabilities in their My BT account.

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

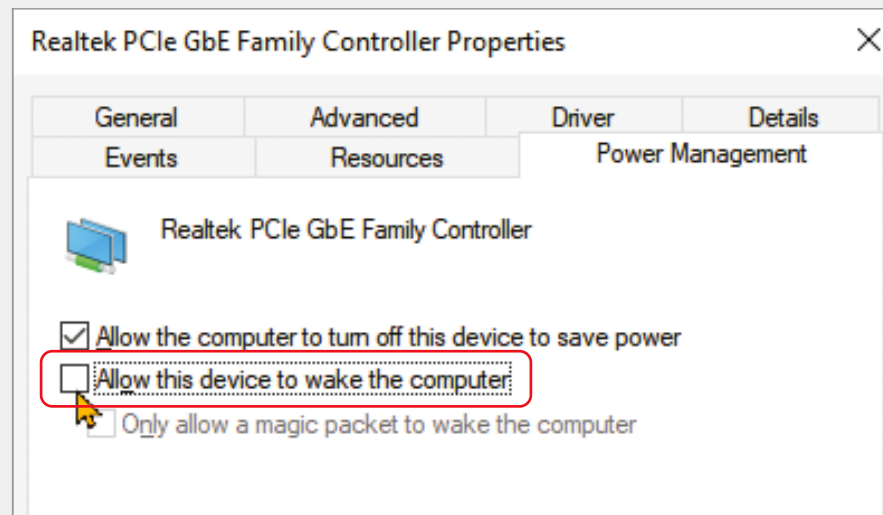
Why is my PC booting by itself?

Q I bought a **refurbished** Windows 10 desktop PC from Amazon, which I connected to the internet via **Ethernet** and is working fine for my needs. However, I've noticed that sometimes it appears to be 'self booting'. By this I mean that I can shut down the computer manually, only for me to find a day or so later that the power lamp on the case is lit and the PC is ready to be used.

I am not technical or super savvy, so might end up doing more harm if I try fiddling with it – so your comments would be appreciated.

Joe Murray

A One culprit behind this issue could be a feature known as 'Wake on LAN' (WoL). This enables commands to be sent via a network to tell a PC to power itself up. We can't say what might be sending this WoL request, but it's unlikely to be



Tell your PC to ignore WoL signals by unticking this option in your network card's Properties...

anything malicious. It's probably just another device on your network, or a software service that you use, sending a signal that your PC's Ethernet connection is interpreting as a prompt to switch itself on. You could try methodically

switching off other connected devices to see if you can isolate which one is the cause, and then troubleshoot from there.

However, a quicker and easier solution is to tell your PC to not respond to WoL signals. The precise method depends on the type of **network card** you have installed. We don't know which one you have, but the basic procedure and key elements are similar for all, so we can tell you where to go and what to look for.

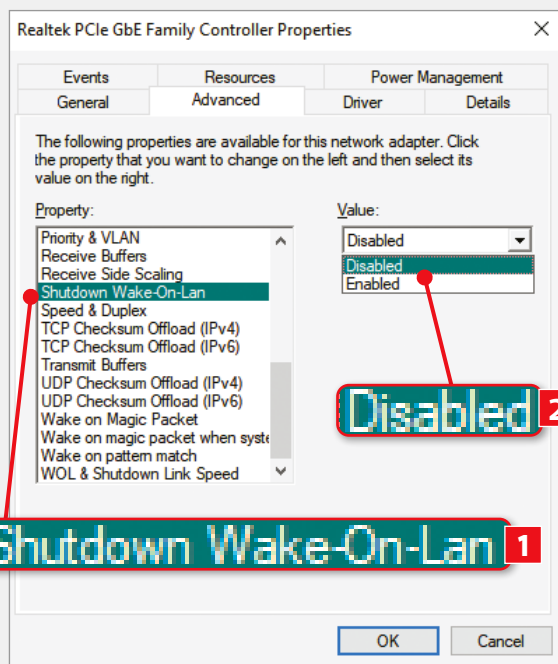
First, press Windows key+X to open the Quick Link menu then choose Device Manager. Next, click the 'Network adapters' category and then right-click on your PC's network card before choosing Properties.

Next, if the tab exists, click the Power Management tab and then untick the 'Allow this device to wake the computer' box (see screenshot above). Click OK to save the changes.

Depending on how your PC is configured, you might not see the Power Management tab. Either way, next go to the Advanced tab. Here, you can selectively disable various WoL-related elements that might allow something to wake your PC. In turn, select 'Shutdown Wake-On-Lan' (1 in our screenshot left), 'Wake on pattern match' and both the 'Wake on Magic Packet...' entries and then open the Value dropdown menu to the right before choosing Disabled (2).

Now return to Device Manager and, using the same method as described above, open the Properties boxes for your mouse and keyboard. Here you might find 'Allow this device to wake the computer' boxes that you should also untick.

It's unlikely that either of these devices are the cause of the problem but, if there's vibration that causes the desk to move, it's just possible that this could jolt either the keyboard or mouse into making a rogue input.



...then in the Advanced tab disable the 'Shutdown Wake-On-Lan', 'Wake on pattern match' and both 'Wake on Magic Packet...' options

Can I build my own PC from this box of components?

Q My son has been left a box of computer components and wants me to use these to build a PC, most probably for gaming. I have no knowledge regarding the viability or age of the parts and having never before built from scratch, but I'd like to have a go. I have back issues of *Computeractive* where you describe the building process, so I could reference these. However, my question is: are the following parts viable for building a working computer or would it be better to buy a ready-made system? I have an Asus Prime A320M-K motherboard, an AMD Ryzen 5 4500 processor, a Radeon RX560 graphics card and 1TB hard drive. I assume I'll need a case and power unit. What do you say?

Paul Rutherfordford

A All these parts are compatible and, broadly speaking, should work together fine – and result

in a serviceable PC, if not exactly one on gaming's cutting edge.

Both the motherboard (pictured) and graphics card are around seven years old, so we're guessing whoever purchased them did so at the same time. The processor is much more recent – just a couple of years old, but it uses the same AM4 socket as the motherboard, so is compatible. Gaming-wise, by modern standards, the whole setup would rank as mid- to low-end, but we imagine your son would be able to enjoy plenty of modern titles pretty happily.

The motherboard is a smaller **microATX** (mATX) unit, so you'll need a case to match. There's loads of choice here, so shop around for one that you like, but the MSI Mag Forge (£55 from www.snipca.com/49767) is a good option.

As for the power-supply unit (PSU), you need to add up the maximum draw of the major components, then add a fair



The Asus Prime A320M-K motherboard is a smaller microATX form so needs a smaller case

percentage on top for minor parts and as 'overhead' to allow for future expansion. The Ryzen 5 4500 processor consumes a maximum of 65W, while the Radeon RX560 graphics card is up to 80W. Minor components, such as the hard drive, will need just a few watts each. So, we'd suggest a minimum 300W PSU, though even basic models these days tend to be higher than this – so again, you won't struggle for choice.

Which motherboard power connector do I need?

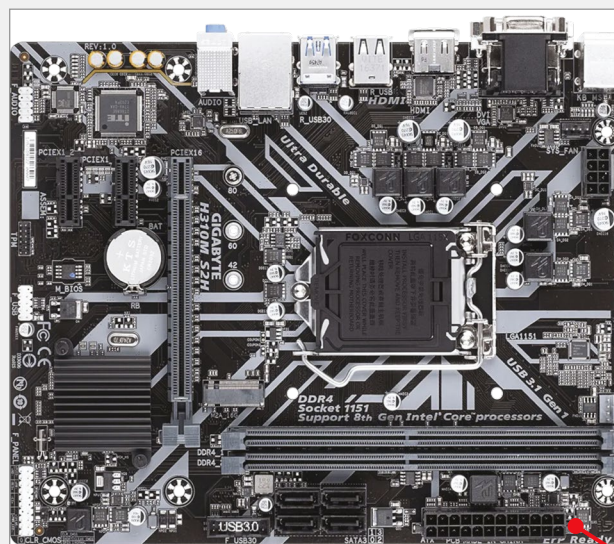
Q I have a Gigabyte H310 S2H motherboard in my computer, which is connected to a 300W power-supply unit (PSU) that I consider to be insufficient. At present the ATX 12V power supply goes via a four-pin plug that slots into an eight-pin socket (1 in our photo). This is how the computer was supplied to me a few years ago. The motherboard's manual recommends that the minimum PSU wattage for this unit should be 550W, so I'd like to upgrade to that. However, all the PSUs I've seen have an eight-pin power connector. Will it be safe to connect this or must I stick with the 300W PSU that was supplied?

Alan Heasman

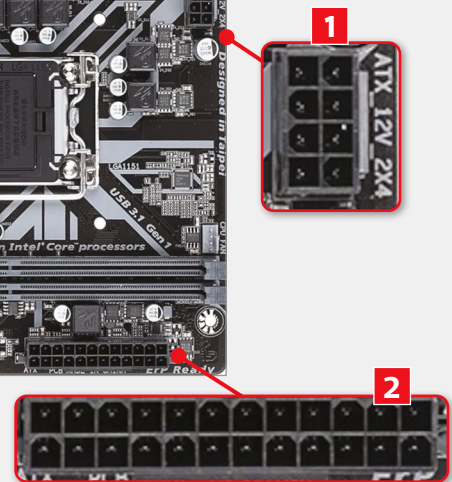
A You should have no worries about what you want to do here. The main power for the motherboard actually enters the it via a standard 24-pin connector (2), while the eight-pin socket is used to power the processor. We don't know which

processor you have installed but it'll only draw the power it needs – up to its maximum specification or up to the maximum available. A four-pin socket can carry up to around 150 watts, while an eight-pin connection roughly doubles this.

You can find your processor's maximum



The Gigabyte H310 S2H motherboard takes power through 8-pin and 24-pin connectors



power draw via Intel's website at <https://ark.intel.com>. Regardless, no harm can come of using the full eight-pin connection – so you can proceed with confidence.

How can I speed up my slow TV?

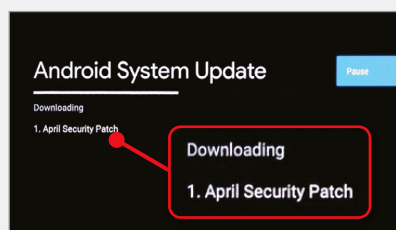
Q I wanted an Android TV so I purchased a budget TCL 55P639K set (www.snipca.com/49821, pictured below). I wasn't expecting its performance to match a premium brand, but it's so slow at changing channels and launching apps, and sometimes it freezes during streaming and other tasks. If this were a laptop I'd be running tests to optimise its performance. Is there anything similar I can do with an Android TV?

Michael Pye



A Not a whole lot, sadly. As you've discovered, low-cost TVs can be clunkier than top-of-the-range models, because they come with more basic processors, less memory and cheaper components generally. Pretty much all you can do is ensure that your TV's system is up to date, not least because it's possible a newer version of Android TV has been released since your set left the factory.

To check, from your TV's home screen select Settings followed by More Settings, then Device Preferences followed by About. Next, choose System Update and then follow the prompts there to download and install any system updates (see screenshot below).



Ensure your TV's operating system is up to date if your set is running slowly

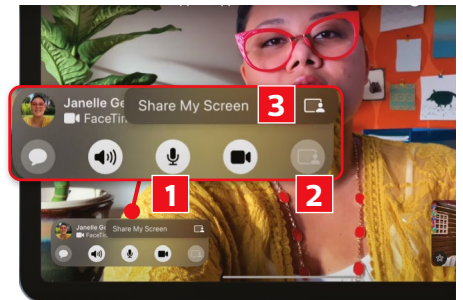
Can I manage my mum's iPad?

Q Is there any free software that will allow a son or daughter to remotely help their mum manage her iPad?

John Slatem

A Probably not in the way you want. That's because Apple tightly controls almost every aspect of its devices, and it doesn't currently allow remote control of iPads or iPhones unless they're connected to the same Wi-Fi network and signed in with the same Apple ID. That's very unlikely to be the case, unless everyone lives in the same house. But if so, first launch Settings, tap Accessibility followed by Control Nearby Devices – and then tap the iPad you want to control.

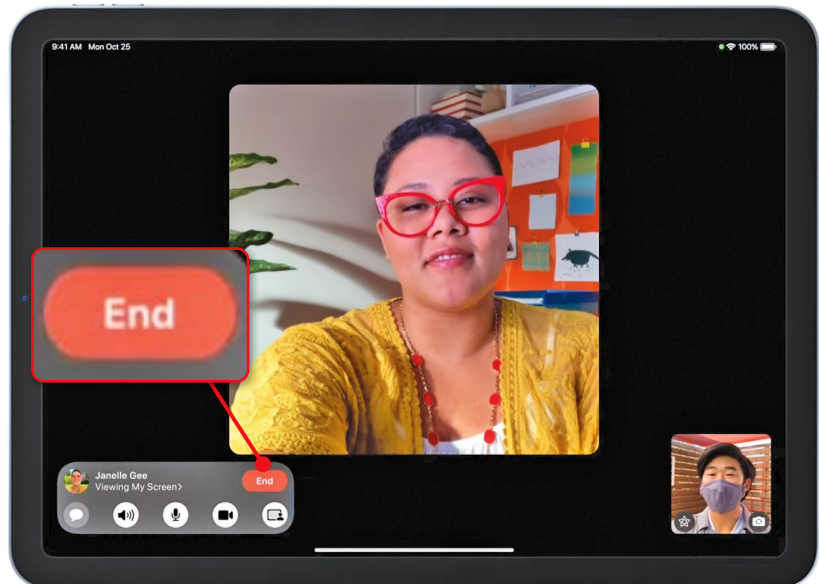
More realistically, something that might be helpful is to have your mum share her iPad screen during a FaceTime call. To do this, she'd first need to tap the screen to reveal the FaceTime controls (1 in our screenshot above right) then tap the Share button (it's a rectangle with a head



To share your screen in a FaceTime call, tap the screen to bring up the controls (1), then the Share icon (2) followed by Share My Screen (3)

and shoulders icon 2) followed by Share My Screen 3. A short countdown will start, and then mum's iPad screen will be visible on the son or daughter's remote device. The son or daughter won't be able to control things directly, but they will be able to tell mum what to tap (or not tap!) via the ongoing FaceTime call.

When you're finished, mum should tap the screen once more to reveal the FaceTime controls, and then tap the End button (see screenshot below).



To terminate the FaceTime call, tap the screen again then tap the End button

Q: Would broadband replace my phone sockets?

A: Issue 661, page 64 – find it on our 2023 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/48860



How do I securely wipe my old hard drives?

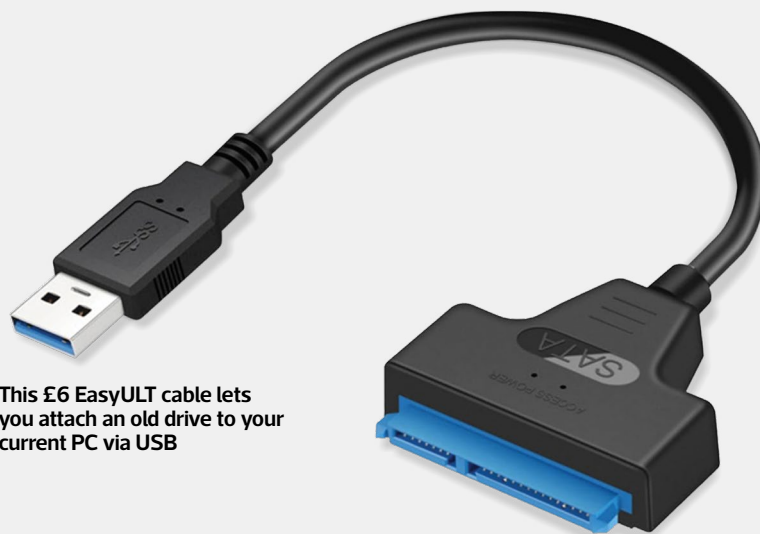
Q I'm a long-term subscriber to *Computeractive* and I've often benefited from your tips and guidance, so I'm hoping you can advise me now.

Over the years I've continually upgraded my desktop PC setup and now I have several old tower units clogging up my house. At the age of 81 and with limited mobility, it's time for a clear-out. So, what would be the easiest and safest way to wipe the abundance of personal data they contain, before I send them for recycling? I know you've probably covered this before and I have a huge pile of back issues, but I don't know where to start to find the answer!

Annie Bell

A There's the long, fiddly method and then there's the short, easy approach. We don't know which specific computers you have, but the personal data will be stored on the drives inside.

So, to do things the long way, you'd need to securely erase each drive



This £6 EasyULT cable lets you attach an old drive to your current PC via USB

manually, using a free 'overwriting' tool such as Eraser (www.snipca.com/49827). You can either carry this out on the machines themselves (assuming they still work), or take out the hard drives and use an adapter like the pictured EasyULT cable (£6 from www.snipca.com/49768) to attach them via USB to your current PC. Note that you might need different cables for older drives.

We explained how to use Eraser in

Problems Solved in Issue 591 (page 64), so dig that one out of your pile of old issues. Each drive could take hours to wipe, though you would be able to re-use them afterwards.

The short, easy way is to take a hammer and masonry nail and, donning some eye protection, drive the spike through the disc platters – a centimetre or two from the central spindle. That will ensure the data is irrecoverable.

Is it safe to continue using Office 2007?

Q Reading your reply to Harry Beard's question, in Issue 674 (page 68), you seemed to indicate that it was fine to use unsupported software such as Office 2007 (pictured). Previously, I recall you saying it might not be safe to run unsupported software.

I ask because I also run Office 2007 on Windows 10. I don't like the layout of the newer Office versions, nor LibreOffice. So is it or is it not safe to continue using Office 2007?

Personally, I use it only for records stored locally on my PC (in Excel mainly) and never open any documents received from unknown sources, nor send any I've created.

Keith Pearce

A Our reply to Harry was focused on whether his older, unsupported software would run in Windows 11 – not necessarily whether doing so

was wise or safe. Nonetheless, yours is a good question.

The short answer is that it's unwise and unsafe to run old, unsupported software. Any older program may contain flaws of varying severity and, by definition, being unsupported means those problems will never be fixed. You should generally look to use software that is actively maintained, be that a newer version of Office or an alternative like LibreOffice.

But – as you say – you don't like those programs and don't want to upgrade. So, given the way you personally use Office 2007, and the specific precautions you take, we'd say you're not putting yourself at huge risk by continuing its use – but you must understand that it does contain vulnerabilities that will never be fixed by Microsoft, so we can offer no guarantees.



Older versions of software – like Office 2007 – are no longer supported and are risky to use

Is an old version of OneDrive safe to use on my iPad?

Q My iPad mini (pictured) has only 32GB of storage, so I regularly remove apps I don't need to make room for ones that I do. And anyway, it's pretty easy to reinstall apps I need again later. Recently, I wanted to restore OneDrive, so I headed to the App Store and tapped the Download button. However, I saw a warning saying I could download only an older version of OneDrive (see screenshot right), because the current one needed the latest version of iPadOS – but Apple won't let me update my iPad to the latest version of their operating system.

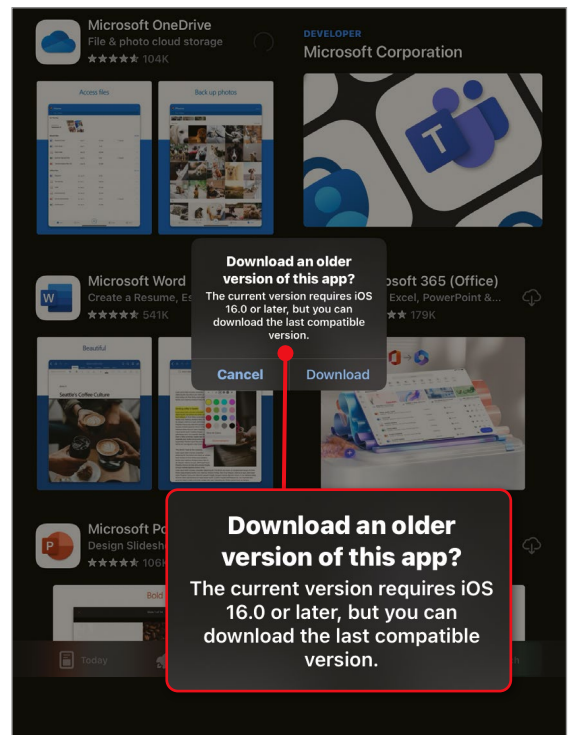
I was worried that an older version of OneDrive might not be safe, so I tapped Cancel rather than Download. What do you think?

Matthew Harrison



A If you read our reply to Keith Pearce on page 67, you'll note that we said it's unwise to run older software – but only if it's unsupported. Apple is very cautious about what it allows in its App Store. It's this strict approach that led recently to the EU forcing the firm to open things up within the European Union (though not in the UK, as we're no longer part of the EU).

Time will tell whether that proves a good or bad thing for users, but what we can say for sure is that if Apple is happy for an older version of any app to remain in its own App Store, then you can be confident that it is safe to install on your iPad.



It's safe to download older versions of apps from Apple's App Store

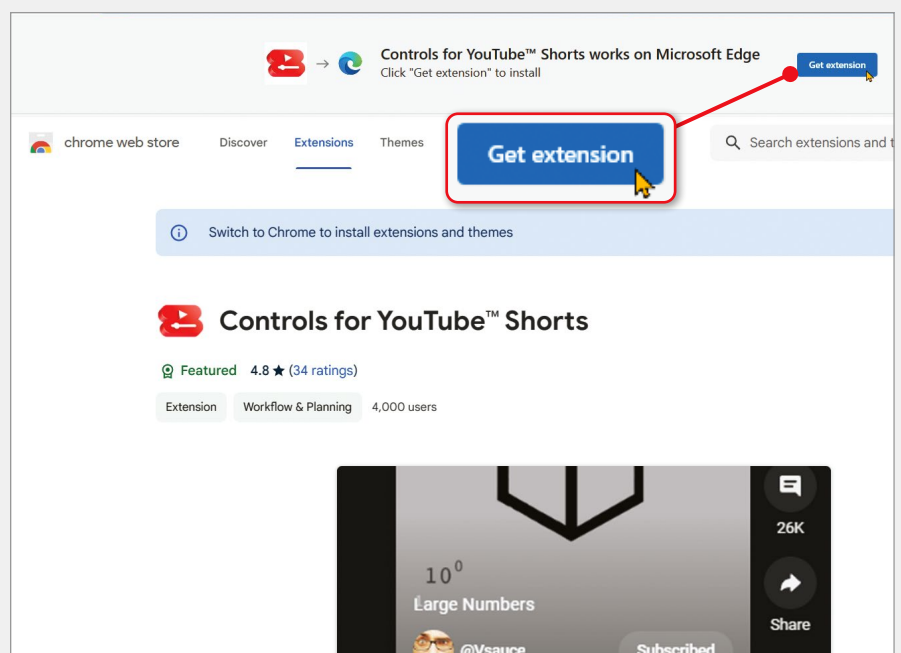
How can I control YouTube Shorts videos?

Q In my retirement I find myself spending more time on YouTube. Against my better judgement, I sometimes click the videos labelled as Shorts, but then become frustrated when I can't use the standard YouTube features to control the video. For example, with a normal YouTube video I can drag the slider at the bottom to rewind a few seconds if I've missed something. However, this doesn't seem possible with these short clips?

Benjamin Reynolds

A No, it's not possible. YouTube owner Google has never explained why the normal controls aren't available when watching short clips, but we – along with many others – think it doesn't make sense.

The company might have a change of heart in future but, until then, if you use Chrome or Edge as your web browser, we'd suggest installing the 'Controls for YouTube Shorts' extension, which is a free download



Use the 'Control for YouTube Shorts' extension for Chrome and Edge to take control of the website's shorter clips

from www.snipca.com/49770 (see screenshot). This restores the standard transport slider at the bottom of videos,

as well as letting you use the left or right cursor keys to skip backwards or forwards a few seconds.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

MP4, M4V and MKV?

Q Over the years I've downloaded videos from various websites and never had any problem playing them, because I use VLC media player (www.videolan.org) and it seems to cope with pretty much everything. However, I do occasionally wonder about all the different video formats that are out there. Why, for example, do I sometimes find videos with M4V or MKV file extensions, rather than MP4? If there's an option I always pick MP4, but would there be any benefit to using the other formats?

Geoff Wallace

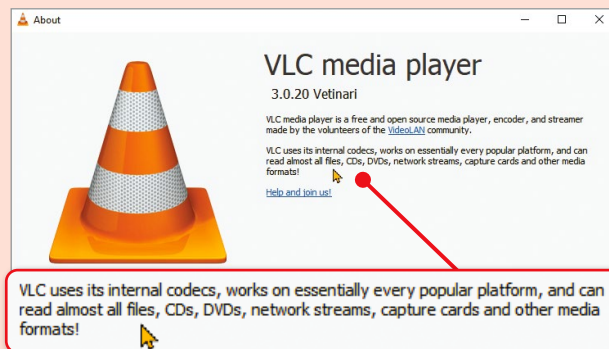
A The world of video formats is one of huge variety and complexity. Given that, a tool like VLC is indeed a godsend because it'll play virtually any video file format (see screenshot). It achieves this by using hundreds of **codecs** that can decipher almost any video 'container'. MP4, M4V and MKV are all video-

VLC media player is capable of playing virtually any video file format

container formats, meaning they're able to pack in video, audio, subtitles and other related content – depending on the specific format.

Detailing all the differences could fill half the magazine, but suffice to say that MP4 has become the most popular choice because it satisfies the needs of most people, most of the time.

M4V, by comparison, is an Apple-developed version of MP4 that – naturally – mainly benefits Apple, or at least Apple's broader interests. This is because it allows for the embedding of the company's FairPlay digital-rights-management (DRM) technology to protect files – typically limiting how or where they can be played or copied. M4V



files might provide slightly better quality, but we doubt many people would notice the difference.

In this regard, MKV has some advantages – offering plenty of versatility for enthusiasts to turn up the quality of both video and audio to the max, but without any of Apple's DRM limitations. File sizes tend to be a lot larger, though, and fewer devices are able to play MKV files than the more popular MP4 format.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Should I stop using my stolen email address?

Q I followed the advice provided in Issue 676 (page 6) to check my email addresses on Have I Been Pwned? (<https://haveibeenpwned.com>, see screenshot). One of my addresses was identified as having been breached, with apparently my email address, IP address and home address all exposed. No info was given, though, on what action – if any – I could take. Clearly, I can't change my home address, but is there any action I should take regarding the other breaches? Should I even stop using the exposed email address? This would be a real pain.

Alan Thomas

A What action to take, if any, depends largely on the nature of the breach. Have I Been Pwned? does summarise the nature of breaches and – where available – includes clickable links to advice from the affected companies or services. However, these links on the site aren't easy to spot – so look closely.

Regardless, there's generally no need to



stop using a 'breached' email address – any more than you'd generally have to consider moving home, just because your home address is listed somewhere.

However, just as you'd consider changing the lock on your front door if you lost a key, it also makes sense to change the passwords for accounts associated with any email addresses that have appeared in any breaches – and especially if the 'Compromised data' section of Have I Been Pwned? indicates that both email address and passwords were breached by the same service. That, in effect, is the equivalent of your home address and key being made available to the general public. So for services flagged

this way, be sure to at least change the password you use to log into that service.

ONSALE
Weds
8 May

Next Issue

- Will Virgin Media be affected by the copper switch-off?
- Can I colour-code iPad emails?
- Has my council been hacked? ...And many more

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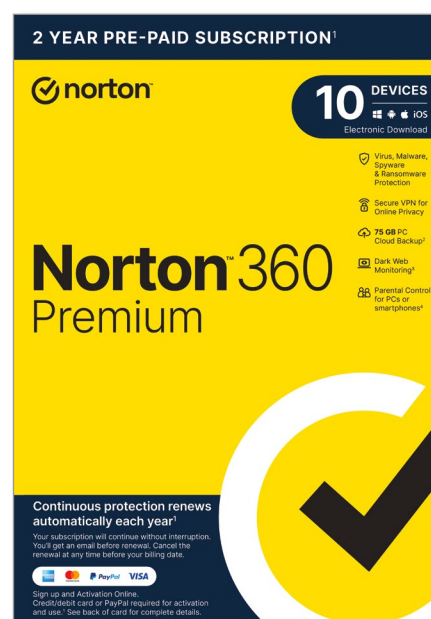
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Reader Support

Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email editor@computeractive.co.uk and we'll do our best to help

What did reader do to fix BT's phone adapter?

Q In Issue 679's Readers' Tips (page 40) Alan Thomassen explained how to overcome the 'flaky' performance of BT's phone adapter. I thought Alan's solution would help me solve my problems, but I don't understand what he did.

At the back of the BT router there are sockets for phone (green), Bluetooth (grey), USB (white) and WAN (red), as well as four Ethernet sockets (yellow). My desk phone is plugged into the green phone socket and works perfectly. My three linked cordless phones have their base unit plugged into the BT-supplied adapter. It's this adapter which is the problem. So how has Alan been able to plug all of his phones into the back of the router?

David Collins

A Alan Thomassen didn't say which BT Hub or cordless devices he's using. Our best guess is that his landline phone doubles up as the base station for his other cordless handsets, which is how he's managed to get them all working simultaneously.

We're assuming from your email that BT has switched your home from its old analogue PSTN connection to the new Digital Voice VoIP service. If so, you'll no longer be able to plug any phones into the broadband socket via one of BT's old microfilters, as you did previously.

However, as you've discovered, you can get some old landline phones working by connecting them to the phone socket on the rear of your BT Hub router. You might be able to get your cordless handsets to work by plugging their base station into the Hub instead of your desk phone. It's worth trying to see if this works.

You could get both working at the same time by using one of BT's Digital Voice Adapters (£20 each from www.snipca.com/49793). If you're a Digital Voice

customer you could get a discount – visit www.snipca.com/49786 and enter your landline number.

Did you give conflicting advice on cloning?

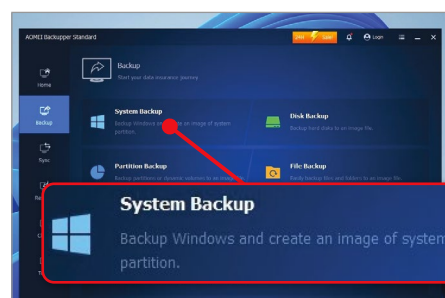
Q Back in Issue 671 (page 20), you told Alan Turk that when using the free version of AOMEI Backupper Standard (www.snipca.com/48012), you had to "click Clone in the sidebar followed by Disk Clone". However, in your reply to Gary Graham on the same page you say that cloning your entire system requires you to upgrade to the Professional version. Is this conflicting advice?

John Perkins

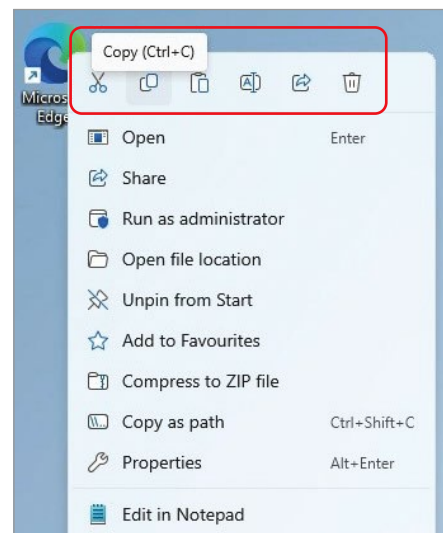
A Well spotted! We did recommend AOMEI Backupper Standard for making system image backups because it's a free part of the tool.

However, we then went on to provide instructions for creating a disk clone, which is not only a different process to creating a system image, but is also, as you point out – and as we ourselves noted in our response to Gary Graham on the same page – only available if you pay to upgrade to AOMEI Backupper Professional.

So, while our advice was correct, the accompanying instructions weren't. They should have read "click Backup in the sidebar, followed by System Backup" – see screenshot below. Apologies for any confusion.



Create a system image (not a disk clone) in AOMEI Backupper Standard, by clicking Backup on the left then System Backup



In Windows 11's right-click menu, key functions such as Copy and Paste are shown as icons along the top

Why do right-click icons sometimes not appear?

Q I'm somewhat bemused by your answer to Eamonn Colley in Issue 679's Problems Solved section (page 64). Like Eamonn, I was struggling with 'Show more options' in Windows 11's right-click (context) menu, until I noticed that the menu has icons at the top for cut, copy, paste, rename and delete (see screenshot above). However, some appear more often than others. As you don't mention this in your reply to Eamonn, could one explanation be that this is a feature of OpenShell (www.snipca.com/46780), which I have installed?

Vic Downer

A As far as we can tell, OpenShell doesn't change anything in the context menu beyond allowing you to right-click items in the Start menu. The reason you sometimes see fewer icons when you right-click is that it displays different options depending on where, when or what you click. If you haven't copied anything to your clipboard, for example, you won't see the Paste icon when you right-click.

Jargon Buster

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

720p/1080p/1440p Common types of high-definition video of 1280x720, 1920x1080 and 2560x1440 pixels respectively.

AI Artificial intelligence. Intelligence demonstrated by a machine rather than a human being. Often used to describe technology that can perform human-like tasks.

AM4 A type of processor socket used by AMD for its Ryzen series of processors.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen. Traditional PC screens are 4:3. Widescreen displays are 16:9 or 16:10.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested. Beta versions are often released so problems can be ironed out.

Biometric Using measurable personal characteristics, such as fingerprints, for identification.

Blue screen of death Technically called a 'Stop error', this is shown when your PC crashes.

Botnet A group of infected computers connected together via the internet, and used to infect other PCs, send junk email and perform other criminal tasks.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users, especially over the internet. Typically used to offer automated customer support.

Client A program that acts as an interface between PC and server.

Clock speed The speed at which a computer processor can perform operations. Measured in Gigahertz (GHz).

Code Programming languages used to create software.

Codec Short for Compressor/Decompressor. A file that tells a computer how to record or play a type of media file.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

CPU Central Processing Unit. Another term for a computer processor.

Cryptocurrency A digital currency not backed by any country. The most popular is Bitcoin.

Dark mode Showing white text on a black background.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DisplayPort A socket for connecting monitors.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

DRM Digital Rights Management. Software that limits the copying of a file.

E2EE End-to-end encryption. Ensures that messages can be seen only by the sender and recipient.

Emoji A small graphic that can be inserted into a text message or email.

EPUB A file format used by many popular ebook readers.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

EXE A program file designed to run in Windows.

Factory reset Restoring a device to the manufacturer's default settings.

Firewall A piece of software or hardware that prevents unauthorised access to a computer over a network.

Firmware Basic software stored on hardware, such as a processor, to control its operation.

GPU Graphics Processor Unit. A chip designed to create 3D graphics, but which can also be used for other computing tasks.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

Greyscale The range of grey shades from white to black, used on both black-and-white displays and monochrome printouts.

Hashtag # Added to words or phrases, particularly on social media, to make them easier to find when searching.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

Hz Hertz. Measures the frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

Incognito mode A browser mode that doesn't save your internet history, so other people using your computer can't see which sites you've visited.

IP55 Ingress Protection 55. Indicates that a phone has been tested against dust and water for up to 55 minutes at a pressure of one atmosphere (or about 10 centimetres of air).

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology. Monitors that use it have wider viewing angles and better, more accurate colours than monitors that do not use this technology.

JPEG Joint Photograph Experts Group. A common type of image file created by most digital cameras.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light. Used on almost all electronic devices, and to provide the backlight for some LCDs.

MAC address Media Access Control. A unique code that identifies any router. A laptop might have one MAC for its wired network socket and another for wireless.

MicroATX A standard for motherboards introduced in 1997.

Microfilter Lets your broadband work at the same time as your phone service.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

Mobile broadband Internet access provided by mobile phone networks rather than fibre cables.

Modifier key A special key (or combination) on a computer keyboard that temporarily changes the normal action of another key when pressed together.

Network card Allows your computer to connect to a network.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Overclock Make a processor work faster to boost performance at the cost of it getting hotter and requiring more power.

Passkey A method for signing into accounts by typing a one-off code, fingerprint or facial recognition rather than a password.

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.

Port forwarding Choosing which computer in your network a router should connect to.

Product key A unique serial number issued by software companies that must be typed in by the user before a program will launch for the first time.

PSTN Public Switched Telephone Network. Old copper phone network that's being switched off in 2025.

QR code Quick Response code. A barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

Refurbished A second-hand device that has been repaired by its manufacturer and is being resold.

Registry keys The Windows Registry equivalent of a folder.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by mobile phones.

SIM-only A phone package in which you pay only for the data, calls and texts. You have to buy the phone yourself.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors, printers and the internet.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts.

sVGA Super Video Graphics Array. A graphics display system introduced by IBM in 1987. It allowed for resolutions higher than 640x480 and supported more than 256 colours.

System image A backup of your 'system image', which includes your operating system drivers, PC's 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.

TPM Trusted Platform Module. A chip that allows your hardware to perform security-related tasks.

Trojan A malicious computer program that's disguised as harmless software.

Upscale Intelligently expanding the size of an image or video file.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A reversible connector.

VA Vertical Alignment. A form of LCDs in which the liquid crystals naturally align vertically between the panes of glass.

Vector graphics Graphics that are rendered as smooth lines and can be enlarged to any scale without a loss of quality.

VESA Video Electronics Standards Association. A standard mount for attaching monitors on to stands, walls and PCs.

VoIP Voice over IP. The routing of voice conversations over the internet.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WAN Wide Area Network. Exists over a large geographical area.

WebM Video file format supported by major browsers and software.

WebP Google's image format designed to create files that are smaller for the same quality, or of higher quality for the same size, than JPEG, PNG and GIF.





Wi-Fi 5 A standard for wireless – also known as 802.11ac. Offers higher transfer speeds than 802.11n.

Wi-Fi 6 Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called 802.11ax.

Wi-Fi 6E Wi-Fi 6 extended to include the 6GHz band.

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Hoping to make his contact details appear more modern and professional, Robert Irvine tries to...

Create a custom email address

A fellow technology journalist once mocked me for having a Yahoo email address instead of a then-trendy Google Mail one. “Other webmail services are available,” he sniggered. That was 15 years ago and I’ve since stubbornly clung on to my Yahoo Mail account, despite the puzzled looks it sometimes prompts. Naturally, I have Gmail and Outlook addresses too, plus a company-supplied one for work, but perhaps for sentimental reasons I often fall back on ‘[myusername]@yahoo.com’.

“

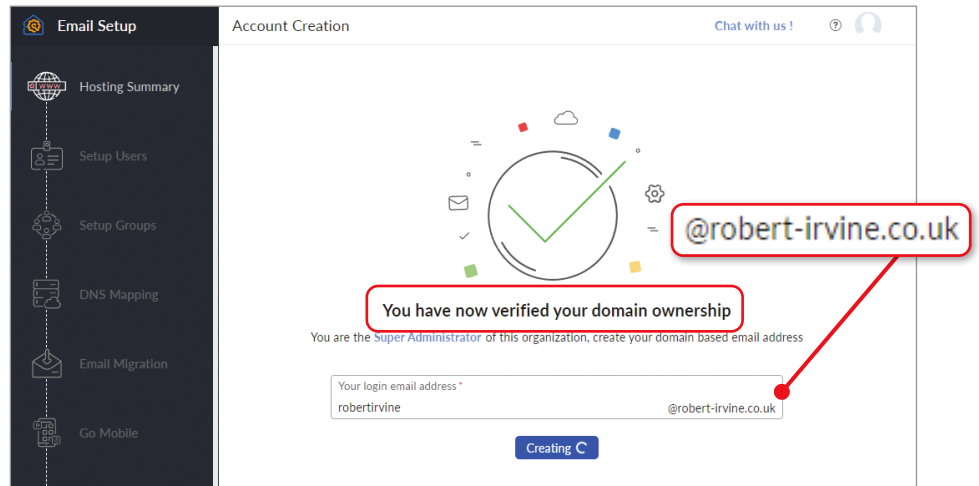
Disabling my ad
blocker revealed the
full horror of my
Mail.com inbox

”

Nevertheless, I recently decided it would be nice to have an email address with a personal domain name after the ‘@’ symbol. This would make my contact details look chic and unique, while saying “yah boo sucks” to the Yahoo naysayers.

I knew that web-hosting packages give you a custom email address when you buy the domain for your site, but I figured there must be a way to get one for less – or even for nothing. This seemed to be the case with webmail service Mail.com, which lets you create a free custom email address from a choice of over 100 domains (www.snipca.com/49896).

I clicked ‘Free sign up’ and scrolled through Mail.com’s huge list of options. I was impressed by the range of professional domains on offer, which ranged from ‘accountant.com’ to ‘worker.com’, plus



After some trial and error, Robert became the proud owner of his own email domain

quirky ones such as ‘toothfairy.com’. I plumped for ‘journalist.com’ and signed up for my free Mail.com account.

The webmail interface was simple enough and sending a test message to my new address was successful – though one I sent from it was flagged as spam. However, I then noticed that my ad blocker, uBlock Origin, had blocked more than 150 advertising and tracking elements on the page, and that there was already an ad in my minutes-old inbox.

Temporarily disabling uBlock revealed the full horror of the ad-drenched site. This was highly unnerving, and because I wasn’t prepared to pay for Mail.com’s ad-free Premium plan just to keep a generic domain, I decided to look elsewhere.

My second stop was Zoho Mail, which offers custom email addresses for personal and business users. Cheapskate that I am, I signed up for the Forever Free plan (below the main options at www.snipca.com/49924), before realising that this doesn’t include a custom domain – though you can use one you already own. So I next went to the ‘Buy a domain’ page (www.snipca.com/50016) and searched for variations on my name.

Unsurprisingly, ‘robertirvine.com’ and ‘robertirvine.co.uk’ were unavailable (there are lots of us worldwide), so I

settled for ‘robertirvine.online’. This sounded vaguely professional and was quoted as costing just \$6 (£4.75) a year.

However, clicking the button to proceed with the purchase required me to first choose a paid-for Zoho plan – the cheapest was Mail Lite at £9.60 a year. As I’d also need to pay for the domain on top of this, I instead decided to buy one from GoDaddy (www.snipca.com/50021), which is currently offering 46-per-cent off names for your first year. Amazingly, the site had ‘robert-irvine.co.uk’ for a mere £6.99 plus VAT, which was cheaper than Zoho’s Mail Lite plan, so I went ahead and bought my hyphenated name.

Armed with my new domain, I went back to the Admin Console of my free Zoho Mail account, clicked Domains then Add and entered the details. I clicked ‘Log in to my DNS’, connected Zoho Mail with GoDaddy and chose Verify.

Within half an hour, my domain was confirmed and I was the proud owner – and ‘super administrator’ – of my own custom email address (see screenshot). I skipped through the remaining setup steps to access my inbox and send my first message. To my Yahoo Mail address, of course, for old times’ sake.

✉ Need help with your email? Let us know:
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