

10 APPS THAT COULD SAVE YOUR LIFE
Let's hope you won't need them!

WHY WE STOPPED USING PAYPAL p21
It's sharing your shopping data

CUT YOUR ENERGY BILLS

New devices that'll save **MORE MONEY** than last winter



Computer

active

ISSUE 695 | 23 OCT - 5 NOV 2024

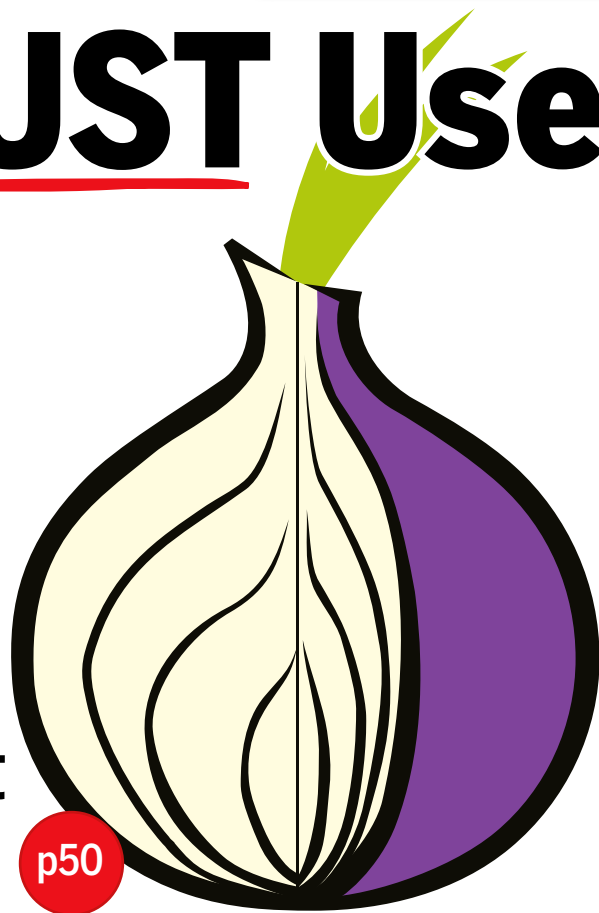
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Learn something new in every issue

Why You MUST Use

TOR

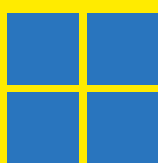
▶ It's the **MOST PRIVATE** way to browse the internet - learn how to...



- ✓ Disguise your location
- ✓ Download anonymously
- ✓ Block personalised ads
- ✓ Fake your identity

- ✓ Share files privately
- ✓ Access blocked websites
- ✓ Avoid Wi-Fi hackers
- + Add it to your **VPN!**

PLUS



WINDOWS 11'S BEST EVER UPDATE p6
But will your PC get it?

DON'T LET GOOGLE KILL YOUR AD-BLOCKER

You need to install this extension p38





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From hacked Internet Archive accounts (page 7) to a vile Disney+ scam (page 8) to PayPal sharing your data (page 21), this issue gives you enough disturbing reasons why it's never been more important to stay private online. And the most powerful way to do this is by using Tor.

I wouldn't blame you for thinking Tor is daunting. All that talk of nodes, circuits and relays is confusing – and that's before you try to understand the onion metaphor. It's enough to bring tears to your eyes.

But this jargon obscures a very simple

concept, as Robert Irvine expertly outlines in his Cover Feature. He explains how Tor helps you share sensitive files, block hackers when on public Wi-Fi, browse without being besieged by adverts and much more. He also reveals why combining it with a VPN strengthens your privacy even further.

Next issue is bound to bring news of more hacks and attacks on our privacy. Use Tor from today and you won't have to worry quite so much.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk

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- ADD it to your VPN!

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31 million
How many Internet Archive accounts have been hacked –p7

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLS

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

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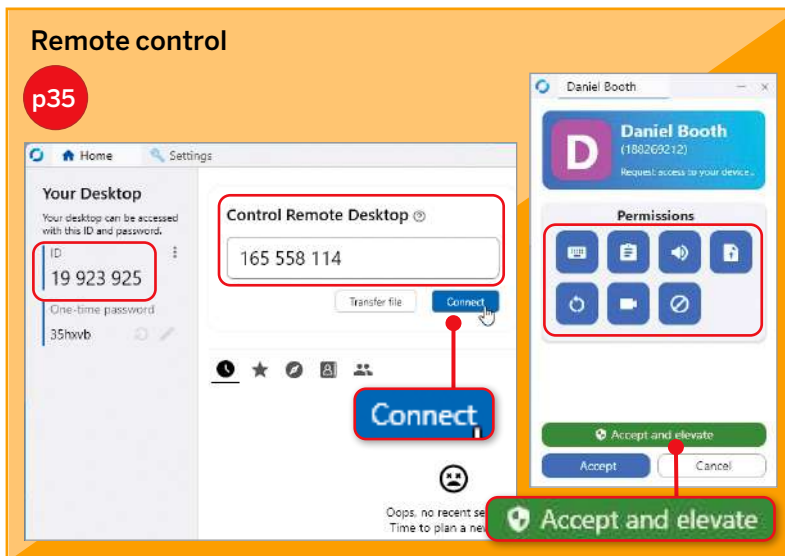


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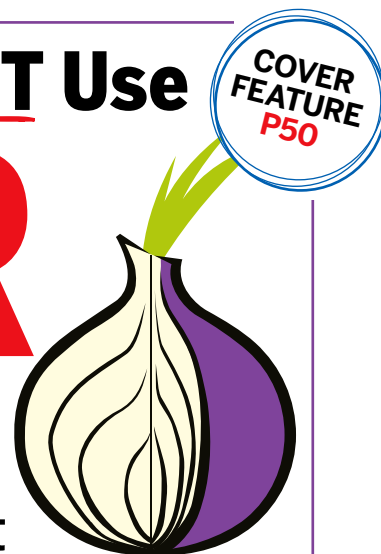
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Why You MUST Use

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▶ It's the **MOST PRIVATE** way to browse the internet



Cut your winter Energy Bills

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Power tools

Windows 11 24H2 arrives with new File Explorer tools

Microsoft has added bigger buttons in File Explorer and lets you create compressed files as part of the 24H2 update for Windows 11, which is rolling out now.

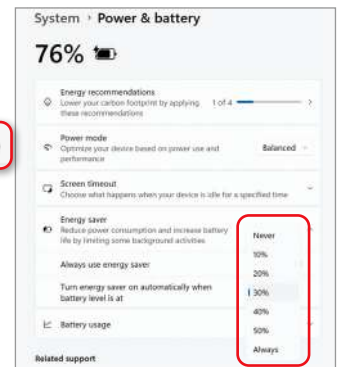
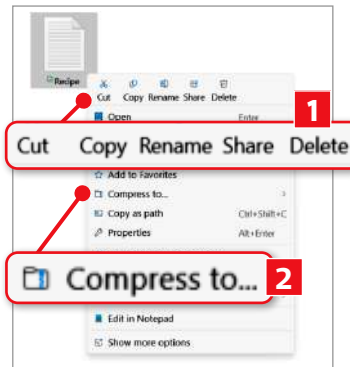
The new Cut, Copy, Rename, Share and Delete buttons appear at the top when you right-click in File Explorer (1 in our screenshot right), rather than being listed in the context menu.

To create compressed files, you again need to right-click then select 'Compress to' (2) and choose **7Zip** or **TAR**.

There's also a new 'Energy saver' section to replace 'Battery saver', which Microsoft says makes it easier to manage your computer's power consumption – both when plugged into a socket and running off a battery.

When activated it reduces more elements across Windows than 'Battery saver' to extend your battery life, such as by limiting OneDrive, and syncing and disabling **transparency effects**.

It also by default reduces your screen's brightness by 30 per cent, though you can



change this. You can also set how low your battery gets before 'Energy saver' is turned on (see screenshot above right). To use it, open Settings, then click System, followed by 'Power & Battery'.

Lenovo's Yoga Slim 7x (see page 22).

Such machines have a neural processing unit (NPU) capable of at least 40 trillion operations per second (TOPS), and a minimum of 16GB of RAM and a 256GB SSD.

AI tools come to Copilot+ machines

However, many of the most innovative new tools in 24H2 are powered by AI and will come only to machines that meet Microsoft's definition of Copilot+ computers, such as

The most significant and controversial new AI feature is Recall, which runs in the background to capture snapshots of everything you see and do on your computer.

This lets you search for anything you've ever done on your machine using natural language, such as 'show me that photo from David'.

Microsoft had wanted to add Recall to computers in the summer, but postponed its launch following warnings from security experts who said it could be abused by hackers.

In response it has turned off Recall by default and given you more control over what information it saves.

Also new in Copilot+ PCs are translations for live captions, and image-editing tools to improve your photos.

WHAT WE THINK

Microsoft would want us to babble excitedly about the Copilot+ tools like Recall, but as with most Windows updates we're more impressed by the smaller changes that improve everyday PC use. Top of the list are the new File Explorer tools, but we also love how customisable the energy-saving options are. There are many more tweaks that make this the best Windows 11 update ever. We'll reveal them all over the next few months in Make Windows Better, starting this issue – see page 46.

WHEN WILL YOUR PC GET 24H2?

Like all recent major updates 24H2 is a "phased" release, meaning Microsoft will install it first on computers that it deems have enough resources to run it smoothly. It will then check for and fix problems before releasing it more widely.

You need to be running version 22H2 or 23H2 of Windows 11 to get it, and can jump the queue by having 'Get

the latest updates as soon as they're available' turned on. Find this option by pressing Windows key+I to open Settings, then clicking Windows Update.

If you've got this turned on but you can't see the update, click 'Check for updates'. If it doesn't appear, your computer is further back in the waiting list. When 24H2 is ready, it will download and install automatically. You'll be notified when you need to

restart your device.

You can also try installing it using Microsoft's Windows 11 Installation Assistant – visit www.snipca.com/52418 and click the first 'Download Now' button as you scroll down.

Microsoft will block some old computers from installing 24H2, including those running the first-generation Qualcomm Snapdragon 835 processors, released in 2017.



You'll like this...

Amazon is using new recyclable packaging (www.snipca.com/52415)



but not this...

Scammers have been targeting people with dementia (www.snipca.com/52412)

Amazon boosts Fire HD 8 tablets with more RAM and AI tools

Amazon has launched faster versions of its Fire HD 8 tablet, with 50-per-cent

WATCH FREELY ON AMAZON TVS

Freely is coming to new Amazon Fire TVs this autumn. It will be available on the forthcoming Omni QLED Series and Fire TV 2-Series, but won't be added to existing Fire TVs. Bush, Hisense, Panasonic, Sharp and Toshiba have already announced TVs with Freely. Read more at www.snipca.com/52396.



more RAM, a sharper camera and new tools powered by AI.

The new model has 3GB RAM – up from 2GB in the 2022 model – and a five-megapixel camera, up from two megapixels. Battery life stays at 13 hours and screen size remains eight inches.

It's available with 32GB and 64GB storage options, priced £99.99 and £124.99 respectively (www.snipca.com/52398), with a microSD card slot for expanding storage up to 1TB. You can remove adverts by spending £10 more. As well as Black (pictured) it comes in Hibiscus (pink) and Emerald.

AI features include an assistant to improve your writing, and summaries of web pages when browsing the internet using Amazon's Silk browser. Amazon will start



adding these tools to existing Fire HD 10 and Fire Max 11 tablets over the next few months.

The 2022 version of the Fire HD 8 is still on sale, priced £89.99 and £116.99 for 32GB and 64GB respectively from www.snipca.com/52401.

IN BRIEF

13,508mph WIND ON BBC WEATHER APP

A fault with the BBC's Weather app and website forecast excessive wind speeds and temperatures across the globe, including

of 13,508mph gales in London (pictured) and 378°C heat in Sydney. The BBC blamed "some of the weather data from our forecast provider". The errors were shown on 10 October, the same day Hurricane Milton hit Florida.

• Don't use BBC Weather – Issue 687, page 60

CHANGE YOUR INTERNET ARCHIVE PASSWORD

Internet Archive users should change their password after 31 million accounts were hacked, leading to the theft of email addresses, usernames and passwords. The accounts have been added to Have I Been Pwned? – check if yours is there by typing your email address at <https://haveibeenpwned.com>, then pressing Enter. To change your password visit www.snipca.com/52403.

13508



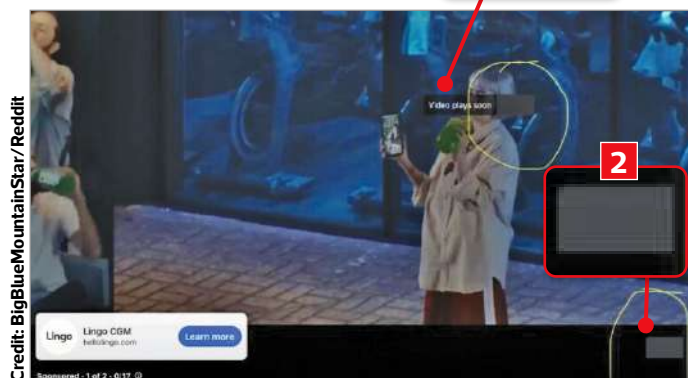
YouTube denies removing Skip button that lets you bypass adverts

Google has denied it's hiding the Skip button on YouTube in order to force you to watch adverts. It was responding to complaints from users that the Skip button had been replaced by a black rectangle.

One viewer posted a screenshot on Reddit (www.snipca.com/52402), showing the message "video plays soon" (1 in our screenshot) and a rectangle where the Skip button normally is (2).

But in a statement to The Verge website, YouTube said "on skippable ads, the button appears after five seconds into playback, as always".

However, it added that it's changing how some advert-related "elements" will appear, including showing a "progress



bar" instead of a countdown timer to indicate how long you have to wait before skipping.

YouTube announced a "global crackdown" on ad blockers earlier this year, saying adverts let the site be watched by "billions of people around the world" for free.

As part of this crackdown YouTube is heavily promoting

its Premium subscription, which removes adverts for £12.99 a month (www.youtube.com/premium).

There's also a family package for £19.99 a month letting five people in the same household remove adverts.

• Beat Google's new ad-blocking restrictions – page 38

TOMORROW'S WORLD



What's more frightening – a robot telling a bad joke, or another robot recognising it's a bad joke? On the left is Tomorrow's World regular Ameca, while making its debut – and trying to be funny – is Azi, both programmed by UK firm Engineered Arts. Watch at www.snipca.com/52397.



IN BRIEF

BUY RASPBERRY PI SD CARDS AND CASE

Raspberry Pi has released its own **SD cards** and a protective 'Bumper' case for the Pi itself (both pictured below). The cards are 32GB and 64GB and are priced £9.90 and £19.80 (see www.snipca.com/52354), while the Bumper costs £2.80 (www.snipca.com/52355). Read the Raspberry Pi blog for more details: www.snipca.com/52356.



EE CUSTOMERS CAN NOW GET SKY STREAM

EE broadband customers can now get Sky Stream for the first time. Launched in 2022, Sky Stream is a TV box providing access to 150 channels and 50 entertainment apps, including Apple TV, BBC iPlayer, ITVX and YouTube. Packages start from just £28 a month for Sky Entertainment and Netflix. Read more at www.snipca.com/52361.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!



It seems even death won't deter some people from seeking online fame.

YouTube mega-celebrity Mr Beast (pictured) – whose channel has a staggering 319 million subscribers – says he has already pre-recorded 15 videos to go live should he die soon. He's only 26.



Google removes Kaspersky software from Play Store

Google has removed all Kaspersky software from its Play Store following its ban in the US.

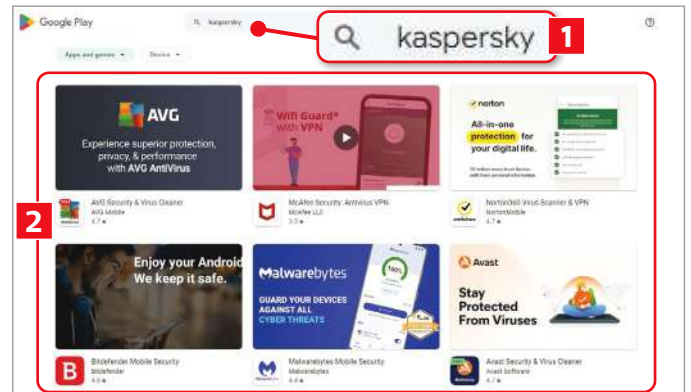
A spokesperson said: "The US Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security recently announced a variety of restrictions on Kaspersky. As a result, we have removed Kaspersky's apps from Google Play."

US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo announced the ban in June, claiming Moscow's influence over Kaspersky posed a major risk to US infrastructure and public safety.

Searching for Kaspersky on the Store (1 in our screenshot) brings up a host of rival software, including AVG, Avast, McAfee, Norton, Bitdefender and Malwarebytes (2).

Kaspersky confirmed on its support forum that Google had removed its products, but said this was only temporary (www.snipca.com/52358).

It added: "Kaspersky is



currently investigating the circumstances behind the issue and exploring potential solutions to ensure that users of its products can continue downloading and updating their applications from Google Play. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause."

Kaspersky said its software could still be downloaded from alternative app stores, including Galaxy Store, Huawei AppGallery and Xiaomi GetApps, or by installing the APK file from its website: www.snipca.com/52359.

The company, whose global headquarters are in Moscow, has always strongly denied that it's under the influence of Russian authorities.

It initially said it would explore "all legally available options" to fight the ban, but has since closed its office in the US and laid off 50 staff.

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

Do you still use Kaspersky? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Fake Disney+ links give 'child pornography' warning

Scammers are using fake search results for Disney+ to trick you into thinking Microsoft has caught you with images of child sexual abuse on your computer.

Researchers at Malwarebytes spotted the fake results appearing on Google when you search for an activation code to sign into Disney+. These are the codes that you have to enter on your TV screen using your remote control.

Clicking one of the links triggers a fake Microsoft pop-up box that says:

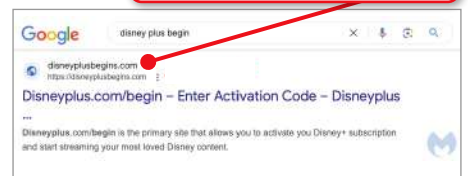
"Access to this PC has been blocked for security reasons. Alureon Spyware With Child Pornography Download Detected."

It says you have to call Windows Support on a US number to get a "quick fix". If you do so, the scammers will try to persuade you to install remote-control software on your computer so they can gain access to it.

Two of the search terms that produce the fake links are 'Disney plus begin' and

'Disney activation code'. The former produces the URL [disneyplusbegins\[dot\]com](http://disneyplusbegins[dot]com) (see screenshot), which closely resembles the real web address: www.disneyplus.com/begin.

For genuine instructions on activating your Disney+ account visit www.snipca.com/52367.



Credit: Malwarebytes

EBay scraps sellers' fees on all categories except motoring

EBay has scrapped fees for private UK sellers across all categories except motoring.

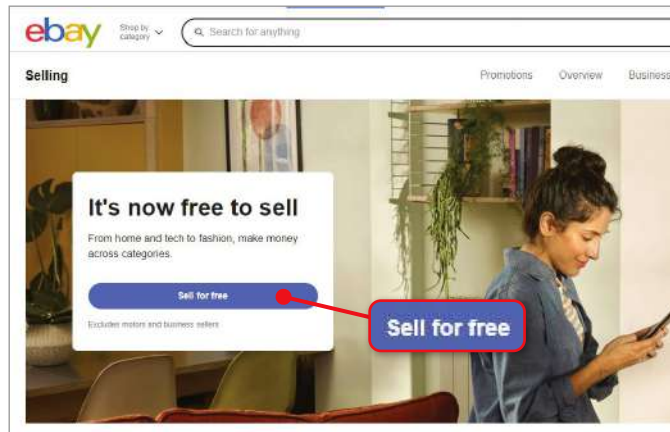
It means non-business sellers will no longer pay the 12.8-per-cent final-value fee, the 0.42-per-cent 'regulatory operating' fee and the flat 30p fee. This meant if you sold an item for £20, you had to pay £2.94 in fees.

Fees will only apply now if you sell more than 300 items in one month, or if you pay for a listing upgrade – such as a bold title – or deliver overseas.

However, buyers will soon have to pay a "small" fee when purchasing items. EBay said it would introduce this next year, but hasn't confirmed how much it will be.

eBay's move comes as it faces pressure from rival sites that don't charge fees for selling, such as Depop, Facebook Marketplace, Gumtree and Vinted.

It responded in April by removing seller fees for



fashion, and said this has led to a double-digit increase in listings for jeans, shirts and dresses.

The site also scrapped selling fees in Germany last year, which it claimed had led to both more people selling and more buying.

In addition, eBay is using AI to help sellers write product descriptions and make photos look better.

Another new feature, called Simple Delivery, lets sellers

send items tracked and fully insured. The buyer will prepay for this, but eBay hasn't yet said how much.

It has also introduced eBay Balance, letting sellers spend their earnings to shop on eBay, and to pay to promote their listings and buy delivery labels.

Read more on eBay's site at www.snipca.com/52267.

Will you sell more on eBay now it's free? Let us know: letters@comuteractive.co.uk

BT blocks 20 million scam and spam phone calls

BT has said its new scam-blocking service has prevented more than 2.4 million calls from fraudsters reaching potential victims.

It launched the free Enhanced Call Protect in May for customers using its Digital Voice phone system. This is powered by technology from US firm Hiya that uses machine learning to spot and block scams.

The service has



also warned customers about nearly 18 million spam calls since launching. These are business calls that, while not fraudulent, are probably unwanted.

When customers receive a spam call, their Digital Voice handset shows the message

'Nuisance?'. They can then reject or accept the call.

Calls from registered businesses show their name so users know it's legitimate.

Scams are automatically diverted to voicemail without giving users the option to accept them.

BT says that 2.5 million customers already benefit from Enhanced Call Protect as a result of switching from copper-based landlines to Digital Voice.

It expects to block more than 1.5 million scam calls every month once all customers have moved to Digital Voice.

• For more information on Digital Voice visit www.snipca.com/52340.

IN BRIEF

SUSSEX ISP GIVES DISCOUNT FOR OAPs

A regional internet provider has launched a discounted broadband package just for pensioners. Lightning Fibre, which operates in East Sussex, said its £15-a-month FullFibre50 package (50Mbps) was introduced in response to the Government removing the winter fuel allowance for 2.5 million pensioners. It's available to people born before 23 September 1958, and runs until the end of November. For details see www.snipca.com/52286.

NEW RULES GIVE YOU CLEARER ROAMING INFO

Mobile networks must now tell you when you've started roaming abroad, under new Ofcom rules. They must also clearly state any fair-use or time limits that apply, and tell you that you can set a cap on how much money you spend. The rules also force networks to tell customers when they've accidentally started roaming, such as when travelling close to an international border. Read more at www.snipca.com/52301.

DRAYTEK RELEASES FIX FOR VIGOR ROUTERS

DrayTek has released an emergency update to fix 14 security flaws that affect 24 Vigor routers (pictured). Around 785,000 routers worldwide – including thousands in the UK – are vulnerable to the flaw, which lets hackers see the router's web interface. Check affected models at www.snipca.com/52289 and click the relevant download link to get the update.



Question of the Fortnight

Will you need a new PC if you can't get Windows 11?

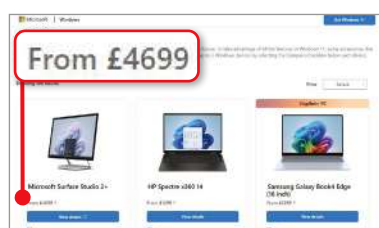
Microsoft has issued new advice that overlooks one crucial factor

There are 700 million reasons to doubt the wisdom of Microsoft's new advice that if you run an unsupported version of Windows you should buy a new computer running Windows 11. Previously, it suggested upgrading to Windows 10 then moving up to 11 if your computer could handle it.

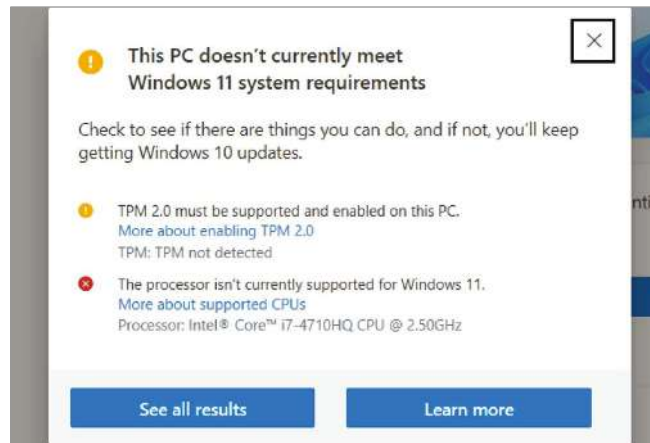
You'll find this change of advice in Microsoft's Support page titled 'What does it mean if Windows isn't supported?' (www.snipca.com/52427). Click the heading 'What options do I have for staying supported on Windows?' and Microsoft says: "If you have an older PC, we recommend you move to Windows 11 by buying a new PC. Hardware and software have improved a lot, and today's computers are faster, more powerful, and more secure."

To reinforce the message, there's a link to 'View Windows 11 PCs', taking you to a list of computers you can buy of all types and from all major brands (www.snipca.com/52429).

Microsoft's top recommendation is the Surface Studio 2+ which is no doubt a powerful machine, but costs an eye-watering



So that's why Microsoft wants you to buy a new PC



£4,699 (pictured below). Ah Microsoft, so *that's* why you want us to buy a new computer!

Look at the top of the page and you'll see the advice is aimed at people running Windows XP, Vista, 7 and 8.1. We can't argue with that. Anyone still running those systems needs to do so extremely carefully (ie, by never going online) or consider buying a new computer very soon.

But in less than 12 months Microsoft will have to add Windows 10 to that list of unsupported systems, and that's a major problem. Despite Windows 10 launching over nine years ago – and its replacement, Windows 11, arriving in 2021 – the system still runs on almost two-thirds (64 per cent) of Windows computers. That's estimated to be 700 million machines worldwide.

Is Microsoft seriously suggesting that 700 million computers should

be replaced with shiny new models? What's going to happen to them all?

Of course, those with the required specifications can upgrade to Windows 11, but many tens of millions won't be able to.

Industry analysts Canalis predict that 240 million Windows 10 computers will be left unsafe when support ends. It says that this number of folded laptops stacked on top of each other would make a pile 600km taller than the moon (www.snipca.com/52436). That's some environmental disaster Microsoft would be responsible for.

Despite these warnings, we think it's unlikely Microsoft will postpone the end date for Windows 10. As we say in our response to Neil Jackson's letter (page 12), Windows 11's market share has risen from 26 to 33 per cent in six months. It's not inconceivable that 11 overtakes 10 by next October.

Microsoft will hope that's driven by people buying new

THE FACTS

- Microsoft has changed its advice for people with "older PCs" to now recommend buying a new computer that runs Windows 11
- Windows 10 still runs on around 64 per cent of Windows computers, amounting to some 700 million machines
- A new version of Rufus offers an updated workaround for installing Windows 11 on PCs that lack the technical specifications

computers, but it's more likely to come from users trying every trick in the book to upgrade their existing Windows 10 machines. The most effective is to edit the registry then use the free software Rufus to download a Windows 11 ISO file to your computer.

Rufus works by bypassing technical requirements for Windows 11, such as TPM 2.0 and Secure Boot. Its developers constantly look for loopholes that Microsoft keeps trying to block. The latest version (4.6 Beta, www.snipca.com/52441) released on 10 October has a new workaround to beat a restriction Microsoft imposed earlier this year.

Microsoft must hate this game of cat and mouse, and it'll never recommend using Rufus. But surely it's better that some users have this escape route than resort to chucking their PC on the scrapheap.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

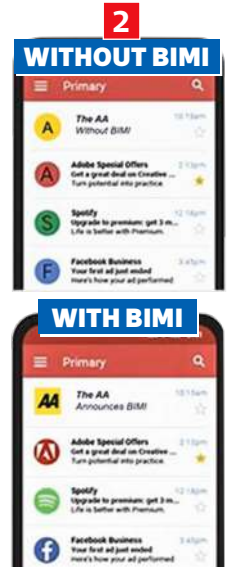
Fake 'AA emergency car kit' emails

What's the threat?

Scammers are sending emails impersonating the AA that claim you've won a free "emergency car kit". They begin 'Dear AA Member' (see screenshot **1**) and say the kit is to thank you for "your feedback", and will give you "peace of mind while on the road". Clicking the link in the email takes you to a page that asks for personal details, which fraudsters can use to target you with further scams.

How can you stay safe?

Look out for the official AA logo next to an email, which indicates it's genuine. These appear because the AA is using the new email technology Brand Indicators for Message Identification (BIMI), which lets companies and organisations place logos to the left of emails in your inbox. The company published screenshots **2** of what an email from the AA looks like with and without BIMI. You can also see them online at www.snipca.com/52305.



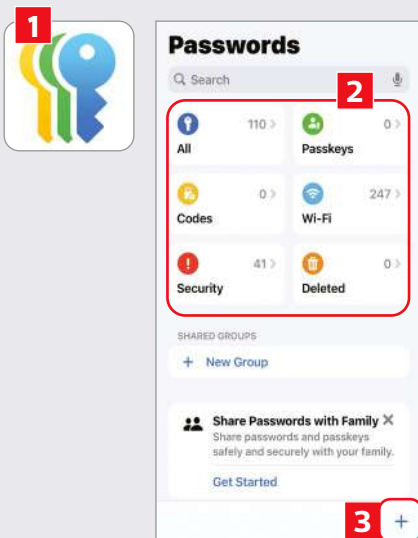
However, while Apple and Gmail support BIMI – meaning you'll see logos in those inboxes – Outlook doesn't. Microsoft hasn't said why, nor whether it plans to add support.

Note also that all official AA emails

come from an address with the domain name 'theaa.com'. The company does make emergency car kits, but they cost £32.50 (www.snipca.com/52306), and aren't offered as free rewards for completing a survey.

New tools | Apple's new Passwords app

Previously on iPhones and iPads you had to open Settings if you wanted to access your passwords. Apple has made



it simpler in iOS 18 and iPadOS 18 (released in September) by adding a new Passwords app that makes it easier to create and manage passwords.

Look for the new app's icon on your device (see screenshot **1**) then tap it. You'll see a screen with six sections: all passwords, passkeys, two-factor authentication codes, Wi-Fi passwords, security alerts about unsafe passwords, and passwords you've deleted **2**. To add a password, tap the plus sign (+) at the bottom right **3**.

You can also share select passwords with trusted contacts – tap Get Started in the 'Share Passwords with Family' section. Tap 'Continue' then give your shared group a name and tap Add People. You'll see a list of potential contacts, or you can search for your own.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers

Bullying Virgin impersonator

We received a call from a woman with an Indian accent, who said she was from Virgin Media. The number was 0844 292 3466. She asked if we realised our broadband speed was below what our contract said it should be. Then she tried to persuade us to download the AnyDesk software, which would've given her remote control of my PC. When I said no, a fast-talking man came on the line and tried to bully me into installing it. I disconnected, then contacted Virgin who told me they don't make calls like this and that 0844 292 3466 wasn't one of their numbers.

Dave Rhodes

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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

Has Microsoft ditched plans for Windows 12?

✉ Issue 693's Cover Feature (pictured) explaining the options for Windows 10 users once support for the operating system ends next year was extremely helpful. I noticed though that you didn't mention the possibility of Windows 12 launching before Windows 10 support is pulled. I thought it was a certainty that Microsoft would launch this next year, but I haven't read much about it recently. I know Windows 11's market share has increased rapidly, so do you think Microsoft has ditched plans for Windows 12?

It would be good to know, because I'll need to upgrade from Windows 10 soon but don't want to do it too early if the option of choosing Windows 12 is likely to become available.

Neil Jackson

CA SAYS Six months ago we'd have said it was almost certain that Microsoft would launch Windows 12 in 2025. But that was when Windows 11's market share was languishing at just 26 per cent. It has since risen to a new high of 33 per cent, while Windows 10 has fallen from 69 to 62 per cent. Users have finally got the message that Windows 10's days are numbered, and that might make Microsoft think there's no need to launch a replacement for Windows 11 just yet.

Also, Microsoft's current priority is AI tools, not Windows 12, so its focus in 2025 is likely to be improving Copilot in Windows 11. Nobody knows for sure except a select few inside Microsoft's boardroom, but some details are bound to leak. We'll report them when they do.

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Give us pros and cons of Windows alternatives

✉ In your Cover Feature on upgrading from Windows 10 you mentioned ditching Windows for



ChromeOS or Linux, but you didn't fully explore these options. For example, you didn't suggest buying a new computer to run these systems.

Extending the lifespan of existing computers is desirable, but some people will be reluctant to do so. If they're determined to buy new hardware, they might also consider alternatives beyond Windows 11. A Chromebook running ChromeOS may be

better for some people because they're secure, easy to use, perform well and don't cost much – although my experience of running ChromeOS Flex on an old laptop didn't provide the same quality of service. It would be useful to have a more detailed article exploring the pros and cons.

Peter Burnham

CA SAYS Peter's right that we need to give more information on the best computers for running ChromeOS and Linux, and explain how to use these operating systems. We didn't have space in our 'Windows 10 is doomed' Cover Feature (available as a back issue from www.snipca.com/52376), but we'll go into much more detail next year so readers can be fully informed about what to do.

Openreach engineer fixed problems quickly

✉ In the interests of balance, I want to paint a rosier picture of Openreach engineers than the one from Andrew Cooke (Letters, Issue 694). I don't blame him for being annoyed that he had to chase his automatic compensation for a missed appointment, but the engineer who came to fix my problem was magnificent.

He arrived 30 minutes early, then parked outside and phoned to ask whether it was fine to start his work now. I said yes, and within 20 minutes he had identified which street cabinet was causing my slow broadband. It then took him just an hour to open the cabinet and work his magic to fix it. When he came back, he gave me an explanation that was easy to understand (basically it was down to twisted wires). That was two months ago. My service has been brilliant since.

Chris Pickering

Spot the mast

✉ In Issue 691's Letters, Helen Reeves asks why phone masts can't be camouflaged to minimise environmental impact. Here's a photo (above right) of one brave attempt, which you'll find beside the A487 road near Menai Bridge in North Wales. Just a short distance down the road is a 'naked' mast, and it does look an ugly beast. Why camouflage one and not the other?

Chris Green

CA SAYS It's rather taller than the trees around it, but still looks nicer than a

What's the Issue...?

✉ When did you explain why it's inherently unsafe to send text messages on phones?

Daniel Stevenson

CA SAYS That was a feature in Issue 660, page 60.

✉ I want to try using a portable router, and I think you covered this subject some time in the past year?

Ian Hamlin

CA SAYS Yes – in Issue 663's How To, page 38. Read this and the feature above on our 2023 Back Issue CD (www.snipca.com/48860).

✉ Was there a tip about using Toilet Finder in satellite view?

Len Franklin

CA SAYS In Issue 683, page 40. Buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/52312.



stark grey pole. If other readers live near camouflaged masts please send us photos.

Gigaset IP box gives me landline and VoIP number

Following Len Howard's letter in Issue 694 ('Landlines v mobile? You can have both!'), because the copper phone lines are being phased out, I dug out my old Gigaset N300A IP box, which handles both analogue and VoIP lines. At first I connected it to our fixed phone line, without using VoIP. But when the line and broadband on it failed, I contacted internet providers Andrews & Arnold (www.aa.net.uk) to get a local phone number. Having now set up the N300A IP box with VoIP, I have a landline number that I can use for my home phones and also mobile phones, tablets and PCs using suitable free programs such as Linphone (www.linphone.org) or Zoiper (www.zoiper.com).

The days of having both a landline and mobile phone are likely to be around for years to come. If my old phone line is ever repaired by Openreach or Sky, I can continue to use that or perhaps transfer it to a VoIP number.

Brian Steer

I switched to Zen and lost my landline

Issue 693's 'Question of the Fortnight' about Ofcom's new rules on switching broadband suggested that since 2015 it's been easy to switch between companies that use Openreach. Not if you want to port your existing landline it isn't. I swapped from Sky to Zen Internet with my existing landline last July, but they lost it. The company switched my broadband over smoothly but couldn't port my landline even after three attempts, all of which took one month. Eventually Zen told me my landline had ceased and had been returned to Sky, with no hope of getting it back. Not a very good experience really.

John Willis

STAR LETTER

Why I won't mind if Windows 12 looks hideous

I don't think you were too harsh when you described those new Windows icons (pictured) as "hideous" ('Question of the Fortnight', Issue 694). I'd go further and say they're abominable, almost an insult to our intelligence. Like so many trends in modern culture and technology, they seem to infantilise us, treating us like babies.

But I don't mind that they look awful because it solves a dilemma I was facing. I've got a Windows 10 PC that can't be upgraded to Windows 11, but I've put off buying a new computer with 11 installed because I thought Windows 12 might be better. If these icons are anything to go by, it will look so bad as to be unusable. So I'm going to buy a Windows 11 PC in the next few months and ignore the dog's dinner that Windows 12 looks set to be.

That doesn't let Microsoft off the



hook though. I've liked the designs of most versions of Windows. I was one of those strange people who quite liked Windows 8, even though I upgraded to Windows 10 as soon as I could. From the videos I've seen of Windows 11, it looks well designed.

But I can't fathom the logic behind those icons. It's as if Microsoft asked a bunch of excited toddlers to sprinkle Haribo sweets over a white sandpit. Surely someone high up at Microsoft will realise they look terrible and veto them.

Des Mannister



The Star Letter writer wins a Computeractive mug!

Speed-camera apps should beep continuously

Issue 692's coverline 'Avoid speed cameras while driving' suggests that people are afraid of accidentally going too fast. For most people most of the time, when they do speed it's probably because they're temporarily unaware of the limit or how fast they're going. You might call this negligence, but with so much going on it would be a rare driver who has never exceeded the speed limit even for a short period.

When I go too fast my ancient Garmin satnav emits a loud warning, but only once. It would be so much better if it continued to do so if my speed crept up again within the controlled area. Waze produces a very timid tone but I'm not aware of any phone app that provides a loud, continuous warning. If any app did this, who would care about speed cameras? It just seems so obvious.

Frank Teasdale

Is Plusnet closing down?

I've been a satisfied Plusnet customer for several years, but a recent reminder that my contract was ending encouraged me to find out what other broadband deals were on offer. No provider would offer a landline, which I can live with, but although Plusnet was offering a new two-year contract I kept reading online that the company might be closing. Is this true? I'd prefer to stay with them, but don't want to renew my contract if the company is a dead duck.

Paul Anderson

CA SAYS Several Plusnet customers have asked us this recently. We don't blame them for being concerned because the company, which is owned by BT, closed both its mobile and business broadband services earlier this year. BT is gradually rebranding its broadband and mobile as EE, and industry observers think Plusnet will go the same way. If that happens, existing customers are likely to be moved to EE, or offered a chance to cancel.



We stand up for your legal rights

Why is Virgin charging me £163 instead of £79.30?



Can Plusnet ignore Ofcom's compensation scheme?

Q In late July, nearing the end of my contract with Virgin Media, I received an offer to 'renew now – keep your current plan'. Until then I'd been paying £66.55 a month and the renewal price was £79.30, so I accepted the offer. Then I was told for an extra £3 a month I could upgrade my speed to 1Gbps, which I also accepted. However, in September Virgin called me to say it wouldn't honour the deal because it was an error.

I feel I've been treated badly by Virgin despite being a customer for 30 years. I'm now paying £163 a month for the same bundle I had for £66.55. Can Virgin do this?
Jim McPhee

A No it can't. It sounds like Virgin misled Jim by offering a deal it couldn't honour, though we're not sure if the company meant the original £79.30 deal or upgrading to 1Gbps for an extra £3 a month. Either way, Jim says he's been moved on to a ridiculously expensive package that he shouldn't have to pay for.

First, we need to find out which deal



Virgin claims it can't honour, and ask it why. We think it's the £3 upgrade, because Virgin had already sent him the contract for £79.30 and started supplying broadband at this price. We then need to decide if this counts as misleading Jim. It certainly seems that way.

The whole case is a mess. During September Virgin told Jim he owed four different amounts, ranging from £30 to £134. It was only after querying these that Jim was told his contract wouldn't be honoured. We find it staggering that Virgin then tried to sell him a contract that was twice the cost of what he thought he had signed up to.

Virgin needs to reduce this as soon as possible, and a goodwill gesture wouldn't go amiss too. It needs to win back the trust of this loyal customer.

CASE ONGOING

Q At the end of January, Plusnet mistakenly disconnected our landline. We reported the problem but were without the line for just over two months. I knew nothing about Ofcom's automatic compensation scheme for loss of service and Plusnet never informed us about it. After cancelling my landline, Plusnet offered me £50 compensation. Is that enough?

Gerald Razey

A We doubt it. Under the scheme (www.snipca.com/52291), once you've reported the fault (broadband or landline) providers must pay £9.76 for every day it remains unfixed. This comes to £585.60 for 60 days – a lot more than the paltry £50 Plusnet is offering.

The whole point of the scheme is to compensate customers automatically, without them having to chase companies. We've asked Plusnet why it didn't pay Gerald this money automatically. If an agreement can't be reached, Gerald should contact the Communications Ombudsman to raise a complaint: www.snipca.com/52295.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Reader gets refund for watch that failed after repair



Reader David Townsend has agreed to a full refund of £78.99 for the Citizens watch he bought from Hogies (www.hogiesonline.co.uk) after the company's attempt at a repair failed (see Issue 694).

David returned the watch when it stopped working the day after it arrived. Hogies said the problem

was probably a faulty battery, and said he could either get it fixed locally (and charge Hogies the cost) or send it back to the retailer for repair. David had a third option – because fewer than 30 days had passed since purchase he could have cancelled the order and demanded a refund. But he liked the watch and wanted to see whether Hogies could fix it.

He decided to return it to



Hogies, which claimed it had repaired it. However, more faults materialised after it came back, at which point he emailed us for advice.

David's dilemma then was whether to send the watch back for another repair, hoping Hogies could get it right this time, or accept defeat and take the refund. He chose the latter. Hogies had no choice but to pay this because it's allowed only one attempt to repair. This applies even if the second fault is different from the first.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

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

Can I cancel if broadband is unreliable?

Q I believe my broadband provider Octaplus (<https://octaplus.co.uk>) is not fulfilling its contractual obligations by providing a consistently unreliable service. I have been patient and cooperative throughout this process, but I'm reaching my limit. What can I do?
Mustafa Muflehi



finally reported the company to the ombudsman CISAS (www.snipca.com/52332) which is now investigating. It also means that we don't need to do anything except wait for the verdict from CISAS,

Mustafa is on a 500Mbps contract, but his connection suffers from too much latency – which is how quickly your online devices can communicate.

It is possible to have both fast broadband – ie, fast download and upload speeds – and high latency, which causes web pages to load slower, games to lag and video streams to **buffer**. He has tried to improve speeds using Wi-Fi boosters, and moving his router to new positions in his home, but to no effect.

All this suggests the problems are caused outside his home, possibly by too many people using Octaplus's network, or by faults with the company's servers. We've asked Ofcom whether these would justify Mustafa cancelling without paying a fee.

CASE ONGOING

A Mustafa doesn't need to do anything at the moment because he's taken all the right steps by complaining to Octaplus, then asking for a deadlock letter. The company has ignored this for 14 months, so Mustafa

Why is Microsoft taking payments from me?

Q My latest credit-card statement shows Microsoft took £59.99 in August, but I've not used any Microsoft products or software for over two years.

I know my bank will probably refund the charge, but this happened last year as well. Am I the victim of fraud or has Microsoft made an error?
Stewart MacPherson

A We'll have to contact Microsoft to find out, so we've asked Stewart to give us permission to talk to the company on his behalf. It's possible Microsoft has reactivated a subscription that Stewart had cancelled, or maybe he never fully cancelled the subscription in the first place.

However, Stewart is correct that his bank will refund the charge because it was unauthorised. The only time a bank can refuse this chargeback is if it can prove you authorised the transaction or someone did on your behalf. The money should be re-credited to your account



within 24 hours.


Unauthorised transactions are usually a problem because of ongoing subscription charges. These aren't considered Authorised Push Payment (APP) fraud, which is when scammers impersonate someone you've done business with and trick you into paying a fake invoice. In 2023, Brits lost £341 million to APP.

To protect consumers, the payment-systems regulator recently made it mandatory for banks to reimburse victims. But the downside is that it has lowered the amount victims of this fraud can claim back from £415,000 to only £85,000.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Currys gave me gift card for Xbox I bought years ago

 Many years ago, I bought an Xbox 360 from Currys PC World and signed up for a warranty deal costing £1.99 a month. I used this warranty at least twice and had my Xbox repaired, so I always felt that I'd got my money's worth.

I wasn't optimistic of using it again when the Xbox stopped working one more time, but the staff at Currys confirmed they could



try to get it repaired.

I got a sinking feeling a few days later when they sent me a text saying they couldn't repair the Xbox, so they were going to send me a gift card instead.

However, the gift card was worth only £10 less than what I'd paid for the Xbox itself all those years ago, which went

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

a long way towards buying a brand new console. Well done Currys!

Roderic Buttimore

Contact
Currys

- **Support page** www.snipca.com/52391
- **Virtual assistant** www.snipca.com/52390
- **Phone** 0344 561 0000

Grow Your Family Tree



18th-century reforms led to record keeping for religions other than Protestantism. **Judith Batchelor** explains how to...

Search UK's Roman Catholic registers

England became a Protestant country after the Reformation in the 16th century, but not everyone adopted the new faith. Those who remained Roman Catholic suffered persecution for over two centuries. As a result, Catholics were recorded only in Anglican parish registers during this period. However, with the gradual abolition of penal laws in the late 18th century, Catholic churches began to keep their own registers.

Browse Findmypast's records

Findmypast has digitised and indexed many Catholic registers, particularly those from the 19th century, for Scotland as well as England. To find them, click the top search menu, then type **Catholic** in the box under 'All Record Sets'.

The original English registers are held by the Catholic diocesan archives of Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Northampton, Nottingham, Plymouth, Salford, Southwark and Westminster. There are separate collections for baptisms,

marriages and burials. Registers for the eight dioceses of Scotland are similarly organised into separate collections. You can filter all records by parish (1 in our screenshot right), diocese (2) or county (3). If you're searching for a baptism, it's helpful to add information such as the father or mother's name (4).

Many Catholics, particularly Irish men, served in the British Army. Sacramental registers of baptisms, confirmations, marriages and burials were kept between 1836 and 1975. You'll find records in Findmypast's 'British Armed Forces, Roman Catholic Registers' collection (www.snipca.com/52239).

Registers are often in Latin, although the meaning of many words is obvious. Names may also be Latinised so check for variants and use **wildcards** when searching. For example, searching for **Pat*** will provide many results for Patricius, the Latin form of Patrick. Read Findmypast's guide on Latin terms at www.snipca.com/52244.

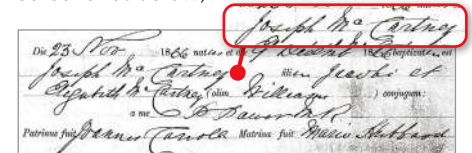


Findmypast lets you search by parish, diocese or county

Look in the north west of England

Historically Catholics were concentrated in the north-west of England and their numbers were swelled by the influx of Irish immigrants fleeing the Great Famine in the 1840s. Findmypast has indexed many Catholic registers from Cheshire (along with registers for other non-conformist denominations) at www.snipca.com/52240.

In Ancestry, you'll find registers in the Card Catalogue by searching for 'Catholic'. Many Irish Catholics settled in Liverpool, and Ancestry has separate collections for the city: baptisms 1741-1919 (www.snipca.com/52241); Marriages 1754-1933 (www.snipca.com/52242); and Burials 1813-1985 (www.snipca.com/52243). I found the 1866 baptism of Joseph McCartney, grandfather of Sir Paul McCartney, in the registers of St Antony's parish, Liverpool (see screenshot below).



Judith found the baptism of Paul McCartney's grandfather in Ancestry's baptism records

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

I have a standard marriage certificate for my great-grandmother, Hannah Denner, for 28 October 1871, from the Abergavenny Register Office. However, I've found a 'Notice of Marriage', dated 3 October, in which Hannah states her intention to marry within three months. The document is linked to the local workhouse. Does this mean she was resident there and, if so, why did she have to declare her intention to marry?

Derek Brewer

The document you're referring to gives 'notice to marry', which was the

civil equivalent of marriage banns, although not many records survive today. For legal purposes, Hannah Denner had to apply to the Superintendent Registrar at the Abergavenny Register Office and declare that there was no impediment to her forthcoming marriage. It appears that Ancestry has included this notice with its new workhouse records, but there's no evidence that Hannah was actually an inmate at the workhouse.



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

SYSTEM-INFORMATION TOOL

Glow 24.15

www.snipca.com/52372

What you need: Windows 10 or 11



Glow has quickly become our favourite free program for checking system information, with each update adding even more useful details and options. This new version – which the developer says will be the last one of 2024 – is no exception, with lots of new data and tools to explore.

In its Operating System section, Glow now tells you whether the 'fast startup' feature (which it calls 'fast boot') is enabled in Windows, as well as your Windows activation type – Retail, OEM or Volume – and the version of WebView2 (a Chromium-based browser engine) used by Microsoft Edge.

The Motherboard section now includes details of your motherboard's manufacturer and system-model family, while the Processor section has added technical information about your CPU's version number, feature set and management engine (Intel processors only).

Visit the Storage section to check if the encryption feature BitLocker is enabled on your PC, and – if so – which encryption method it's using for the current drive.

Glow has added several new tools to its Tools menu in the top-right corner. These include a Network Troubleshooting Tool, which diagnoses and fixes problems with your internet connection, and a Wi-Fi Password Showing Tool, which reveals the passwords of Wi-Fi networks you've previously connected to. It has also improved the speed and presentation of its Cache Cleanup Tool, to make it easier to delete junk files from specific folders.

Under the bonnet, Glow's algorithms have been tweaked to make it load information up to 30-per-cent faster, and use your CPU and RAM more efficiently. The developer now has a proper website (see link above left) as well as a GitHub page (www.snipca.com/52377), where you can download Glow and the developer's other software directly.

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

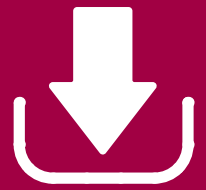


1 Glow has improved its Battery Report feature to make it easier to save laptop-battery reports for future reference. Click 'Generate Battery Report' to create a report with a unique name and save it to your desktop. Click 'Yes' to open and read the report.

2 When you run Glow's Cache Cleanup Tool, either by choosing it in the Tools menu or by pressing Ctrl+W, you can use its new options to clean junk files from the Windows Prefetch, Windows Update Cache and Windows Icon Cache folders.

3 To diagnose problems with your network connection, either click the Tools menu and select the new Network Troubleshooting Tool, or press Ctrl+O to launch it. Click the 'Start Network Repair' button to detect and fix network problems.

4 The new Wi-Fi Password Showing Tool, which you can launch by pressing Ctrl+P, reveals the passwords of networks you've previously connected to. Select a network and click Copy Wi-Fi Password to save the information to your clipboard.



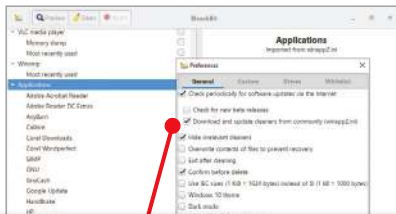
SYSTEM CLEANER

BleachBit 4.6.2

www.snipca.com/52371

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

BleachBit is one of the best free tools for removing junk files from Windows and this update makes its clean-ups even more thorough. It now deletes more **cookies, cached**



Download and update cleaners from community

data and session information from Chrome, to stop the browser storing details of your web activities. It has also fixed an error that caused BleachBit's name to appear with a long description in Windows Task Manager. However, the biggest change is the expansion of the 'Winapp2.ini' file to cover additional programs. To include these in BleachBit, click the menu button in the top-left corner and choose Preferences, then General. Tick the 'Download and update cleaners from community (winapp2.ini)' box (see screenshot) to unlock hundreds of extra cleaning options. Click 'More info' then 'Run anyway' if BleachBit triggers a security warning – it's completely safe to use.

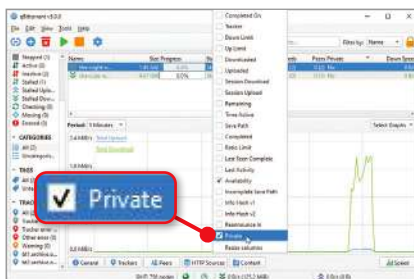
TORRENTING TOOL

qBittorrent 5

www.snipca.com/52375

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

There are lots of legal uses for **torrents** – from sharing large files to downloading content from the Internet Archive – but some torrenting software includes ads and trackers.



qBittorrent is one of the most trustworthy tools, and this new version has a host of new features and improvements. You can now pause and resume an entire torrenting session, rather than just individual downloads; set the program to shut down your computer automatically once all downloads are complete; and move files to a Trash folder rather than permanently delete them. Another useful addition lets you check the privacy of your torrents – click the column-titles toolbar and tick Private (see screenshot) to add that column to qBittorrent. The updated code in version 5 means the program no longer supports Windows 7 and 8.1, or **32bit** systems.

SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

MagicPods

www.snipca.com/52386

Price: £1.69 **Free trial period:** 14 days

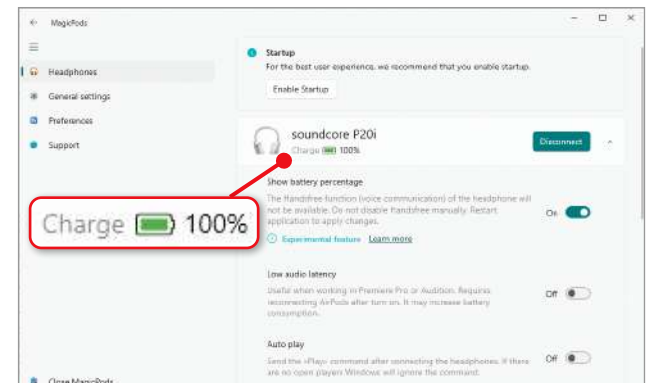
What you need: Windows 10 or 11

Although the Bluetooth feature in Windows makes it easy to connect wireless headphones to your PC, its settings are otherwise pretty basic. MagicPods adds extra options for managing Bluetooth audio devices, though some are limited to Apple AirPods.

One of the app's most useful functions is the ability to view the battery level of your Bluetooth earbuds or headphones. The current battery percentage is shown both in the Headphones section of the MagicPods interface (see screenshot) and as a number in its system-tray icon. You can set Windows to display a notification – or announce one – when the battery charge dips below a certain level.

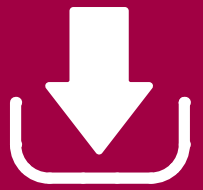
As well as streaming sound to your ears, MagicPods works the other way round by letting you stream audio from other Bluetooth-enabled devices to your PC. This effectively turns your computer into a Bluetooth speaker, and is useful for listening to music from your phone when you don't have headphones to hand. Just right-click the MagicPods system-tray icon and choose 'Stream from [name of Bluetooth device]'

The app first requires you to pair your Bluetooth headphones and other devices with your PC, but is very easy to use. It offers 'Ear detection' for AirPods, so audio automatically pauses and resumes when you remove and reinsert earbuds, while for other devices you can use a **hotkey** to control playback.



OUR VERDICT: Pay for it

MagicPods is a great little app for anyone who listens to music, audiobooks and podcasts through Bluetooth headphones while sitting at their PC. It costs less than the price of a coffee, and you can try it for free for two weeks.



What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

What's the best program for writing a book?

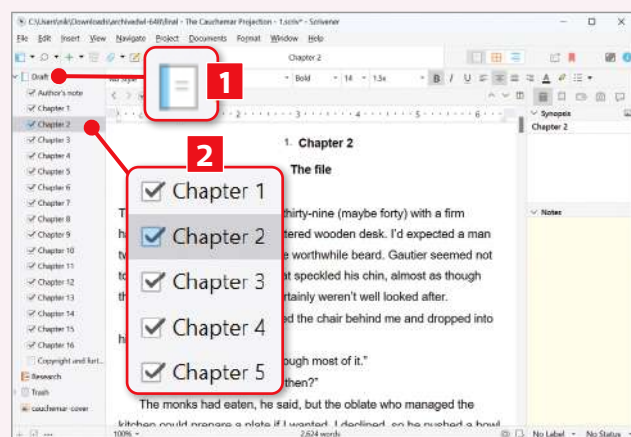
Q I'm planning to write a book on the history of our Norfolk village, and I need a simple program that would make this easier. Friends say I could use Microsoft Word, but surely more specialised software is available. Is there anything that could help me self-publish the book when it's finished, too?

Paul Robinson

A Scrivener (www.snipca.com/52185) was designed for precisely this task, and we've used it to write several books over the years. It can help with all three phases of the process – plotting, writing and publishing – with a clever binder design (1 in our screenshot) that helps you organise your book into chapters (2), rearrange them as you work on the text, then output it as a PDF or electronic book when you've finished.

We've found that it greatly simplifies the process of writing both fiction and non-fiction books, as well as longer pieces of structured journalism, such as extended features.

Scrivener costs £55, but it's worth every penny. You can download a free trial that runs for 30 days – and that doesn't mean 30 days from installation, but 30 days of actual use. So, if you were to use it only on Saturdays and Sundays, it would keep running for 15 weeks before you needed to pay for a licence. Maintain a disciplined work schedule and that might give you enough time to finish your book.



Can I back up to external drives automatically?

Q Is there a free backup program that can synchronise files to external drives or NAS drives? I currently have a WD external hard drive and use Windows' built-in sync program to create backups, but I have to start this manually. Is there a program that syncs automatically?



Keith Moody

A Try the free FreeFileSync (www.freefilesync.org, pictured). Once you've set your source and destination options, it checks files in the source folders and copies them to the backup device only if it spots a change. You can use it to create a batch file, which is a set (or 'batch') of instructions for running the synchronisation process, and then set it to run at intervals using Windows Task Scheduler. Follow the instructions at www.snipca.com/52183.

Which 3D scanning app works on my Android devices?

Q In Issue 693 (page 44) you recommend Scaniverse (www.scaniverse.com) for 3D scanning. I use Polycam (www.poly.cam), but wanted to try Scaniverse. Unfortunately, when I tried to download it to my Samsung Galaxy A40 phone and Galaxy S6 tablet, I was told it's not compatible. Is there an alternative?

Frank Hodder



A Most 3D scanning apps are free to install but charge you to download your rendered model, though Kiri Engine (www.snipca.com/52184) gives you three free downloads a week. We tried it on a Google Pixel 5 (released in 2020) and made this basic model of a miniature pink gin bottle using the automatic capture mode.

Named & Shamed



Keumars Afifi-Sabet puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software trying to trick you

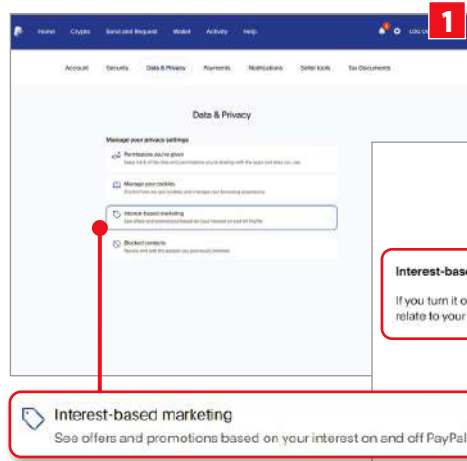
SOFTWARE WARNING!

PayPal swaps your data for targeted adverts

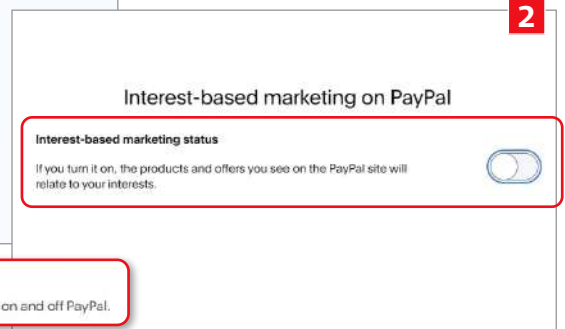
Whenever a tech company promises to make its service “more personalised for you”, it’s usually at the expense of your privacy. That’s certainly the case with PayPal’s astonishingly misguided decision to share your shopping data with almost everyone on the planet. The company says on its US ‘Policy Updates’ page that this information includes “products, preferences, sizes, and styles we think you’ll like” (www.snipca.com/52387). Oh joy! As if we don’t get enough personalised online adverts already.

It doesn’t affect US PayPal users until the end of November, but UK members have been tracked since 10 October (www.snipca.com/52389). The latest version of its UK Policy Updates pages says: “We are clarifying that merchants are permitted to share customer personal information provided to them by PayPal with their service providers.”

By ‘merchants’ it means any business that accepts payments through PayPal, and by ‘service providers’ it means any



1 Click ‘Data & Privacy’ followed by ‘Interest-based marketing’...



...then turn off the ticked sliders to stop PayPal sharing your data

business that helps those merchants operate. I have no idea how many companies that encompasses, and I seriously doubt PayPal does either.

What’s truly flabbergasting though is that this being activated by default. PayPal says you can turn it off, but doesn’t explain how – leave that to us. Log into PayPal, then click MyPayPal at the top followed by the settings cog. Next, click

‘Data & Privacy’ at the top, then ‘Interest-based marketing’ (see screenshot 1). You’ll be shown two options – click them and you’ll see both have been turned on by default. Reverse this by unticking the slider – see screenshot 2.

Now choose whether to keep using PayPal or – like me – seek alternatives that take your privacy more seriously.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?



WHAT THEY SAY

Microsoft on its new icon design
www.snipca.com/52215

“Much like a forest, where each new season brings new growth and transformation, our illustrations reside in a perpetual state of evolution. There is no ‘end product’. Rather, each set of illustrations creates fertile ground for more refined work to grow from in the future.”

WHAT THEY MEAN

There is in fact an ‘end product’ and it looks awful, but not as awful as our explanation of it.

KEUMARS’ VILLAINS OF THE FORTNIGHT

Maksim and Viktor Yakubets



There are several ways fathers can give their sons a helping hand – pay for driving lessons maybe, or lend money for a house deposit. But Viktor



Yakubets (pictured second from the right) took the less conventional route of laundering money stolen by his hacker son Maksim (far left), head of the Russian gang Evil Corp.

The gang has made \$300m infecting banks, hospitals and companies with ransomware, often

working with the equally vile LockBit hackers. Viktor has previously denied aiding his son, but recent investigations

from UK, US and Australian agencies show otherwise.

The UK Government has now sanctioned Maksim and Viktor, along with Artem Yakubets (furthest right), another of Viktor’s criminal offspring. Not a bunch you’d like to come up against on *Family Fortunes*.

Credit: National Crime Agency

LAPTOP | £1,350 from Lenovo www.snipca.com/52204

Lenovo Yoga Slim 7x

Chief pilot

This is the third AI-ready Copilot+ laptop we've reviewed, following the Asus Vivobook S15 (£1,299 from www.snipca.com/51051, tested in Issue 688) and the HP OmniBook X 14 (£1,199 from www.snipca.com/52075, Issue 694). At just 12.9mm thick, it's the slimmest model yet, taking full advantage of the Qualcomm Snapdragon X Elite processor that's common to all three laptops. This processor includes an NPU that runs at 45 TOPS, faster than the minimum 40 TOPS a laptop needs to get into Microsoft's Copilot+ club. This helps it run AI-related tasks faster than other PCs, including tools in the Copilot+ version of Windows such as image creation, and live captions and translation of video.

“A well-built AI-ready laptop with a beautiful screen, but pricey”

Note, however, that this ARM processor has a different architecture to the Intel and AMD chips found in most Windows laptops, which means it works well with most but not all Windows programs. Unsupported software includes some of Adobe's creative tools, security programs from Avast, Avira, Kaspersky and Webroot, a few games including Fortnite, and the Google Drive software that syncs



the company's cloud storage to your PC.

The Yoga Slim 7x we review here comes with 32GB of RAM and a 1TB SSD, and costs £1,350 if you buy from Lenovo. You can shave the price down to £1,300 by halving the RAM to 16GB (www.snipca.com/52206). You could also reduce the storage to 512GB, bringing the price down to £1,250 (www.snipca.com/52207).

Our benchmark tests show it's faster than the HP OmniBook, but slightly slower than the Asus Vivobook. However, its battery lasted an impressive 16 hours and two minutes in our 'light use' test, which simulates someone using the laptop to write, browse the web and make video calls.

That's a considerable achievement when you consider the demands of its 14.5in OLED screen. It's incredibly sharp thanks to its resolution of 2944 x 1840 pixels, which is slightly higher than the Vivobook's screen, and it peaked at a superb 508cd/m² in our brightness tests. It also covers 100 per cent of the DCI-P3 colour standard, making it an excellent screen for the price.

SPECIFICATIONS

12-core Qualcomm Snapdragon X Elite processor • 45 TOPS • 32GB RAM • Qualcomm Adreno graphics • 14.5in 2994x1840-pixel OLED display • 1TB SSD • 1080p webcam • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 5.3 • 3x USB-C ports • Windows 11 Home • 12.9x325x225mm (HxWxD) • 1.3kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/52204

We've seen Lenovo sacrifice keyboard quality in laptops that aren't part of its business-friendly ThinkPad range, but that's not the case here. Key presses feel firm and the backlighting is excellent.

The 135x80mm glass touchpad is top quality and a great complement to the touchscreen. The IR camera also supports Windows Hello, which works perfectly.

One compromise is the number of ports. The chassis is too thin for many full-size ports, so instead you get three USB-C ports and a USB-C adapter. This adds a 3.5mm headphone jack, a USB 3.0 port, an HDMI port and a VGA output. Ethernet would have been more useful than VGA, but the laptop's Wi-Fi 7 and Bluetooth 5.3 will enable fast connections to the internet and other wireless devices.

VERDICT Arguably the best-built Copilot+ laptop we've seen to date, but that's reflected in its high price



ALTERNATIVE Dell Inspiron 14 Plus £799 Dell's laptop doesn't have the OLED screen or Copilot+ AI tools, but its Windows performance is just as good, and it costs a lot less



MINI PC | £409 from Amazon www.snipca.com/52216

Beelink EQR6

Ryzen star

The Beelink EQR6 mini PC uses an older AMD processor to provide decent Windows performance at a reasonable price. The model we've reviewed sits at the top of the range of options, with an AMD Ryzen 9 6900HX processor, 24GB of RAM and 1TB of storage. As is usual with mini PCs, other versions with lesser processors and different RAM and storage configurations are also available.

“A great PC for office work, email and web browsing – if you can get it at a discount”

The Ryzen 9 6900HX processor first appeared at the start of 2022, so it's a couple of years old now, but it was state of the art when it was launched. This means the EQR6 is not the most powerful PC you can buy today, but its specification is good enough for anyone who spends most of their time doing office-type work in Windows.

At the time of writing, the PC was available from Amazon for £409, a significant discount on the recommended retail price of £639,

SPECIFICATIONS

8-core AMD Ryzen 9 6900HX processor • 24GB RAM • Radeon 680M graphics • 1TB SSD • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.2 • 2x Gigabit Ethernet port • 1x USB-C port • 3x USB 3.0 ports • 1x USB 2.0 port • 2x HDMI ports • Windows 11 Pro • 46x126x126mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/52216



though this was labelled as a “limited time deal” so it may not be available at that price by the time you read this. You can also buy directly from Beelink at www.snipca.com/52218 for £343.19, although as the company is based in and delivers from China, you may end up paying more than that to get it through customs.

To see how much difference the older processor makes to the PC's performance, we compared it with that of our current favourite mini PC, the Geekom A8 (£899 from www.snipca.com/51157, tested in Issue 689). The A8 features a Ryzen 9 8945HS processor, which is more recent than the EQR6's version. As the A8 also has more RAM (32GB) and storage (2TB), it's easy to see why it's more expensive.

This higher price seems justified. Our benchmark tests show the Beelink EQR6 running at around two thirds of the speed of the A8, with the newer processor proving more proficient at tasks that call for raw processing power and advanced graphics. If you intend to use your computer mainly to work on office documents, read emails and browse websites, the EQR6 will suffice for now, but it may struggle to run more demanding software.

At its current discount, the EQR6 is great value, as long as your needs are relatively modest. If Amazon hikes the price back up to £639, however, you'd almost certainly be better off buying the pricier but more capable Geekom A8.

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 This mini PC has an old processor but is still great value for general Windows work if you can buy it at a discount



ALTERNATIVE Geekom A8 £899

More expensive, but a modern processor and extra RAM and storage give it greater power and longevity



ROUTER | £120 from Amazon www.snipca.com/52252

TP-Link Archer BE3600

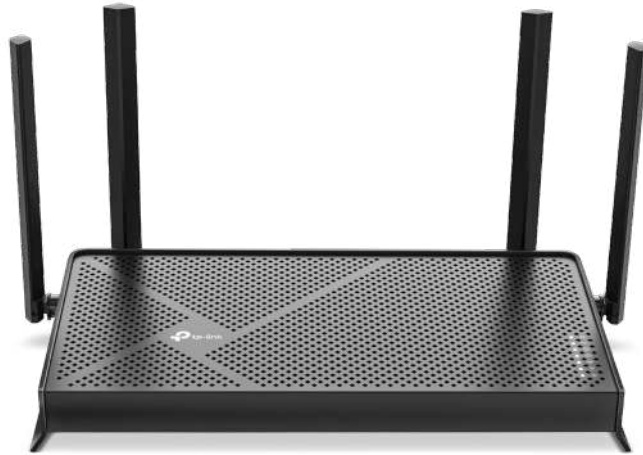
Mixed signals

Until recently, Wi-Fi 7 has been an expensive upgrade for those seeking the fastest wireless network speeds, with routers costing many hundreds of pounds. Netgear's Nighthawk RS300 (£300 from Amazon at www.snipca.com/51974, reviewed in Issue 693) made the technology more affordable. Now TP-Link is in on the act, with the Archer BE3600 promising Wi-Fi 7 for a phenomenally low price of £119.99. The question is, what has TP-Link left out to get the price so low?

“A quick router for wired networks, but a poor choice for Wi-Fi 7”

The answer is that it's a dual-band router, limited to the 5GHz and 2.4GHz channels. It doesn't have a third radio for 6GHz devices, which isn't formally part of the Wi-Fi 7 specification, but every other Wi-Fi 7 router we've seen so far offers it. A third channel would speed up the network by providing a separate signal for compatible devices to use at top speeds, taking them off the busier 2.4GHz and 5GHz networks.

The wired networking options are less disappointing. The router has two 2.5GB Ethernet ports, so you can connect one to your broadband connection and share it with another wired device without compromising speed. It has more than enough bandwidth for fast broadband connections, and should continue to do so even if you get faster speeds.



The BE3600 is housed in a reasonably slim black plastic case with four antennas extending from the back and sides. Its LED lights are visible through holes on top, and all the ports are at the back (pictured below left). These include a single USB 3.0 port, four LAN ports and one WAN port (for the incoming connection), as well as a socket for the power supply. The WAN port and one of the LAN ports are 2.5GB versions and clearly labelled as such. Four buttons – also on the back – let you switch the power on, initiate WPS connections, switch off the LEDs and disable the Wi-Fi.

Setting up the router is easy thanks to TP-Link's mobile app. TP-Link's web interface is the easiest way to access all the router's features, which are worth exploring because not all the options you might want are switched on by default. A good example of this is a feature called Multi-Link Operation (MLO), which lets Wi-Fi 7 devices operate on the 5GHz and 2.4GHz bands simultaneously for higher speeds and increased reliability.

The router can act as part of a mesh system, which sends data between devices that are far apart by routing the signal through intermediary devices. As the BE3600 lacks a 6GHz network, however, there's no option for a dedicated backhaul channel to handle the extra data, so it isn't ideal for Mesh Wi-Fi.

SPECIFICATIONS

Dual-band Wi-Fi 7 • Supports Wi-Fi speeds up to 3,570Mbps • 2x 2.5 Gigabit Ethernet ports • 3x Gigabit Ethernet ports • 1x USB 3.0 port • 42x273x147mm • 550g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/52252

We'd usually test a Wi-Fi 7 router by transferring data to and from another Wi-Fi 7 device over the 6GHz network, but obviously that wasn't possible with this model. It still proved fast enough to share our 910Mbps broadband connection at full speed using the 5GHz network at close range. That's great for the time being, but in the longer term, as you acquire more Wi-Fi 7 devices that could take advantage of a 6GHz network, we think this router's shortcomings will become more apparent.

Another aspect we don't like is that the router comes with only basic security protection and family administrator tools. It then encourages you to pay for an upgrade to get advanced parental controls and added security protection. This costs more than £50 per year, which is an expensive ongoing cost.

VERDICT While technically a Wi-Fi 7 router, it lacks 6GHz networking and requires a subscription to get the most from its security features, so it isn't as good value as it looks



ALTERNATIVE Netgear Nighthawk RS300 £300

This Wi-Fi 7 router is more than twice the price but it's a better buy, with more of the benefits that makes Wi-Fi 7 so attractive



SMARTPHONE | £799 from Amazon www.snipca.com/52317

Apple iPhone 16

Pressing matters

In previous iPhone generations there has been a big difference between the specifications of the standard iPhone and its iPhone Pro stablemate – usually because Pro models have brand new Apple processors that are handed down to the cheaper models only when the next generation comes out. That hasn't happened this time round, so the basic iPhone 16 comes with the same A18 processor as its more expensive sibling.

“Slick operation, a stunning screen and fantastic pictures”

In our **benchmark** tests the new processor runs 30-per-cent faster than the iPhone 15, so there's a marked speed improvement over the previous model. It also performs better than recent flagship Android phones, slightly quicker than the Samsung Galaxy S24 and easily beating the Google Pixel 9 by around 60 per cent. That means the vast majority of apps run faster on this iPhone than on rival Android devices.

It's not so fast running games though. In these tests the Galaxy S24 provided better performance with higher **frame rates**. However, the iPhone still beats the Pixel 9's results.

The basic iPhone that we've reviewed here has a 6.1in screen and comes in three storage options – 128GB (£799), 256GB (£899) and 512GB (£1,099). The larger iPhone Plus has a 6.7in screen for £100 more, while the Pro comes in two sizes, 6.3in and 6.9in, starting at

SPECIFICATIONS

Six-core Apple A18 processor • 128GB, 256GB or 512GB storage • 6.1in 2556x1179-pixel OLED screen • 48-megapixel rear camera • 12-megapixel ultrawide camera • 12-megapixel front-facing camera • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 5.3 • iOS 18 • 148x72x7.8mm (HxWxD) • 170g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/52317



£999 and £1,199 respectively.

The screen is simply stunning, with a sharp 2556x1179-pixel resolution and a maximum brightness level of 2,000cd/m², meaning it can be used outside on the brightest of days.

But what's more interesting are two new buttons. The Action Button was introduced on the 15th-generation iPhone Pros, launched last year. You can set this to perform many tasks, from switching on the torch to turning on silent mode and using the magnifier to increase text size (see www.snipca.com/52439 for more).

The other is the Camera Control button. This can be operated in a variety of ways, using different levels of pressure, **haptic feedback** and even as a slider. It's intended to be mostly used to take photos, zoom in and out, and access and manage the camera's settings.

As you'd expect the cameras take fantastic pictures that are easily as good – if not better – than you'll find on any other smartphone. However, with only the standard lens and **ultrawide** lens available on this model, we do miss the telephoto option that comes with the Pro.

VERDICT Arguably the best new iPhone for a few generations, with a processor that matches more expensive models and some clever and useful new buttons



ALTERNATIVE
iPhone 16 Plus £899
If you prefer a larger screen, you'll like this 6.7in model



CHOOSE THE RIGHT SPECS

Wi-Fi antennas



What are they?

The antennas on your router through which your Wi-Fi signal is transmitted and received. As a general rule, the bigger the antenna, the better the signal. But do you want a large unit with long transmitters sticking out or a small, discreet router you can hide away? To resolve this dilemma, some routers come with internal antennas, which looks neater, while others keep them on the outside to maximise their effectiveness.

How do they work?

Incoming signals are converted into data that are transferred to your computer and other connected devices, while outgoing data is converted into radio signals that are sent via the antennas.

What are the specs?

Router specifications often don't provide much detail about their antennas, though they will state how many there are and, generally speaking, the more the better. They should also state whether they're internal or external – indeed this should be clear from any accompanying photo. Omni-directional antennas send their signal out in all directions, which is useful if you have lots of devices. Directional antennas are better for concentrating all of the signal in just one area.

Can I change them later?

That depends on your router. Many use replaceable antennas that you can simply unscrew. This means you could replace small antennas with compatible larger ones from companies such as Bingfu (£7.99 from www.snipca.com/52329, pictured).

However, if your router has internal antennas, or they're moulded on to the casing, you won't be able to change them.



PORTABLE POWER BANK | £95 from Amazon www.snipca.com/52282

Cuktech 20

Depth charge

The Cuktech 20 is a 25,000mAh portable power bank with a sleek, futuristic design that makes it look more like a prop from a sci-fi movie than a typical portable battery. It can recharge just about any mobile device, even a laptop, and when at full capacity it can recharge phones and tablets multiple times. In our tests we used a fully charged Cuktech 20 to recharge an iPad once, an Apple watch twice and an iPhone three times.

On the front is a clear plastic panel with blue light strips, an LCD screen and a button that wakes up the display and switches between its two modes. The default mode shows the current charge remaining, total input wattage, total output wattage, and the watts, amps and volts coming in or going out from each port. If that's too much information, select the second mode for a larger, simplified live reading of the total input and output wattage.

With one **USB 3.0** and two **USB-C** ports on the top, the Cuktech 20 can charge three devices at once. One of the



“A chunky portable battery that will keep your laptop going”

two USB-C ports has a subtle blue connector indicating that it supports 140W fast charging for laptops. You should find that this charges your devices as quickly as if they were plugged into a wall socket.

While it's much larger than the type of power bank you might carry for topping up a phone or tablet, it's not too big to slip into a bag or rucksack. At 160mm tall and 55mm across, it's about the same size as a can of Red Bull, although it's substantially heavier at 630g.

The box comes with both USB-C and regular USB cables, but it doesn't come with its own charger, so you'll need to supply one. Cuktech says the device supports up to 110W input, which will take it from empty to full in around two hours, but the 65W laptop charger we used to test it took about three-and-a-half hours to complete the job.



SPECIFICATIONS

25,000mAh • 2x USB-C ports • 1x USB 3.0 port • Maximum 140W output • Maximum 110W input • 160x55x55mm (HxWxD) • 630g • Eighteen-month warranty www.snipca.com/52282

VERDICT A useful extra battery that should provide you with at least one complete charge for your laptop (and more for your phone) when you travel



ALTERNATIVE Anker Prime Power Bank £180 If 25,000mAh isn't enough power storage for you, Anker's power bank can hold 27,500mAh, but it's almost twice the price



WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

Can I edit video on a mini PC?

Q I have a height-adjustable desk and two monitors that I used with a work laptop. I've since retired and returned the laptop, but I kept the desk and monitors. I'm looking for a PC that will sit on top of the desk so I can use it at different heights. I think a mini PC fits the bill.

Can you tell me whether a mini PC would be powerful enough to run Adobe Premiere Elements and let me edit and render my family videos.

Dermot Kennedy

A Yes, a mini PC is perfectly suitable. While it's true that Adobe Premiere Elements can take advantage of a **graphics card**, which a mini PC is unlikely to have, this merely improves the appearance of live previews and speeds up rendering. It has no impact on the result. You can read more about what you'll be missing on Adobe's website at www.snipca.com/52290.

Our current Buy It favourite, the Geekom A8 (£899 from www.snipca.com



www.snipca.com/51157, pictured, see Issue 689, page 32) will run Premiere Elements perfectly, and with two **HDMI** ports should work well with your two monitors.

If you want to spend a bit less, the Beelink EQR6 (£409 from Amazon www.snipca.com/52216, reviewed on page 23) should also cope with Premiere Elements, but it won't run quite as smoothly.



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

Meticulous design and performance



Vand water-cooled PC

Industry-leading water cooled PC, redefining your gaming experience, delivering a harmonious blend of timeless aesthetic and unparalleled performance.

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GAME . CREATE . WIN

EARBUDS | £55 from Amazon www.snipca.com/52271

Sony WF-C510

Sounds great

Sony's products tend to come in two varieties: high-end devices for enthusiasts or surprisingly decent affordable products for the rest of us. As you may guess from the price, the WF-C510 earbuds fall into the latter category. You don't get **noise cancelling** at this price – for that you'll need to buy the excellent Sony WF-CN700N earbuds (£78 from Amazon at www.snipca.com/48438, tested in Issue 673). However, if you're using them in quieter environments or don't need to block out surrounding noise, these are impressive.

Sound quality is amazing for the price. By default the earbuds prioritise clean treble over thumping bass, but you can

SPECIFICATIONS

Bluetooth 5.3 • 11-hour battery life • Charging case extends battery life by 11 hours • 4.6g each • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/52271

experiment with the audio settings using Sony's excellent app for Apple and Android devices.

They're well designed, too. The buds remained in our ears during bike rides and gym workouts, thanks to the grippy texture of the tips and the overall lightness of each bud (4.6g). The charging case is light also, although this has the disadvantage of a smaller battery that offers just 11 hours of recharging time – less than most other affordable buds. Having said that, the buds themselves last for 11 hours without needing a top-up, which is impressive.

It lacks some other features you'll find in pricier earbuds, including pausing music when you remove them, and 'find my' tools that can help you track them down if you've misplaced them. However, Sony has arguably focused



on the most important elements, offering superb sound quality for an excellent price.

VERDICT Great-value earbuds that sound brilliant, but the lack of noise cancelling may be a deal breaker for some



ALTERNATIVE Sony WF-CN700N earbuds £78 These excellent Sony alternatives include noise cancelling, so they're even better for travelling and other noisy environments



MOUSE | £50 from Amazon www.snipca.com/52272

NZXT Lift 2 Ergo

Hot wired

While most rechargeable wireless mice also work as wired mice if you connect them to your computer using a cable, genuine wired mice are relatively rare. This is a pity, because without the need for batteries and radio components, wired mice can be lighter and cheaper than their wireless counterparts. The NZXT Lift 2 Ergo is a good example. It has a 26,000dpi sensor, a **polling rate** of 8,000Hz and weighs just 61g, so it feels light and is accurate in use.

As its name suggests, the Lift 2 Ergo has been designed to fit more comfortably in the hand, although it's only suitable for

SPECIFICATIONS

8,000Hz polling rate • Programmable buttons • 26,000dpi optical sensor • 2m corded cable • 41x65x128mm (HxWxD) • 61g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/52105

right-handed users. If you're left-handed, look for the Lift 2 Symm (£52.98 from Amazon www.snipca.com/52275), which is basically the same mouse but with a symmetrical case.

It isn't overloaded with features but you can configure most of its options using the supplied software. You can adjust the sensitivity and change the function of the buttons, for example. If you want different button configurations for different users or programs, you can set up multiple profiles and switch easily between them.

It lacks some of the fancier features you might usually find on this kind of mouse, such as **RGB** lighting. But these effects are aimed more at gamers, not people simply browsing the web or using Windows.



VERDICT We love wireless mice but it's annoying when they need recharging – this wired model will never run out of power



ALTERNATIVE Razer DeathAdder V3 £95 A more expensive but even more sensitive wired mouse with a 30,000dpi optical sensor



TV STREAMER | £99 from Google www.snipca.com/52334

Google TV Streamer

One iPlayer short

Google's TV-related products have had mixed levels of success with UK audiences. The Chromecast – an affordable plug-in disc that lets you stream anything you can play on your Android smartphone to a TV screen – is a brilliant device that's still available (£60 from www.snipca.com/52339). Many of the company's other products, such as smart TVs that use Google's TV interface, launched in the UK before offering all the streaming services we've come to expect, specifically BBC iPlayer and Channel 4.

“A versatile streaming device with smart-home support, but lacks BBC iPlayer and Channel 4”

Unfortunately, the new Google TV Streamer suffers from the same problem, having been released without these two key terrestrial services. There's a chance the iPlayer might follow later, as it has on other Google devices, but Channel 4's app still doesn't appear on any of them. You can launch programmes from the app on your smartphone and cast these to your TV Streamer, but there's no built-in app to browse and watch programmes using the supplied remote.

Unlike the Chromecast, the device is a set-top box, so you'll need to find some room around your TV set for it. The Streamer plugs into an HDMI port on your TV, is powered through a USB-C port and has Ethernet and Wi-Fi options for connecting to your network.

SPECIFICATIONS

4K resolution • 60FPS • Supports Dolby Vision, HDR10, HDR10+, HLG, Dolby Digital, Dolby Digital Plus and Dolby Atmos • 1x HDMI port • 1x Gigabit Ethernet port • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5.1 • 25x163x76mm (HxWxD) • 162kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/52334



Once set up there's a new Google TV interface to explore, giving you access to Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV and Disney+. There are some recommendations in the main interface, too, with plot summaries delivered courtesy of Google's Gemini AI. This is the most useful of the device's AI tools, but it also has an image generator that makes TV screensavers based on your instructions.

It also works with Google-compatible smart-home devices, which gives your TV the kind of tools you'd normally find on a Google Nest Hub (£90 from www.snipca.com/37837, reviewed in Issue 604), letting you control any smart lights and feeds from compatible cameras or doorbells.

This all makes the price more attractive for anyone thinking of getting a Hub who doesn't mind switching on their TV set instead. However, we can't get past those missing British streaming services, which are freely available on rival devices from the likes of Amazon and Roku.

VERDICT A sophisticated TV streamer and smart-home control centre, but it's disappointing that it lacks two key UK terrestrial catch-up services



ALTERNATIVE

Amazon Fire TV Cube £110 Set-top streaming box that can also help control your smart-home devices, and it does come with all UK catch-up services



DO I REALLY NEED...

A keyboard that's also a mouse?



What is it?

The HHKB Studio (£325 from www.snipca.com/52336) is a mechanical keyboard that offers a new way of controlling your cursor.

What does it do?

It saves you needing two devices on your desk. As well as the standard keys, it has a small button between the H, G and B keys (pictured), which you can use like a mini joystick to move your cursor around your screen. A number of buttons below the space bar can be used for left- and right-clicking. There are also four gesture strips that can be set to other functions, such as scrolling through open windows as if you were using the Alt+Tab shortcut.

What's the catch?

It costs more than you'd normally pay for both an excellent keyboard and a really good mouse. Also, the pointer control isn't easy to use.

So can I do without it?

Yes. It's interesting, but not better than using a keyboard and mouse.

NEXT ISSUE

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GMKtec NUCbox G5
A truly tiny Windows 11 mini PC



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

LAPTOP

Dell Inspiron 14 Plus
£799 from www.snipca.com/51831
Tested Issue 683



This laptop has the same processor (Intel Core Ultra 7 155H) as our previous favourite (Acer Swift Go 4), but manages to squeeze more speed out of it. It also comes with 16GB RAM, 512GB SSD and a 14in 2240x1400-pixel screen. Excellent value overall.

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

DESKTOP PC

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



This fast PC is a mouth-watering bargain, with 16GB of RAM, a 2TB 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 10.9in
£320 from www.snipca.com/51839
Tested Issue 646



The price of the 10th-generation iPad, released in 2022, has fallen far enough to make it better value than earlier models. If the Amazon price above has expired, get it for £349 on Apple's site.

ALTERNATIVE iPad Mini With an even better, but smaller, screen than the 10.9in iPad, the Mini also supports the Pencil and has 64GB of storage. £499 from www.snipca.com/33050

ANDROID TABLET

Samsung Galaxy Tab S9
£799 from www.snipca.com/50039
Tested Issue 667



With a much brighter screen than our previous favourite – the Galaxy Tab S8 – this is perfect for watching TV. It also has a faster processor, so tasks feel smoother, even with several windows open. £799 will get you the 128GB version. If you want 256GB you'll need to spend around £100 more.

ALTERNATIVE Lenovo Tab P11 Pro It's slower than the Tab S9 and the screen is duller, but has a detachable keyboard so you can use it as a laptop. £390 from www.snipca.com/45244

APPLE IPHONE

Apple iPhone 16
£799 from www.snipca.com/52317
Tested Issue 695



This is the best new iPhone for years, boosted by a processor that's as fast as more expensive models. The screen is excellent, while the new Camera Control button gives lots of ways to take photos.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 14 Now discounted to £599 (128GB), this remains a speedy phone with great features and an impressive camera. £599 from www.snipca.com/52411

ANDROID PHONE

Google Pixel 7a
£340 from www.snipca.com/46332
Tested Issue 660

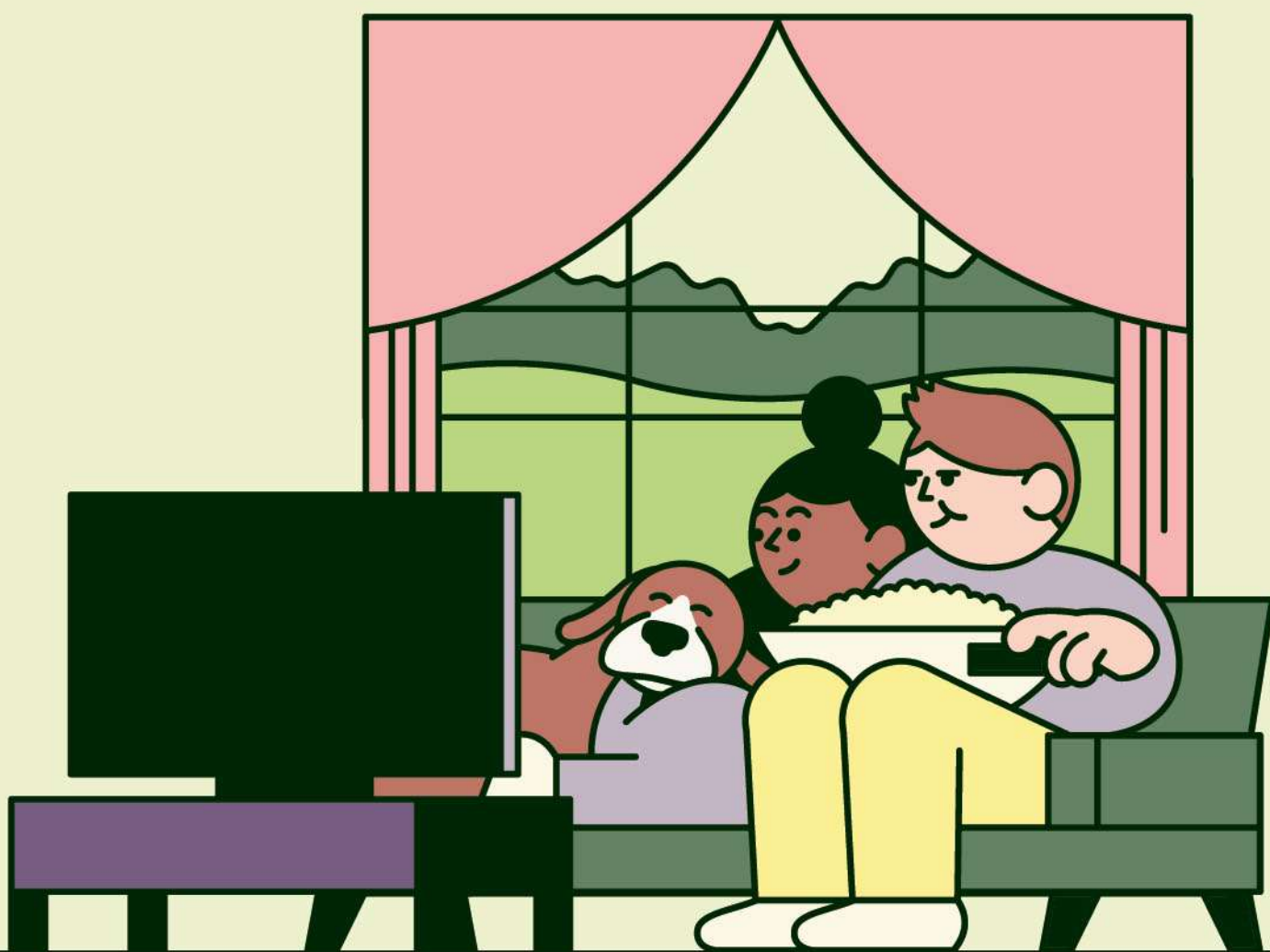


A cheaper version of Google's flagship phone, this uses AI to add clarity to photos, and lasts an impressive 10 hours. Has a fast processor and 8GB RAM to supercharge performance.

ALTERNATIVE Nothing Phone 2a Don't be put off by the odd name. This has a distinctive design, superb camera and decent battery life. From a UK company too. £319 from www.snipca.com/49930

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Buy It

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

MINI PC

Geekom A8

£899 from www.snipca.com/51157

Tested Issue 689



This tiny machine (37x112x112mm) doesn't have much room for ports, but makes up for it with a 2TB SSD, a fast processor and an SD card slot for adding storage. It comes with 32GB RAM, as does a slightly slower model that's around £170 cheaper and has only a 1TB SSD. Take your pick.

ALTERNATIVE Beelink SER8 A decent mini PC with 1TB SSD and 32GB RAM, but it's bigger than average. £849 from www.snipca.com/51331

EBOOK READER

Kobo Libra Colour

£199 from www.snipca.com/50192

Tested Issue 683



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

ALTERNATIVE Amazon Kindle This low-cost option is a good choice, especially now it has 16GB of storage. £85 from www.snipca.com/52049

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

£57 from www.snipca.com/50751

Tested Issue 608



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

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £38 from www.snipca.com/51577

PC MONITOR

Philips 27E1N1600AE

£200 from www.snipca.com/51687

Tested Issue 692



An affordable 27in monitor with a sharp resolution, impressive image quality and a sturdy build. It has an HDMI port, a USB-C port and two USB 3.0. The hefty base means you can raise and tilt the monitor easily using just one hand.

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £249 from www.snipca.com/49898

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 500GB

£66 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 £82; 2TB costs £137.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £47 from www.snipca.com/37304

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 2... Ruark Audio R1S smart radios



Winner of a Buy It! award in Issue 693 (page 29), Ruark Audio's R1S offers built-in Wi-Fi for easy access to your favourite music streaming services such as Spotify Connect, Amazon Music and Deezer – or you can stream directly from smart devices thanks to its robust Bluetooth connection.

You can also explore a huge and ever-increasing list of specialist internet radio stations from around the globe. DAB provides quality digital radio from local and national stations, while DAB+ ensures it will handle the

next generation of digital stations, too. FM means you can still pick up any stations that have yet to go digital.

The design takes the timeless medium of radio to the next level, with subtle curves, an elegant finish and hand-crafted composite wood grille. Its full-colour TFT screen shows you the time, alarm and programme information, as well as Wi-Fi sources, and album and station artwork. A light sensor automatically adjusts the screen's brightness to suit light levels, so it's a perfect bedside companion.

To enter the competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/52369 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 5 November. Good luck!

You can buy the Ruark Audio R1S digital radio for £299 from www.snipca.com/52002. For more information on Ruark Audio's products, including subwoofers, speaker systems and sound systems for TV, visit www.ruarkaudio.com.

PRINTER

Epson EcoTank ET-2830
£249 from www.snipca.com/51715
Tested Issue 676



This has recently risen in price from £180, but it's still better value than the ET-1810 because it adds copying and scanning to its functions for £79 more. Print quality is great, especially for photos, which have crisp details, vivid colours and realistic skin tones.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810
Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £170 from www.snipca.com/52191

SMART TV

**Amazon Fire TV 50in
Omni QLED**
£490 from www.snipca.com/51020
Tested Issue 694



A fantastic 50in QLED screen with 4K resolution that produces vibrant tones in bright, sunlit images and pale, subtle shades in more atmospheric scenes. It provides access to all the streaming services you need, and offers voice control through Alexa.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Q60B
Excellent colour reproduction in well-lit scenes and the picture is wonderfully sharp, especially in 4K. £490 from www.snipca.com/51020

ROUTER

Asus RT-AXE7800
£105 from www.snipca.com/52410
Tested Issue 665



This £105 offer from Argos is outstanding, but might not last long. It has Wi-Fi 6E, so will be capable of the fastest speeds on the 6GHz network. 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. £212 from www.snipca.com/52051

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HOW TO...

Remotely connect to any device to offer help

by Nick Peers

What you need: RustDesk **Time required:** 10 minutes

Trying to give or receive tech support by phone or email is a nightmare, especially if you're constantly having to explain the basics or trying to imagine what's on the screen of the ailing machine. One solution is to use remote-control software to take over the computer you're trying to fix – or to let a helper take control of yours.

You could use the Quick Assist tool in Windows, but this only works between computers, so is no help with phones and tablets. What's more, it doesn't give you administrator privileges, so you can't access all the advanced settings and tools you might need.

For many years the best alternative was TeamViewer (www.teamviewer.com). It's easy to use and works across Windows, macOS, Linux, Android and iOS/iPadOS.

However, TeamViewer has recently imposed new restrictions on its free version, which is supposed to be for "personal use" only, not business (see www.snipca.com/52265). Increasingly, it cuts sessions short if it thinks you're using the software too often – which might indicate that you're a business offering IT support. It also limits how many connections you can establish in a given period, and shows warnings if your behaviour seems too business-like.

The good news is we've found an alternative that offers all the advantages of TeamViewer with none of the charges, nags or limitations. RustDesk (<https://rustdesk.com>) is free and easy to use, and even includes a file-transfer tool for sending files between devices.

It works with Windows, macOS and Linux computers (including Chromebooks with Linux Developer Mode enabled), as well as Android devices. There's also an iOS app that lets you control other devices from your iPhone or iPad.

By default, RustDesk connects through a free public server, just as TeamViewer does. All you need to know is the device's ID and – if the remote machine is unattended – a one-time password that the program generates randomly each time you run it.

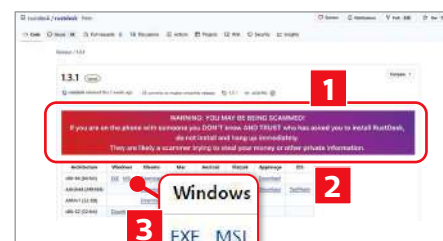
It's not quite as fast as TeamViewer, but you can improve its performance by connecting directly through your IP address (for local connections), or through your own RustDesk server. Here we explain how to set it up.

1 Install RustDesk on both devices

The first step is to install RustDesk on your device and the one you're helping to fix. Visit its GitHub page (www.snipca.com/52269) and take note of the message at the top (1 in screenshot right) warning you that scammers can try to trick you into installing RustDesk to gain control of your computer.

Now look in the box below (2) and select the correct download link for your device, and whether it's 32bit or 64bit. Most Windows users will need to click the EXE file (3).

Note that the iOS app can only control other devices – and only macOS, Windows, Linux and Android (not iPhones or iPads). This obviously means you can't receive help for an iPad or



Note the warning, then click the appropriate download link for both devices

iPhone through RustDesk. All the other platforms work with one other, so you can control a Windows laptop from an Android device, a Linux computer from a Mac, and so on.

You'll find direct links for all platforms here, including **APK** files you'll need to download for Android devices, because RustDesk isn't available in the Google Play Store (see box opposite for instructions).

Once installed, RustDesk opens automatically. Some platforms, such as macOS, may need you to configure further permissions to give RustDesk the access it needs. Simply follow the instructions.

2 Connect your devices

The main RustDesk screen contains everything you need to make and receive connections. If you're connecting to another device, ask its owner to give you its ID (1 in our screenshot below). Now type this into the Control Remote Desktop box 2 and click Connect 3. In our screenshot, our ID is 19 923 925, but we're *connecting* to a device so we've typed its ID into the box.

The person receiving help will have to wait for an access request to pop up on their device. Be patient, because this can take some time. Once they've accepted this, you'll be able to control their device.

Ask the person you're helping to look carefully at the access-request box that appears before clicking Accept. Each button gives control over a different part of their device. By default, they're all coloured blue to indicate that they're switched on – in effect giving you full control over their device.

Going from left to right in our screenshot (above right), the recipient can give you permission to control the mouse and keyboard, save items to the

How I Use RustDesk

I've long been the person my family turns to for technical support, but trying to help Dad fix a problem over the phone is a nightmare. He recently lost some files he'd been editing in LibreOffice. By taking control of his laptop with RustDesk, I was able to pinpoint the missing files and fix a few other problems at the same time.



Nick Peers



How do you help friends and relatives with their tech problems? Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk



The person receiving help can accept or refuse types of permission, such as control of mouse and keyboard

clipboard, change the audio and transfer files 1. They can also let you restart the computer or device, record video of the session and block any user input 2.

That last option lets you block the recipient from doing anything on their computer or device while you're connected to it. If that person doesn't want to give permission for any of these, they can simply click the blue button so it goes grey.

3 Change the screen's resolution

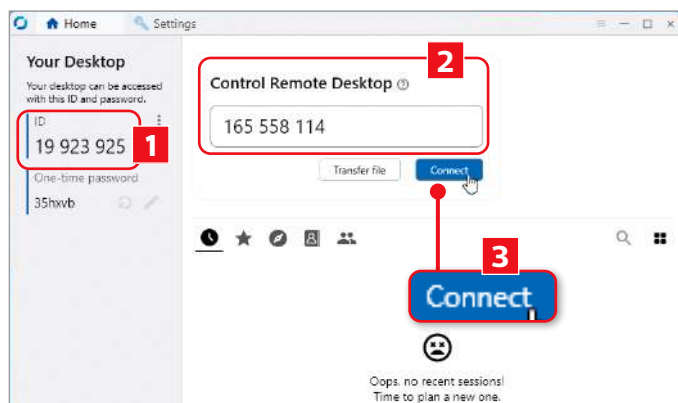
Once you've established a connection with the remote device, the remote desktop will appear in a

window on your screen. By default, RustDesk tries to render the screen at the same resolution as the remote device. In many cases, you'll find it doesn't fit within the confines of the RustDesk window, so only part of it is shown. As a result, when you move your mouse pointer over the window, you'll see the desktop move with it.

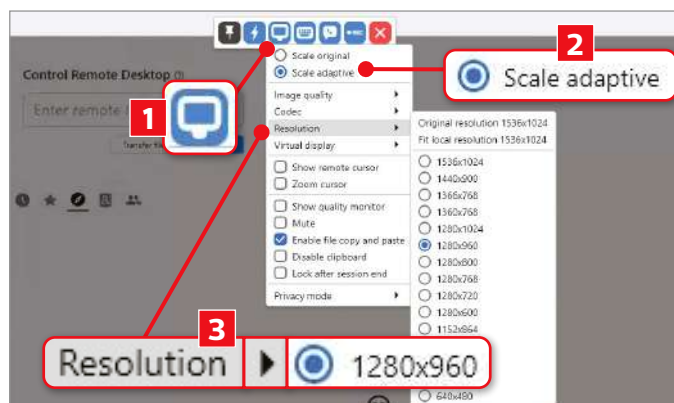
This isn't very practical – particularly if you're connecting to a device that has a higher screen resolution than your own (4K on a regular 1080p Full HD screen, for example). To change it, look at the top of the screen and click the Fullscreen button in the middle (a blue square).

To fit a larger-resolution remote display to your RustDesk window, click the arrow button to the right of Fullscreen. You'll see seven icons. Click the display icon (1 in our screenshot below), then select 'Scale adaptive' 2 to make the remote display fit the window. Alternatively, expand the Resolution submenu to change the remote device's resolution 3.

Most of the other Display options help you balance image quality with the speed of your connection. Explore the 'Image quality' menu (1 in our screenshot above right) to experiment with **bitrate** and frames per second (**fps**) settings if you

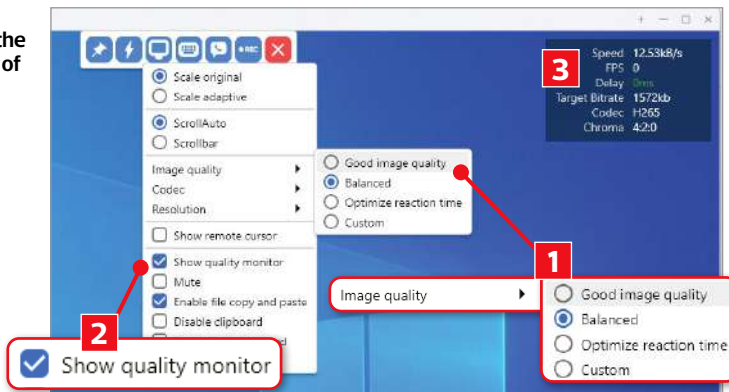


Type the ID into the Control Remote Desktop box and click Connect



Select 'Scale adaptive' to make the remote screen fit your window

Open the Display settings to change the bitrate and number of frames per second



need a better balance between image quality and how quickly the mouse and keyboard respond to your commands.

You can see the current state of your connection by ticking 'Show quality monitor' **2**. This opens a draggable box inside RustDesk that shows statistics including the connection speed, FPS, delay and target bitrate **3**.

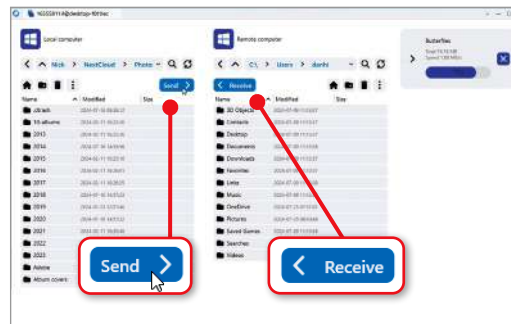
Other useful options include adding **virtual machines** to remote operating systems that support them. When added, you can arrange them across multiple displays and move between them using this menu. Under this are options to 'Show remote cursor' and 'Zoom cursor'. By default, the remote device's cursor is hidden in favour of your own, so ticking the first option lets you track the remote cursor when the device's owner moves it.

You'll also find options to mute the remote desktop's sound, disable its clipboard and lock it once you've ended the session (for security reasons). Some devices also support 'Privacy Mode'. When enabled, this hides the device's display so no one in the vicinity can see what's happening unless they press Ctrl+P (make sure you block user input to stop anyone doing this if you're accessing one of your own devices remotely).

4 Transfer files and chat

If you'd like to keep the seven-button toolbar visible at all times, click the pin button on the left. Click the lightning button next to it for options including storing the remote device's password so you can enter it with a single click when the prompt appears on the remote machine.

You'll also see a 'Transfer file' option, which opens RustDesk's file-transfer tool. Before you can use this, the program



RustDesk lets you easily share files between the connected devices

will ask you for your connection password again – or agreement from the person at the other end of the connection. You'll then see the **root directory** on both computers (see screenshot), allowing you to navigate to any folder and send files between them.

Click the speech-bubble button if you want to start a text chat or voice call. The chat will appear in a floating window on your PC, which you can drag and drop anywhere on your desktop. If you make a voice call, a pop-up box appears with the choice to Accept or Dismiss it.

The final options are a blue Record button – selecting this will record the screen as a video and save it to a RustDesk folder inside your personal Videos folder – and a red cross icon to end the session.

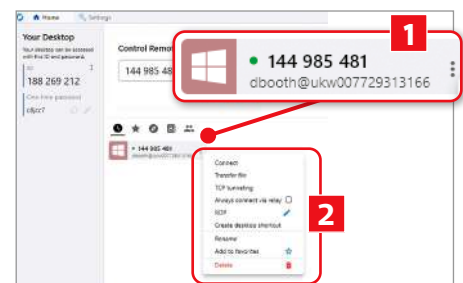
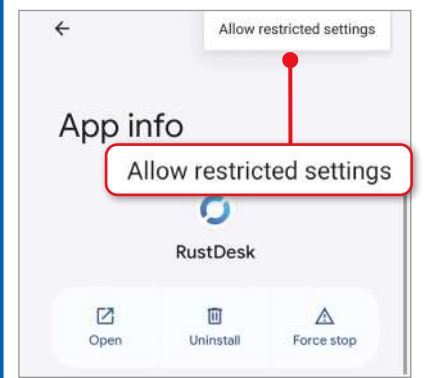
5 End the session and click shortcut to restart

When you've ended your remote session, you'll find that RustDesk has conveniently stored a shortcut to the remote machine in its 'Recent sessions' section. You can find this by clicking the clock icon in RustDesk's main screen. It shows the user and device name, with a green dot to indicate

GIVE ANDROID PERMISSION TO USE RUSTDESK

Android users need to jump through several hoops when configuring the app to allow remote control of their device. Once you've installed the app on your phone or tablet, tap 'Start Service', then read the warning message about scams. Wait for the 'I Agree' box to turn blue, then select 'Don't show again' before tapping it. Android will then prompt you to select other permissions such as 'Display over other apps' and 'files access' for transferring files.

Now open the Accessibility section on Android. You'll see that RustDesk Input is greyed out. This is because you installed it from an APK file. It's easy to fix. Open Android's settings, then tap Apps followed by RustDesk. Next, tap the three-dot menu (top right) and select 'Allow restricted settings' (see screenshot). Now return to Accessibility, where you'll be able to give RustDesk Input full control of your device.



Click this shortcut to reconnect with the remote device

when the machine is online and accessible **1** in screenshot above). Click the three-dot menu for options to connect, transfer files, create a desktop shortcut, rename and more **2**.

Workshop

Beat Google's restrictions to keep blocking ads

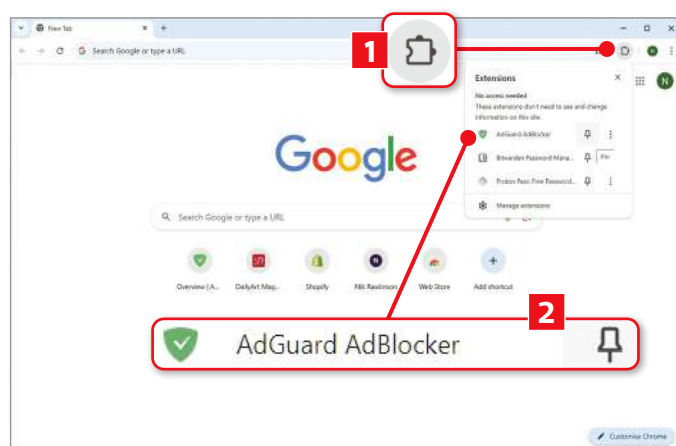
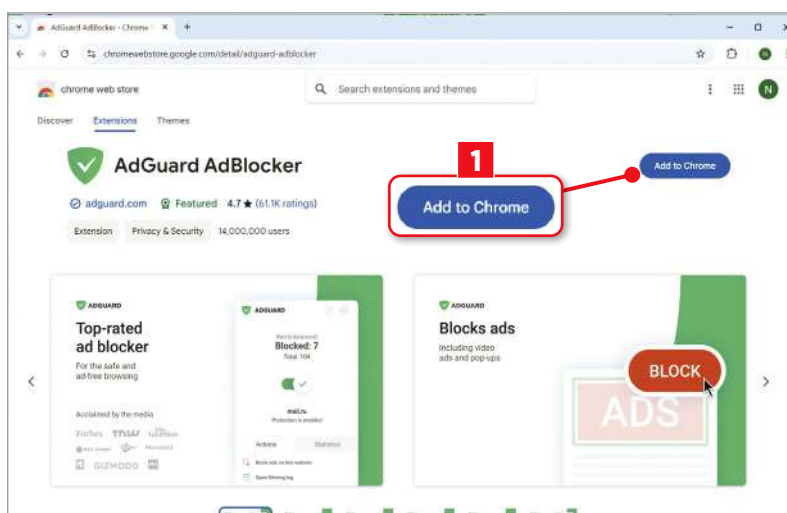
What you need: AdGuard browser plug-in
Time required: 20 minutes

Google's new **Manifest v3** standard for browser extensions has limited the ability of ad blockers to do their job on Chrome and other browsers that share its **code** (such as Brave, Edge and Opera). That's because it reduces the number of 'rules' a blocker can use when deciding

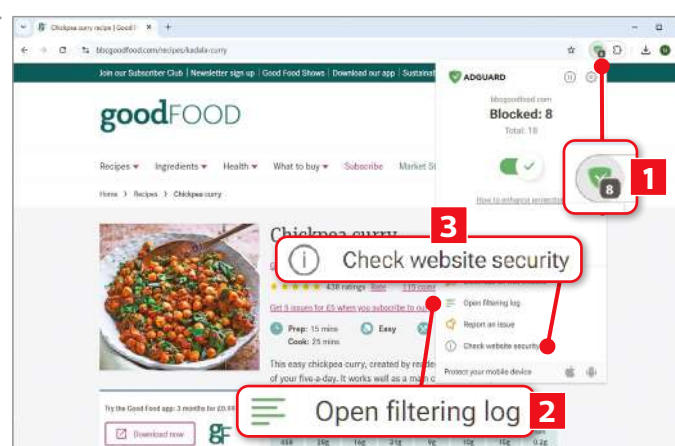
whether something on a web page is an advert. As a result, some ads might slip through because the ad-blocker doesn't recognise them as such. AdGuard believes it has a solution, and has rewritten its extension to get round the restrictions. We'll show you what you need to do.



STEP 1 Launch your Chrome-based browser (most major browsers are based on Chrome, with the notable exception of Firefox) and visit www.snipca.com/52253. Click the Install button and the site will redirect you to the appropriate installation page for your browser. Here, click the 'Add to [browser name]' button **1**. If a warning pops up, read it, and if you're happy to proceed, click the Add button to complete the process. After installation, a new page will open with an 'Install AdGuard for Windows' button. Note that although the browser extension is free, AdGuard for Windows costs £1.99 a month if you pay for a year up front.

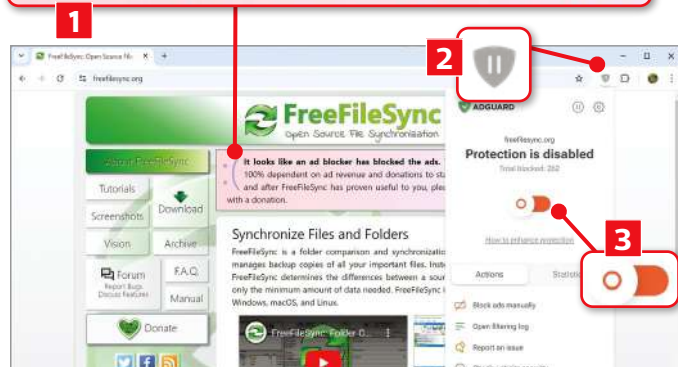


STEP 2 Once you've installed AdGuard, you can browse the web as usual and it will block ads and trackers in the background. As it does so, it logs what it's doing. If a web page appears not to be working properly, this information can help you diagnose and fix the problem. You can make it easier to access by clicking the extensions icon **1**, which looks like a jigsaw piece in Chrome, then click the thumb tack beside AdGuard AdBlocker **2** to pin it to the address bar.

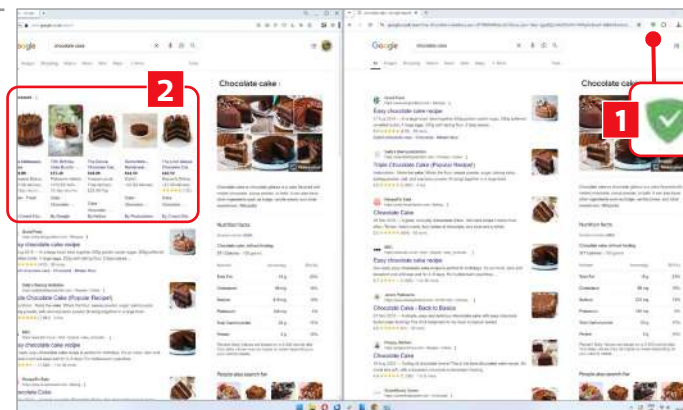


STEP 3 Visit a site you use regularly. In our example above, we've looked up a recipe for chickpea curry on BBC Good Food (which is no longer owned by the BBC and therefore now shows adverts). We can see that AdGuard has blocked eight items because there's a number '8' on the AdGuard logo **1**. If you want to see what it has blocked, click the logo followed by 'Open filtering log' **2**. If you have any doubts about a site, click 'Check website security' **3**. When we did this, AdGuard said BBC Good Food is safe.

It looks like an ad blocker has blocked the ads.

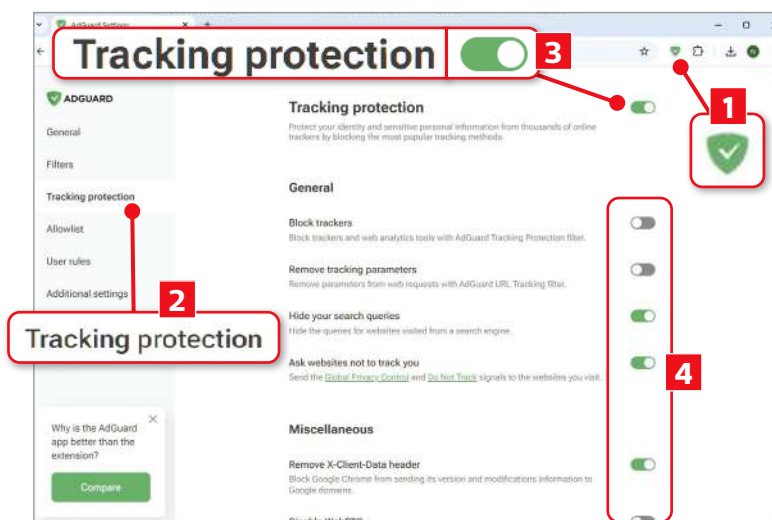


STEP 4 Some sites actively block browsers that are running ad blockers. Others, such as FreeFileSync – which relies on advertising to fund the software it makes available – simply ask you to turn off your blocker **1**. You can do this quickly and easily by clicking the AdGuard icon **2**, followed by the protection switch in the dropdown menu **3**. Once you've done that, reload the page to access the site.



STEP 5 Not all ads are blocked by default. For example, AdGuard explains that ads in web results can be useful because they are personalised, so it lets them through. If you want to block those too, click the AdGuard logo **1**, followed by the cog to open its settings, then activate the switch beside 'Block search ads and websites' self promotion'. As you can see in the examples above, we've searched for 'chocolate cake' in Opera without AdGuard and in Chrome with AdGuard. The row of ads that appears at the top of the results in Opera **2** is completely absent in Chrome.

STEP 6 AdGuard can also protect your privacy by blocking trackers, removing tracking parameters from web addresses and automatically erasing third-party cookies after a set period. To enable these and other options, click the AdGuard button **1** followed by the settings cog, then 'Tracking protection' **2** (this option is called Stealth Mode in the Opera extension). Click the slider at the top of the page **3** to switch it on, then use the sliders further down the page **4** to enable the options you want.



STEP 7 If you find yourself regularly disabling ad blocking for sites you visit often, it makes sense to add them to a whitelist – or 'allowlist'. AdGuard will avoid blocking content on any websites included in this list. You'll find the allowlist option in the sidebar **1**. To add a site to the list, click the rules box then type the site's address **2**. Put each site on a separate line, and when you've added as many as you need, click Save **3**.

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Narrow results when buying refurbished devices

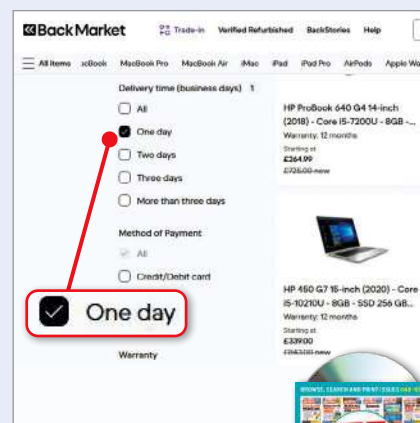
Whenever the subject of **refurbished** devices comes up, you tend to mention Back Market (www.backmarket.co.uk) as a good place to browse. What I love about this site is the comprehensive list of filters that appears down the left. These let you weed out devices you know you don't want.

As an example, I've bought three HP laptops from Back Market over the past couple of years, all refurbished and all under £300. Search for HP laptops and Back Market shows more than 630 results (or it did when I last checked).

As I'd only consider buying laptops in Excellent condition, I tick that box on the left. I also tick one-day delivery (see screenshot). If a company can promise to deliver that quickly, it must have high standards to live up to. Ticking both reduces the results to a manageable 40.

There are lots of other filters you can apply, including price, storage, year of release and colour. I know most online retailers have similar filters, but I've never used any that were as simple or well designed as these.

Mick Hamilton



Mick wins a copy of our 2023 Back Issue CD

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



PHONES

Search jigsaws saved as text file

Mike Willcocks asked what he could use to keep track of jigsaws he has completed (Issue 693, page 20). You suggested creating a spreadsheet using Collabora Office (www.snipca.com/52219) or Google Sheets. I'm an avid jigsaw puzzler and have completed hundreds over the years. I tried using spreadsheets, databases and even Word, but the simplest, easiest and quickest way to record completed jigsaws is to create a text file list. I've saved a shortcut to the file on my phone. I can open it with one tap, and search it easily. I record the names of the jigsaws I've bought and take a photo once I've finished them. Your advice was spot on, but for me it's a little

too complicated for such a simple list. Great mag though – please keep it coming.

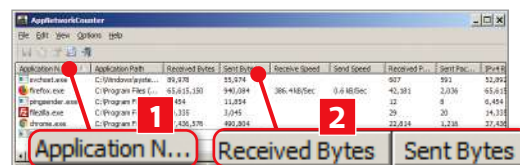
Fraser Drummond



SOFTWARE

Use NirSoft tool to monitor network traffic

In Issue 693's Problems Solved (page 64) you suggested that Alan Jeans could monitor his network traffic by delving into Windows or his router's settings. There is another option, which is to use NirSoft's excellent program AppNetworkCounter. It has several columns showing each application's name (1 in our screenshot above right), the application path, bytes sent and received (2), and the speeds of



both. It's free to download from www.snipca.com/52214. Scroll to the bottom and click either the 32bit or 64bit link.

Neil Muller

MOBILE

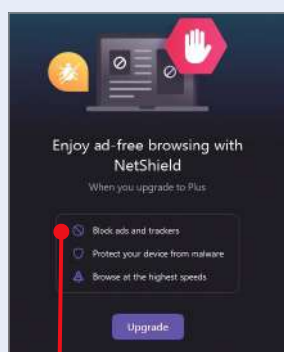
Get 30GB data with Superdrug Mobile

After reading Issue 690's 'Cancel your phone contract' Cover Feature, I opted for Superdrug Mobile's £10 monthly deal (www.snipca.com/52154, pictured above right), which

Why I stopped using...

ExpressVPN

At over £77 a year, I felt I was overpaying for ExpressVPN (www.expressvpn.com). Then when I read Issue 692's Cover Feature on using VPNs, I saw that ExpressVPN promotes itself as a way to watch live sport. That doesn't interest me, so I concluded I was paying for something I didn't need.



Block ads and trackers

And what I use instead...

From what I read about Proton VPN (<https://protonvpn.com>) in your feature, it seemed to be a much better option for me. A year's subscription cost less than £50, which is a considerable saving over ExpressVPN.

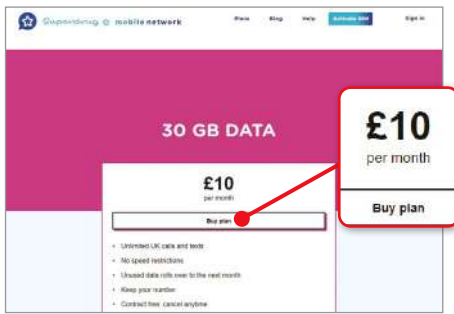
After switching, I expected to see my speeds drop or find that more

websites outside the UK were blocked, but this hasn't happened. I also expected Proton to be less proficient at blocking adverts, but again its NetShield tool (pictured) seems just as effective as ExpressVPN's equivalent.

Three weeks after switching, I'm wondering what ExpressVPN users get for their extra money. Maybe other readers could tell me.

Jon Nicholson

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



gives you 30GB data. It took a while to set up, and the £10 is *just* for the SIM – you then need to give your payment details to pay £10 for the first month (so the first month is £20). However, £10 is added to your Superdrug point card (to spend in store) if you have one. Also for three months you can get 90GB of data instead of 30GB, but you have to ask for it once you have signed for the first month – it starts from your next payment.

Paul Disney

APPLE

Take screenshots using Siri

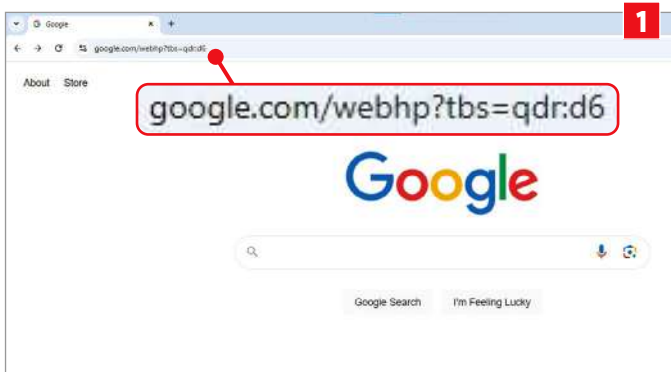
Here's a simple tip that readers might like. For ages I struggled to take screenshots on my iPad 9. Then one morning I wondered whether asking Siri would work. I said "Hey Siri" to activate it, and when it responded I said "take a screenshot". Hey presto – there it was!

Michael O'Donnell

SEARCH

Narrow Google results to a specific time period

I've always used the 'Last update' filter in Google's Advanced Search (www.snipca.com/52238) to narrow my results to the past 24 hours, week, month or year. I didn't realise until recently that you can limit your search results to any number of hours, weeks, months or years. What's more, you can create shortcuts for these, which I find very useful in Android.



Reader recommends...

Saiyin DS6305 soundbar £40 from www.snipca.com/51578

Issue 694's Cover Feature on smart TVs mentioned the importance of soundbars, so I thought I'd recommend the Saiyin DS6305, which I bought after reading your four-star review in Issue 691 (page 29). You mentioned it was designed for budget TVs, so I assumed it would suit my 43in Samsung TV, which cost me £219 earlier this year.

It made an instant difference. The TV's sound has always been tinny, but the soundbar enhanced this straight away. Dialogue is so much clearer now. I've even turned off the subtitles on some programmes!



Music is also extremely clear and bright when playing through Bluetooth, and I like the way the light turns blue when in this mode.

I can't pretend it looks great. In fact, when I first opened the package I thought it felt cheap and plastic. But then it is cheap and plastic! For £40 it's the best bargain I've bought for years.

Oliver Colville

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

For instance, type www.google.com/webhp?tbs=qdr:XX into your browser's address bar, then type **qdr:XX** at the end – where **X** is the period of time you want to narrow the results to. So, typing **qdr:h3** will narrow the results to the past three hours; **qdr:d3** to past three days; **qdr:w3** to past three weeks; **qdr:m3** to past three months; and **qdr:y3** to past three years.

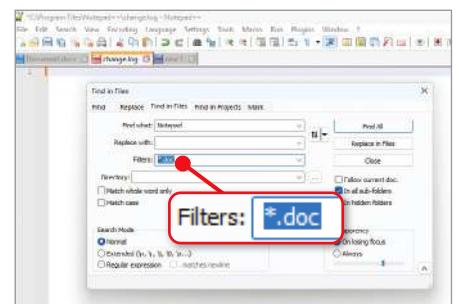
Screenshot 1 (below left) shows what you'd have to type to narrow results to the past six days. Type a search term then press Enter and you'll see that Google has preselected '6 days' at the left 2 on the results page. You can then bookmark it or set it as a custom search to use when needed.

Steve Bown

SOFTWARE

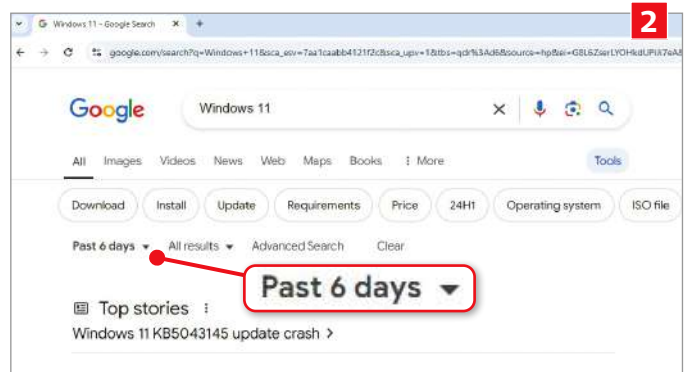
Find file types in Notepad++

In Issue 692's Readers' Tips, Morvyn Finch says he wished there



were a way to find specific file types in Notepad++ (www.snipca.com/51771). He can do this by clicking Search at the top, then 'Find in Files' (or pressing Ctrl+Shift+F). Next, click in the Filters box and replace *.* (meaning all file types) with, for example, *.doc (see screenshot above), *.docx, *.htm, *.html and *.pdf. I often use this technique to erase hundreds of .htm files – across many folders and subfolders – in one go, without having to open every folder.

Nick Adams



Browser Tips

CHROME Sideload extensions that Google has blocked

Chrome 130, released 9 October, implements the first stage of Google's controversial plan to kill off Manifest V2 (MV2) extensions. When you try to install MV2 add-ons such as uBlock Origin from the Chrome Web Store, you're now told that: "This extension is no longer available because it doesn't follow best practices for Chrome extensions". Previously, the message said "may soon no longer be supported".

For now, you can continue to use MV2 extensions you already have installed, but to install one, you'll need to **sideload** it in the browser. Check if the extension has a

GitHub repository and, if it does, open the Releases page – for example, uBlock Origin's page is at www.snipca.com/52208. Find the latest version of the extension, download the Chromium ZIP file listed under Assets and extract its contents.

Next, go to the Extensions page in Chrome (type `chrome://extensions` into the address bar) and switch on 'Developer mode' in the top-right corner (1 in screenshot below). Click the 'Load unpacked' button in the top-left corner (2), browse to the extension you downloaded and select the folder that contains all its files.

You should now see an 'Extension loaded' message confirming that the

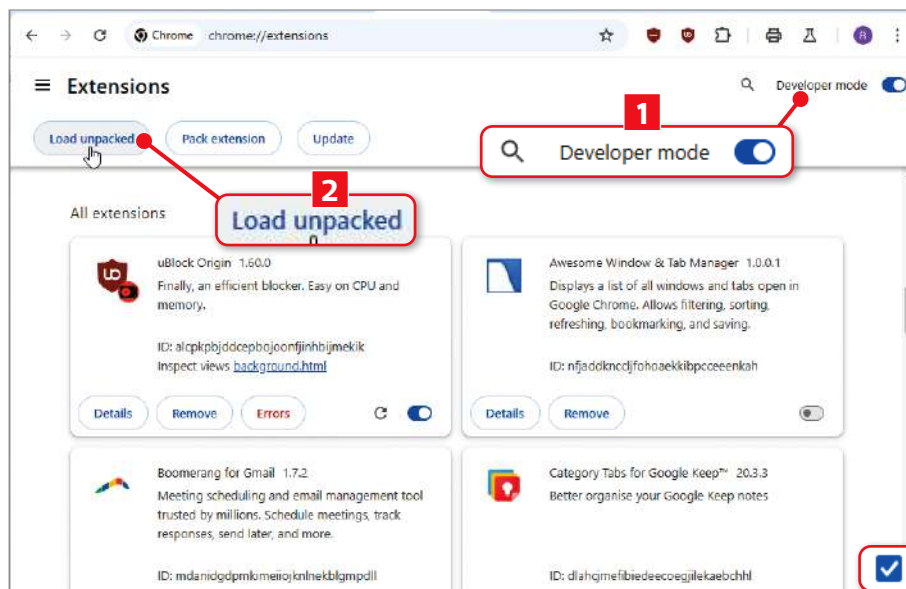
extension has been installed. It may show an error when Chrome detects its Manifest version, but other than that it should work as intended. You can turn it back on if it's disabled – until Google permanently blocks MV2 extensions.

See our 'Stop Google breaking your browser extensions' feature in Issue 691 (page 61) for more advice on this subject.

FIREFOX Switch to picture-in-picture mode automatically

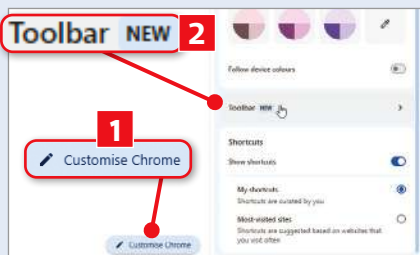
Firefox's **picture-in-picture** (PiP) mode lets you pop out videos from sites such as YouTube into a floating player window, so you can continue watching while getting on with other tasks. To switch to PiP mode, you usually have to click an icon on the video that looks like a big screen pointing at a smaller one, but Firefox 130 – released in September – adds the useful option to switch automatically.

This means if you're watching a video and open a new tab or switch to another one, the video will continue playing in a



WORKSHOP Add new buttons to Chrome's toolbar

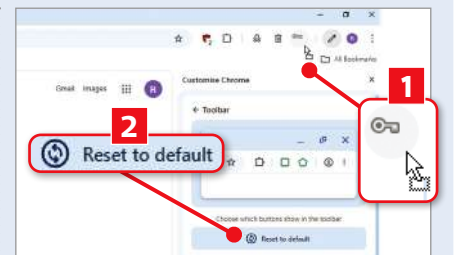
In Issue 688 (page 42), we explained how to use an experimental option to pin new buttons to Chrome's toolbar, giving you one-click access to useful tools. Version 130 of the browser makes this feature official – here's how it works.



1 Open a new tab in Chrome and click the Customise Chrome button in the bottom-right corner of the page (1). In the panel that opens, click the new 'Toolbar NEW' option (2) between the Appearance and Shortcuts sections.



2 Here you can select which new buttons you'd like to add to the browser's toolbar. Options include 'New Incognito window' (1), 'Google Password Manager' (2) and 'Delete browsing data' (3). Just switch them on to add them.



3 You can rearrange any buttons you've added by dragging them to the desired positions on Chrome's toolbar (1). Switch them off to remove them or click the 'Reset to default' button (2) to restore the browser to its default layout.

BEST EXTENSION FOR...

Managing user scripts

Tampermonkey

Chromium

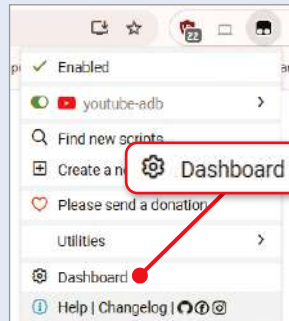
www.snipca.com/52229

Firefox

www.snipca.com/52228

User **scripts** are tiny tools that let you customise how websites look and behave, add and remove features, and automate tedious tasks.

To use them in your browser, you need to install a script manager, and – with over 11 million users – Tampermonkey is by far the most popular. Once installed, visit the Greasy Fork script



repository (www.snipca.com/52231) to browse and search for useful scripts. These include tools for blocking ads and other annoyances, downloading images and videos, and customising the appearance of sites such as Facebook, Gmail and YouTube. Click

the 'Install this script' button on a script's description page, select 'I already have a user script manager, let me install it!' and click Install. To manage the scripts you've

installed, click Tampermonkey's toolbar button and choose Dashboard (see screenshot).

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

Violentmonkey

Chromium

www.snipca.com/52232

Firefox

www.snipca.com/52233

Violentmonkey works in a similar way to Tampermonkey and has a friendlier interface, but sadly it's under threat from Google's **deprecation** of Manifest V2 extensions.

floating PiP window. When you return to the original tab, the video will pop back into the site's media player.

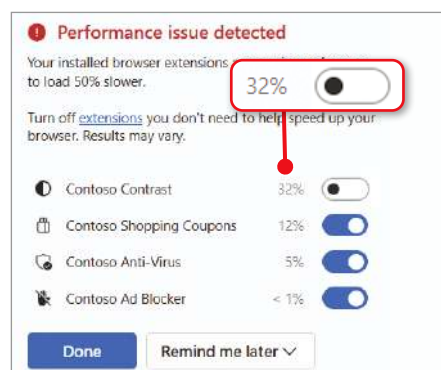
The option is currently an experimental feature in the new Firefox Labs section, which we wrote about in Issue 694 (page 42). To enable it, click the browser's three-line menu button and choose Settings then Firefox Labs. Tick the box 'Picture-in-Picture: auto-open on tab switch' (see screenshot below left), to play videos in PiP mode automatically.

If this doesn't work, click the General tab in Settings, scroll down to the Browsing section and ensure the option 'Enable Picture-in-Picture video controls' is selected.

EDGE

Disable extensions that slow your browsing

When web pages are taking a long time to load, it's often because browser extensions are using too much memory in the background. To stop this happening in Edge, Microsoft is testing a feature that warns you when extensions



are causing pages to load 50 per cent slower, and lets you disable the most resource-hungry tools.

To activate this new option in Edge 130, which was released in early October, type `edge://flags` into the browser's address bar and press Enter to load the Experiments page. Find the experiment **Extension performance detector**, select Enabled in its dropdown menu and click Restart.

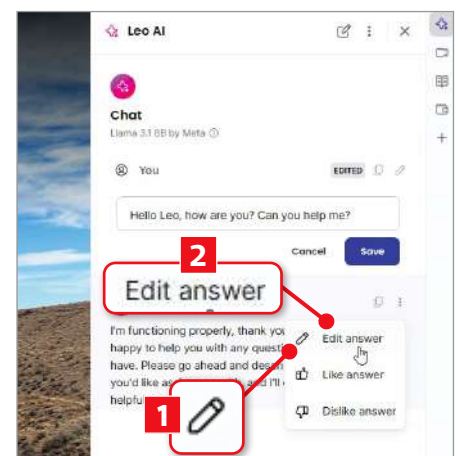
When extensions slow your browser, Edge now shows a 'Performance issue detected' pop-up box. Disable those with the highest percentages (see screenshot below left) – which indicates that they're having the most detrimental effect on page-load times – then click Done. Note that you'll only see this pop-up when Edge detects a "persistent performance problem stemming from using extensions". You can't open it manually.

You can also identify resource-hogging extensions through the browser's task manager. Press Shift+Esc to launch this and discover how much memory and CPU power all your browser tabs, extensions and background processes are currently consuming. Select an entry and click 'End process' to free up resources.

BRAVE

Edit your conversations with Leo AI

The latest version of Brave – 1.70.117, released in late September – makes two welcome tweaks to the browser's AI assistant, Leo. You can now edit your text prompts after submitting them to Leo, tailoring its responses accordingly. This



saves you having to send a new message when you want to add to or modify the content of the original prompt.

Simply click the Edit (pencil) icon next to a message you've submitted (1 in our screenshot above), change the text as required and click Save. The prompt will then be labelled as 'Edited' and Leo will update its response.


You can also edit Leo's answers to your questions. This lets you remove irrelevant information before copying and pasting the text elsewhere, and improves the flow of your conversation with Leo because it refers to previous responses when generating new ones. Click the three-dot icon next to an answer, choose 'Edit answer' (2) and modify the text – again the browser will mark this as 'Edited'.

If you exceed your response-rate limit for the day (editing a message counts as a response), click the three-dot icon at the top of the Leo panel and choose a different AI language model.

Phone and Tablet Tips

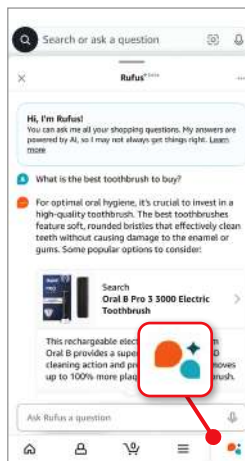
ANDROID & iOS

Get shopping advice from Amazon Rufus

 Amazon has added an AI-powered shopping assistant to its Android (www.snipca.com/52235) and iOS (www.snipca.com/52236) apps in the UK. It's called Rufus, in honour of a Welsh Corgi dog once owned by Amazon staff (www.snipca.com/52237), and answers your shopping questions to help you find suitable items faster.

To use the new **chatbot**, press the Rufus button that now appears in the bottom-right corner of the Amazon app – it looks like orange and blue speech bubbles, with a plus sign. Either type your query into the message box or press the microphone button to speak, and Rufus will provide a detailed response. You can then select one of the listed follow-up questions or submit one of your own.

Amazon suggests asking Rufus to recommend popular examples of particular types of product, and items for specific activities and occasions. You can also ask it to explain the differences between products and categories, and get information about




the item you're currently viewing, such as: "is this jacket machine-washable?" or "is this cordless drill easy to hold?".

Rufus bases its responses on Amazon's listing details, customer reviews and community Q&As, and provides links to all the products it recommends. Some users in the US – where Rufus has been available since February – have found the (unremovable) AI feature more annoying than useful, but you can help improve its accuracy by rating its answers with a thumbs-up or thumbs-down.

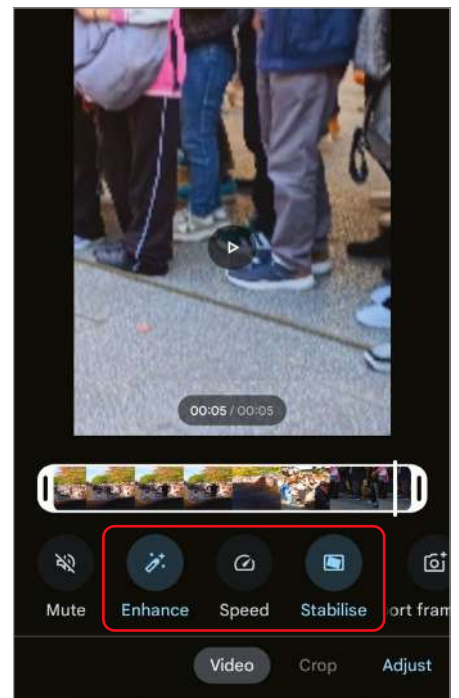
ANDROID & iOS

Use the new video-editing tools in Google Photos

 Google has updated its Photos app for Android (www.snipca.com/52249) and iOS (www.snipca.com/52248) with a host of new video-editing tools. They're all free to use and save you having to install a separate video editor.

In the Android app, you can now trim videos easily by dragging the sliders at either end of the timeline. You can also enhance colours and stabilise shaky footage with a single tap, using the new Enhance and Stabilise options. Another new feature, Speed (see screenshot above right), lets you slow down or speed up videos by a factor of four.


Although the iOS version of Google Photos lacks those options, it does have AI-powered presets. These



let you trim videos, adjust lighting and apply effects such as slow motion and **dynamic tracking** of the main subject. To access them, tap the Edit tab when watching a video and choose Presets.

ANDROID

Hold 'live' conversations with Google Gemini

 The Google Gemini app for Android (www.snipca.com/52247) now lets you hold 'live' conversations with the AI assistant. The Gemini Live feature was

BEST NEW APPS

What you should install this fortnight

Startpage

Free

Android www.snipca.com/52254

iOS www.snipca.com/52255

Privacy-focused search engine Startpage is taking on Brave and DuckDuckGo

with its own mobile browser, which lets you search the web without being tracked, targeted with ads or shown biased results. You can also visit sites anonymously so they can't detect your **IP address**, and explore maps without revealing your real location.



Miofive UK Speedcam

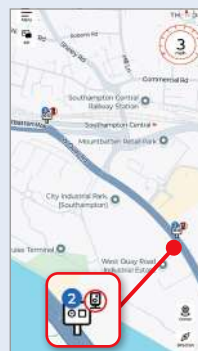
Free

Android www.snipca.com/52250

iOS www.snipca.com/52251

This handy free app provides real-time alerts for all types of speed camera on the roads

around you, including fixed, red-light and average-speed cameras, both on residential streets and main roads. Miofive UK Speedcam also includes a **picture-in-picture** mode so you can see speed-camera alerts while using other apps.



PDFgear

Free

Android www.snipca.com/52245

PDFgear has quietly launched an Android version, and although it's currently quite basic compared with the desktop program

and iOS app (www.snipca.com/52246), it still has lots of useful tools. You can import PDFs to edit and annotate their content, delete and extract pages, add text and images, and print directly from your mobile device.



Brilliant things to do on your device

initially limited to Advanced subscribers, but now it's available for free and saves you having to type commands or press the microphone button to speak them.

Instead, you can chat aloud to Gemini as if you were talking to a real person, interrupt it mid-response to ask another question and pause conversations to return to later. Gemini Live is available hands-free, so you can keep chatting to the assistant while you get on with other things, even when your phone is locked.

To try the feature, tap the new Live button in the bottom-right corner of the Gemini app (see screenshot below). This will launch a welcome screen that explains how it works. Tap OK to continue, then start your first conversation. If you can't think of anything to ask, Gemini will suggest a few activities such as playing a trivia game, finding you some music or telling you a joke.

To interrupt Gemini, either tap the screen or talk over its response. Press the

Hold and Continue buttons to pause and resume chats, and End to finish the conversation. Gemini will then show a transcript of what you said to each other.

Chatting with Gemini Live feels more natural than talking to Google Assistant, and it can look up information much faster. The feature will eventually be available in Google's iOS app.



iOS Create your own walking routes in Apple Maps

One of the most-improved apps in the recent release of iOS and iPadOS 18 is Apple Maps. This adds several useful features for finding your way around, including a Custom Routes option that lets you create your own walking routes.

To do this, press your profile icon in the Maps app and tap Library then Routes. Press the Create Route button and a 'Create a Custom Route' box will open. Tap locations on the map to add them to your walking route – you can either use your current position as the starting point or begin somewhere else.

As you add locations, the 'Create a Custom Route' box will update automatically to show the distance, elevation and estimated duration of the route you've plotted. You'll also see three options at the top of the box: Reverse, 'Out & Back' and Close Loop (see screenshot right).

Tap 'Reverse' to switch the order of your walking route's steps. 'Out & Back' creates a route that takes you to the end location then lets you



retrace your steps. And 'Close Loop' gets Maps to finish off your chosen path by looping it back to your starting point

If you want to walk your new route straight away, tap Directions for turn-by-turn guidance. Otherwise, tap Save, give the route an appropriate name, decide whether or not to download it to your device for offline use, then tap Done. Maps will now save it to your library in the Routes section.

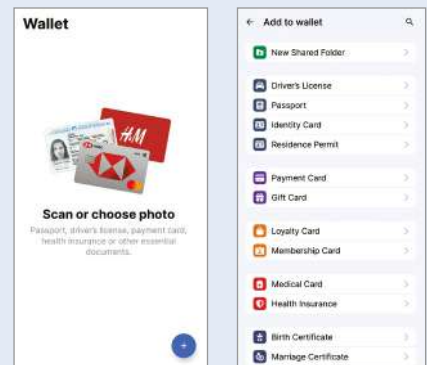
BEST APPS FOR...

Digitising your wallet

Folio: Digital Wallet Free

Android www.snipca.com/52262
iOS www.snipca.com/52263

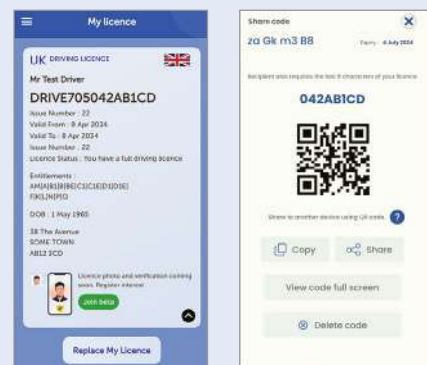
Folio is a third-party alternative to the Wallet apps from Google, Apple and Samsung, which lets you digitise and store all your important cards and documents in one place. This includes payment and gift cards, proof of identity and medical docs. Your data is protected with AES 256-bit encryption, and you can share information securely, too. **Best For** Digitising cards and documents



Driver Codes Free

Android www.snipca.com/52257
iOS www.snipca.com/52256

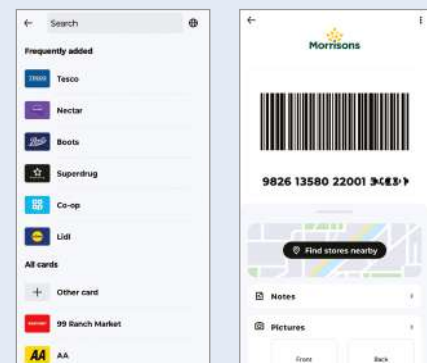
Driver Codes stores a digital version of your driving licence on your phone – an option not yet available in Google Wallet or Apple Wallet in the UK. When you need your licence to rent a car, go for a test drive or verify your identity, you can request a share code from the DVLA. You can also use it to request a replacement licence. **Best For** Storing your driving licence



Stocard Free

Android www.snipca.com/52258
iOS www.snipca.com/52259

Declutter your wallet by storing all your loyalty cards for supermarkets, high-street stores, coffee shops and more in this handy app. You can then scan them at the checkout to earn and redeem points, without needing the physical versions. Stocard is easy to use and highlights offers from relevant retailers. **Best For** Scanning loyalty cards



*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 11

Move your buttons in the Quick Settings menu

One of the best hidden features in Windows 11 24H2 (see page 6) is the ability to reposition the buttons in the Quick Settings menu by dragging and dropping them. This menu gives you quick access to frequently used Windows settings such as Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and Accessibility.



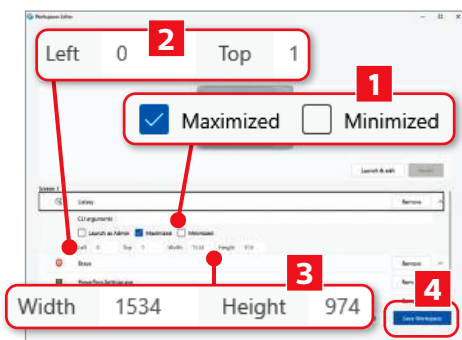
Open the menu by clicking the Wi-Fi, volume or battery icon at the bottom-right of your system tray (1 in our screenshot above). Next, click and hold one of the buttons, then move it where you want it. In our example we've moved the Wi-Fi, 'Nearby sharing' and 'Energy saver' buttons to the top (2). If a setting is in use the button turns blue – as the Wi-Fi option has here. You can also scroll down (3) to see all the settings in the menu.

WINDOWS 10 & 11

Launch programs fullscreen or minimised in Workspaces

The Workspaces tool is one of the best additions to PowerToys in 2024.

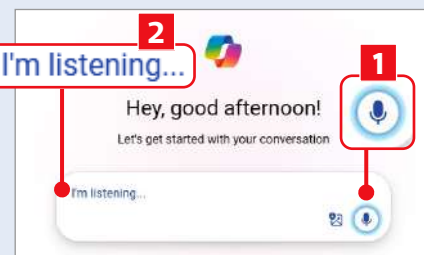
Available since version 84.0, which was released in September, Workspaces lets



WINDOWS 11

Control Copilot with your voice

You can use Microsoft's Copilot AI tool by typing your questions and commands, but you may find it quicker to use your voice. To do this, search for and open Copilot then click the microphone icon (1 in our screenshot) and Copilot will tell you it's "listening" (2). Start talking, and what you say will appear in that box. Copilot will then provide a response – both typed and spoken. In our experience, it does a good job of recognising voices, and produces spoken responses in a tone that's easy to understand.



If the mic doesn't seem to be working, press Windows key+I to open Settings then click 'Privacy & security'. Scroll down to the 'App permissions' section, then click Microphone and make sure 'Microphone access' is turned on.

you save a set of programs, including browsers, in a layout of your choice and launch them with a single click.

One of its hidden settings lets you launch programs with their screens maximised (fullscreen) or minimised when you open a workspace. To do this, first check that you have Workspaces switched on. Open PowerToys, click Workspaces on the left, then turn on 'Enable Workspaces' at the top. Now follow our instructions in Issue 694 to create a workspace.

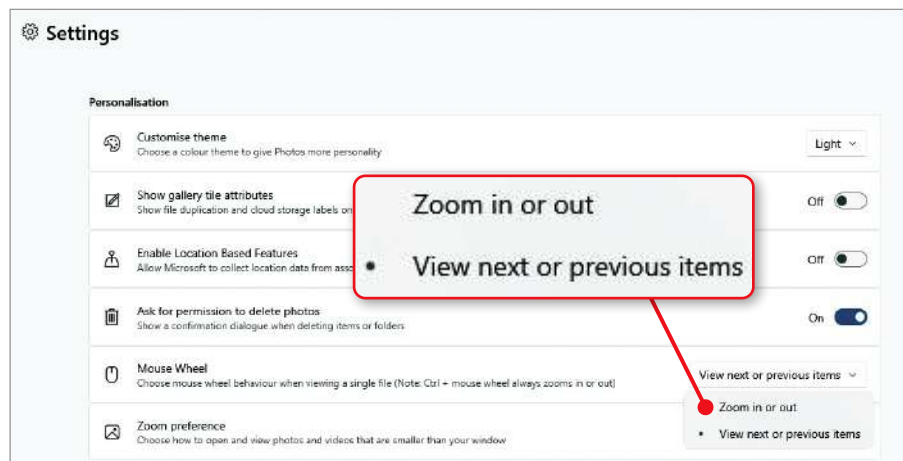
Next, click 'Launch editor' on the Workspaces page in PowerToys, then the three horizontal dots. Choose a program you want to maximise or minimise, then click the down arrow at the right (next to the Remove button). Tick either the Maximized or Minimized box (1 in our screenshot below left), or leave them both blank and instead decide where the program should appear when you launch

the workspace (left/top (2) and its dimensions (width/height) (3). When you've finished, click Save Workspace (4).

WINDOWS 10 & 11

Change what your mouse does in Photos app

By default, moving the mouse wheel when you have an image open in the Photos app zooms in and out. You can change this so moving your mouse wheel scrolls through your images from left to right as if you're watching a slideshow. Open the Photos app then click the Settings cog at the top. Find the Mouse Wheel section then click the dropdown menu at the right and select 'View next or previous items' rather than 'Zoom in or out' (see screenshot below). Note that whichever setting you choose, holding down Ctrl while scrolling your mouse wheel will always zoom in and out.

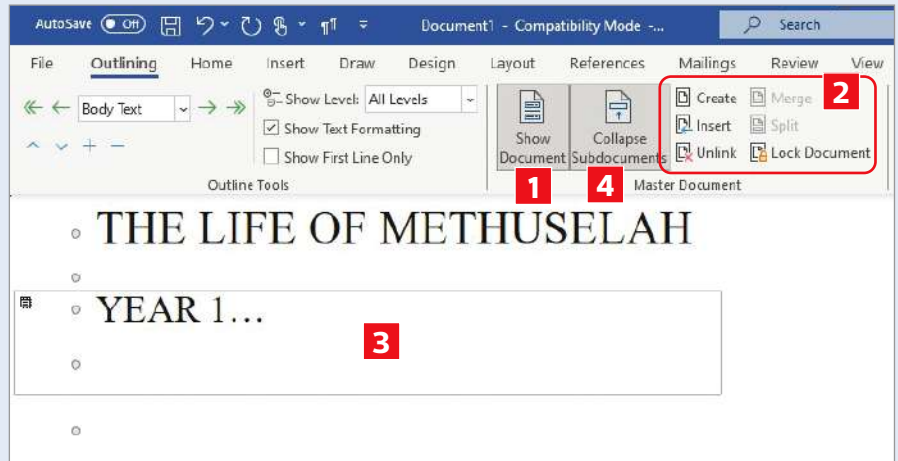


MICROSOFT WORD

Add subdocuments to organise long documents

Writing and editing a long Word document is easier if you create subdocuments within it. First, open a 'master' document then click View at the top, followed by Outline in the Views section on the left. Now click Show Document (1 in screenshot) in the Master Document section and you'll see options to create and insert a subdocument (2, as well as to unlink, merge, split and lock it.

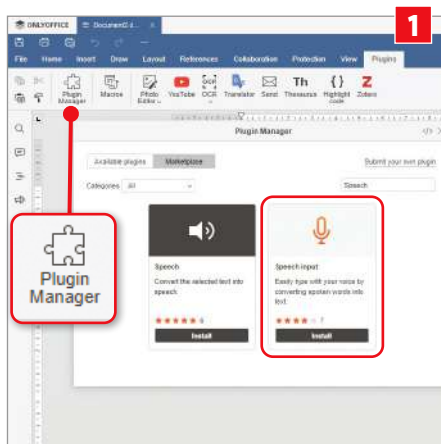
Click 'Create' to create a new subdocument on the page you have open, or Insert to insert a saved file from your computer. Any subdocuments you insert will appear with a border around them (3). You can then edit the text and collapse it when done (4). When you save the master



document it will include any changes you made in the subdocument.

To see all the subdocuments when you

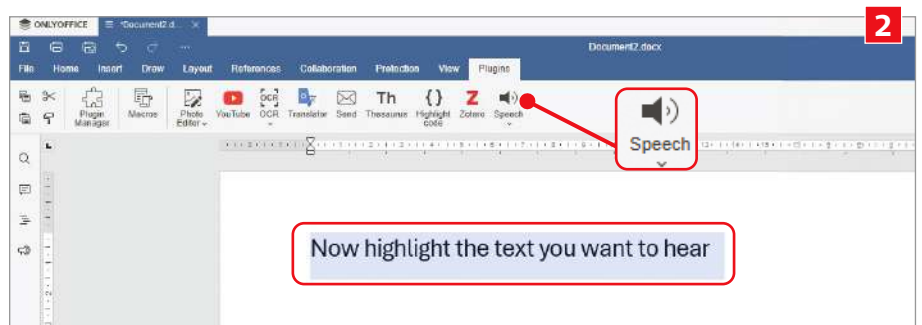
next open the document, click View at the top, followed by Outline, then Expand Subdocuments.



ONLYOFFICE Hear text read aloud using Speech plug-in

If you install the Speech plug-in in OnlyOffice, you can get the program to read your documents aloud. Open a document then click the Plugins tab at the top. Now click Plugin Manager, search for Speech (see screenshot 1 above) and click Install.

Next, highlight the text you want to hear (see screenshot 2 above right), then click the Speech icon on the plugins toolbar. If you don't like the voice, click the arrow below the icon, then Settings. You can now change the rate and pitch of the voice, or switch from the default option (English George) to a different one such as English Hazel or English Susan. Click OK to confirm.



LIBREOFFICE CALC Add multiple cells and rows

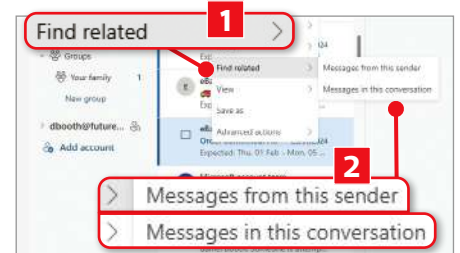
Version 24.8 of LibreOffice, released in August, added the option to insert more than one row or column into a Calc spreadsheet. First, place your cursor where you want to add your rows/columns. Next click the Insert tab at the top then select Insert Cells. Finally, type how many rows or



columns you want in the 'Entire row' and 'Entire column' menus. In our screenshot (below left) we've chosen five rows.

MICROSOFT OUTLOOK Find emails by sender or conversation

Outlook has a 'Find Related' option that quickly shows you emails that are from the same sender or in the same conversation. Open your inbox then right-click an email and select 'Find related' (1 in our screenshot below). Now choose 'Messages from this sender' or 'Messages in this conversation' (2).



In The Club



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

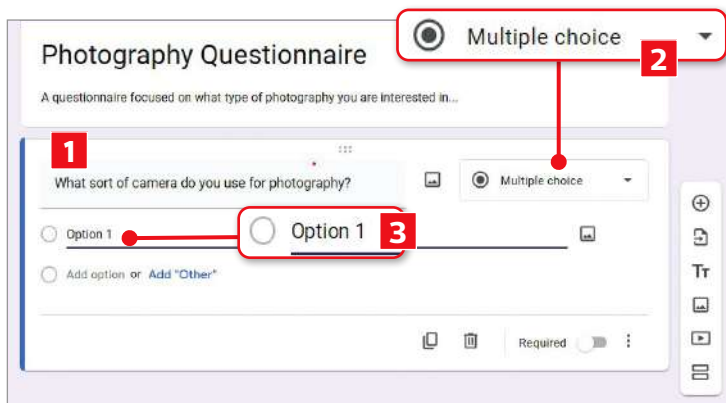
Add nested questions to your surveys

Google Forms are a great way to conduct a survey of your members, especially if you use nested questions. These show specific follow-up questions based on a respondent's previous answer, which means they won't have to wade through irrelevant questions. As we'll show, surveys that use nested questions can elicit nuanced responses that give you a better understanding of your membership. You'll need a Google account for this, so if you don't already have one, follow the instructions at www.snipca.com/52318.

Type your questions and answers

Before you create your survey, make a flowchart to work out which questions you want to link to which answers. For instance, our survey for members of a photography club starts with 'What sort of camera do you use for photography?'. No matter how the member answers this, they will see the next question: 'What sort of photography are you interested in?'. Subsequent questions are nested, so answering with 'Wildlife Photography', for example, will send members to questions about this topic.

Once you've worked out your questions, visit www.snipca.com/52320 and click 'Go to Forms'. Click the 'Blank form' image and give your survey a name and description. Next, click 'Untitled Question' and type your first question (1 in screenshot above right), then make sure Multiple Choice is selected in the dropdown menu (2). Type your first



Type your question and add multiple-choice answers

answer over 'Option 1' (3), then press Enter and add a second answer. Keep going until you have enough answers. Click 'Add "Other"' if you want 'Other' to be a possible answer. If a question is compulsory, click the Required slider at the bottom right (a red asterisk will appear next to the question).

Each subsequent question needs a new section. To create one, click the 'Add section' icon (1 in our screenshot below left). Give it a name and description, then click the 'Add question' icon (2) and type your question and multiple answers as before.

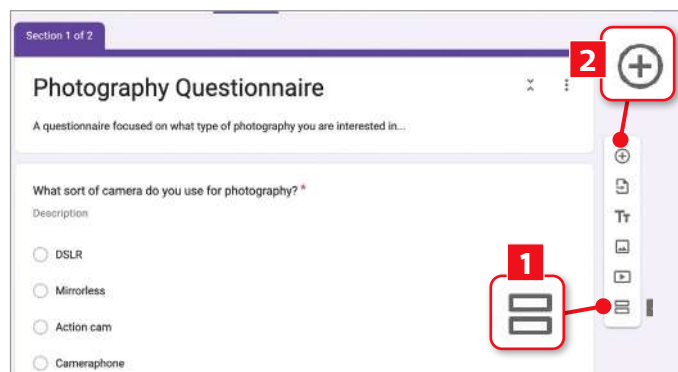
Link your answers to sections

Once you've added all the questions from your flowchart, scroll back to the answers to your first question and click the box that contains them. Now click the three vertical dots next to 'Required' followed by 'Go to section based on answer' (1 in our screenshot below right). You'll see that each answer now

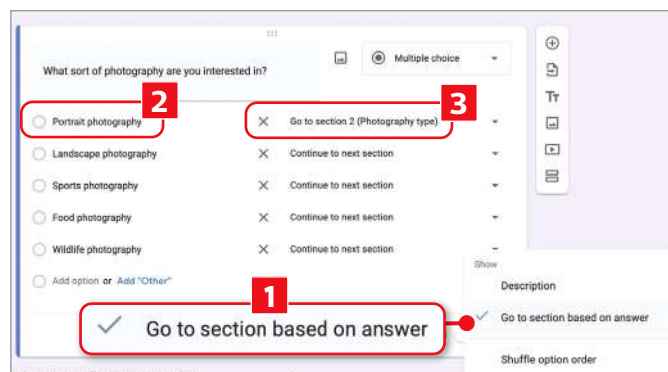
has a choice of links ('Continue to next section') for every section you've created. Choose which section you want each answer to link to. In our example, answering 'Portrait photography' (2) takes you to section 2 (Photography type) (3), while every other answer takes you to the next section.

Another option in the menu is Submit Form. Select this if choosing a particular answer means the member doesn't need to answer any more questions.

Once you've finished, click the Preview (eye) icon at the top to open your form in a new tab. Read through it, checking that the answers go where you want them to. Click the bottom-right pencil icon to make any changes. If you're happy with it, close the Preview tab, go back to the original form and click Send at the top right. You can now add email addresses to send the form directly to your members, or click the Chain icon to copy and paste the link that appears.



Click the 'Add section' icon followed by 'Add question'



Use the dropdown menus to link each answer to a section

What's All the Fuss About...



First-letter navigation

WDM stands for Well Done Microsoft for bringing back this useful tool

What is it?

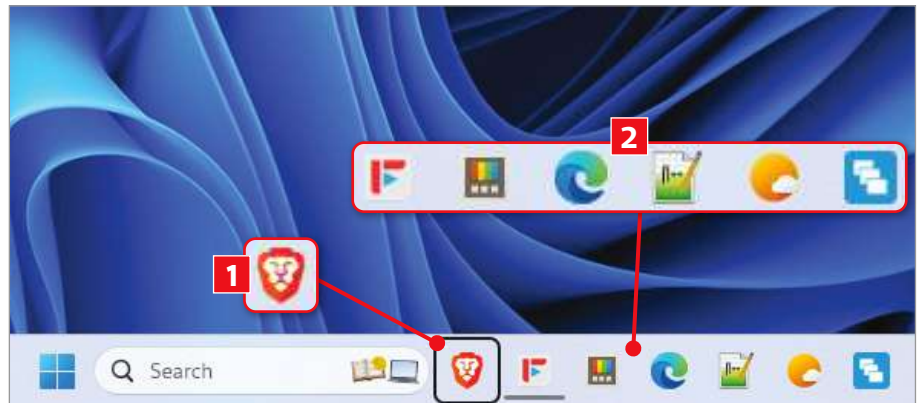
It's a feature in software and operating systems that lets you jump to an item in a list or menu by typing the first letter of its name. It's often used in programs with long lists, such as in a folder with many files. Pressing 'M' for example will highlight the first file or item starting with that letter. Just double-click to open it.

Can you give an example?

Certainly. It works throughout Windows (including Control Panel, Recycle Bin, Settings and Start menu), but it's most useful in File Explorer, so we'll use that as an example. Press Windows key+E to open File Explorer, then decide which folder to open and press its first letter or number on your keyboard. You'll see it selected in the menu. It works the same for files inside folders. If there's more than one folder/file with the same letter, it'll cycle through them to let you pick the one you want.

Does it work with tools pinned to the taskbar?

It does in Windows 10. Press Windows key+T and you'll see a black border appear around the taskbar icon furthest to the left. Press the first letter of any other icon or the arrow keys on your keyboard. It's a handy tool that's very popular with users, which makes it all the more baffling as to why Microsoft chose to remove it from Windows 11 at



launch. Happily, it now realises it made a mistake and is bringing the feature back.

So I can use it now in Windows 11?

Only if you're a Windows Insider who has installed Preview Build 27718. It's been released on Microsoft's Canary Channel for Windows 11, which is where it tests features with confident users before making them available to everyone. We're glad it's back, though we question why such a simple and popular tool can't just be added to the full version straight away.

Does it work in the same way as before?

It seems to. We pressed Windows key+T and it selected the Brave icon, which is the furthest to the left on the taskbar (1 in our main screenshot). Pressing 'F', 'P', 'M', 'N', 'W', 'A' on our keyboard selects

FreeTube, PowerToys, Microsoft Edge, Notepad++, Windows' Weather app and AllDup respectively 2. In addition, pressing the Home and End keys will take you to the first and last items in your taskbar.

Where will I find those?

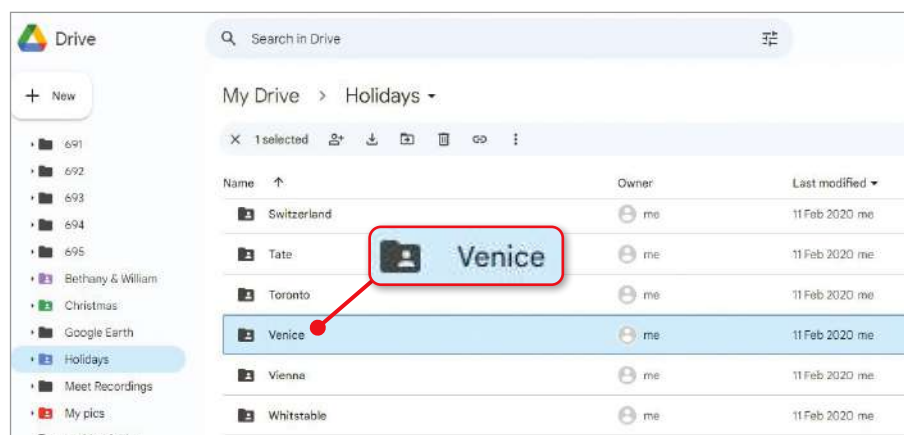
In the group of six keys above the arrow buttons, on the right-hand side of your keyboard – though most laptop keyboards are too small to accommodate them. If yours lack these keys, press Fn+Left Arrow to select the furthest left icon (replicating the Home key), and Fn+Right Arrow to go furthest right (End key).

Is first-letter navigation popular in other programs?

Yes, and becoming more so. In April, Google added them to Drive, as explained at www.snipca.com/52370. With Drive open, press a letter and it will find the first file or folder starting with it. In our screenshot left, we pressed V and it found our Venice photos. Pressing V again selected Vienna on the line below. And for other programs try pressing Alt+F.

What does that do?

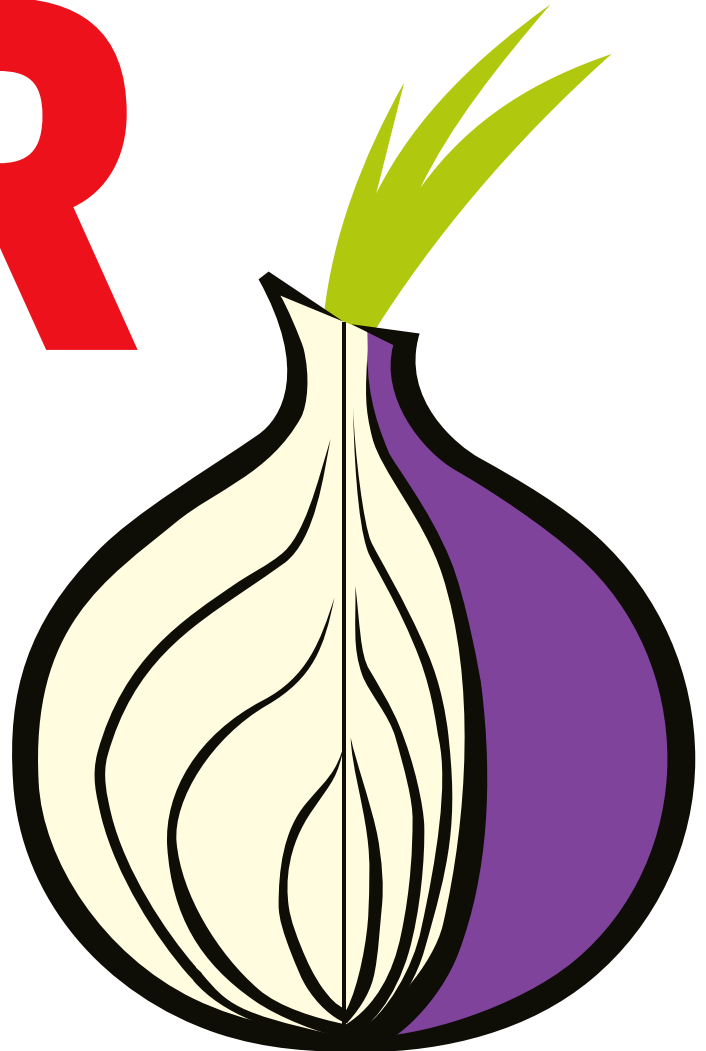
In Chrome-based browsers it opens the Settings menu, from where you can press a letter for what you want. In other software it opens the File menu – try it in Adobe Acrobat, Firefox, LibreOffice, Notepad, Outlook, Paint.NET and many other programs. Master those and it'll be red letter days all round.



Google Drive now lets you find files and folders by pressing their first letter on your keyboard

Why You MUST Use TOR

Tor is the most private way to access the internet, but it can seem intimidating. Robert Irvine explains how to use its browser and network to be completely anonymous online



In previous Cover Features, we've recommended using the Brave browser or a VPN to protect your privacy online – see issues 686 and 692, respectively. Both are reliable options, with benefits other than keeping you private, but if you want to be completely anonymous as you browse the web, you can't beat Tor.

Mention Tor to some people and they'll react with concern, because it has an undeserved reputation for being used for shady purposes. While that's not completely unfounded, the Tor Project (www.torproject.org), which maintains the Tor network and browser, is a legal, non-profit organisation. It's funded by US

federal agencies, private foundations and donors, and its aim is to prevent internet surveillance and censorship – not to enable illegal activities.

Tor's powerful protection against online trackers, hackers and snoopers lets you access websites without revealing your identity, location and activities. In this feature, we explain how it works, the best reasons to use the Tor Browser instead of – or as well as – a VPN and how to access its anonymous network on your PC and mobile device.

We also show you how to use Tor in the most secure and private ways possible, whether you want to visit standard websites without being spied on, or access legal hidden services that are only available through Tor.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Hide your location and identity from all websites you visit
- Apply multiple layers of encryption to your data
- Block hidden trackers and personalised adverts
- Delete your browsing data automatically
- Thwart hackers and snoopers when using public Wi-Fi
- Share sensitive files anonymously
- Beat censorship to access blocked sites
- Conceal your Tor usage from your ISP

YOUR TOR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

What is Tor?

Tor, which is short for ‘the onion router’, is an **open-source** network and web browser that lets you access the internet anonymously. It was created in the mid-1990s by the US Navy to allow secure communication between officers, using a special encryption technique called onion routing.

Because Tor conceals your browsing activity, disguises your **IP address** and blocks trackers, it’s popular with whistleblowers and journalists, but it’s equally useful for anyone who wants to protect their privacy online. Although its primary purpose is to prevent surveillance, it has many other uses – as we’ll explain in this feature.

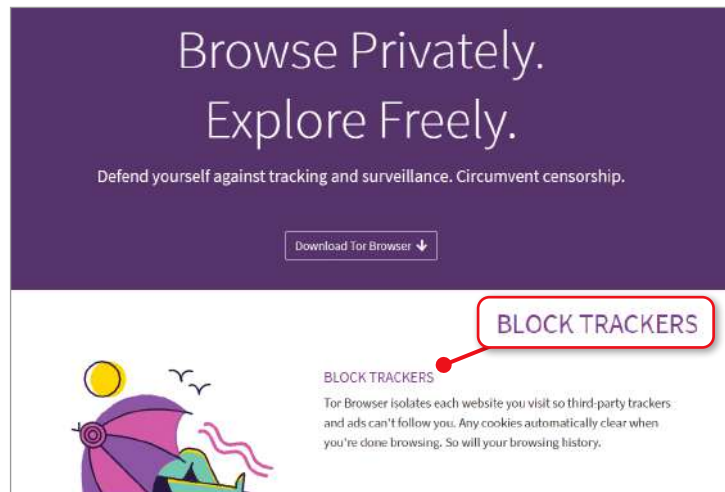
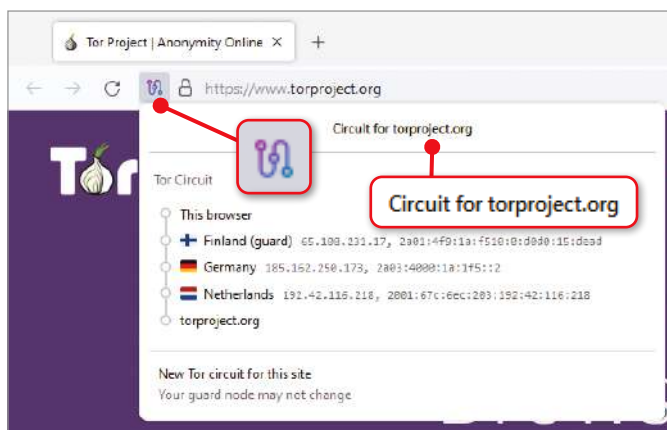
How does onion routing work?

Onion routing protects your data using multiple layers of encryption (akin to the layers of an onion) then directs it through a series of ‘nodes’ (servers), which are also known as ‘relays’. Each node ‘peels away’ layers of encryption until your data reaches its final destination – the exit node – where it’s fully decrypted.

The Tor network has thousands of nodes in countries all over the world, and when you use it to connect to a website, it plots a random path through these nodes. To reach the site, your internet traffic passes through an entry node server (or ‘guard’), at least one middle relay and an exit node, each of which has its own IP address. Tor calls this journey a ‘circuit’ (see screenshot below).

This means nobody can see your real location or the data you’re sending and receiving. Sites you visit using Tor will detect your data as coming from the exit node, and the hosts of individual relays never know the complete path your internet traffic has taken.

Tor diverts your internet traffic through a series of ‘nodes’ called a circuit



Tor lets you browse the web privately without being tracked and spied on

How does Tor differ from a VPN?

Both Tor and a VPN encrypt your data and hide your IP address, but they work in different ways. A VPN routes your internet connection through a server owned by the VPN service. This pipes your encrypted data through a secure tunnel between your device and the VPN server, which then forwards it to the site you want to access.

In contrast, Tor sends your data through a random circuit of nodes and relays, which are run by thousands of volunteers around the world. This means you don’t need to trust a central service to respect your privacy, and your anonymity is guaranteed.

On the downside, Tor’s elaborate routing of your internet traffic makes browsing slower than it would be over a VPN. What’s more, it encrypts only what happens in the browser, rather than all the data your device sends and receives.

Is Tor legal to use?

Yes, the Tor network and browser are completely legal to use, though it is

blocked or banned by some countries with repressive regimes, including China, Russia and Iran.

The common misconception that Tor is illegal arises from the fact it gives you access to the so-called **dark web** as well as standard websites. This encompasses special **onion** sites that you can’t access in your usual browser, some of which are used for criminal activities such as trading drugs, weapons and stolen account details.

However, recent statistics suggest that the dark web constitutes only three per cent of Tor traffic (www.snipca.com/52273). The vast majority of Tor users are drawn to the network for its privacy benefits, not to exploit it for criminal activities. Tor itself says it is “not a tool designed or intended to be used to break the law” (www.snipca.com/52274).

But will I stumble across illegal content?

No. To access an onion website, you need to know its 56-character onion address, so you’re extremely unlikely to stumble across one by mistyping a URL. Besides, criminals are far from the only Tor users. Many reputable organisations have onion versions of their sites to help visitors beat censorship and surveillance. We reveal some of the most useful on page 57.

Is Tor safe to use?

The Tor browser is based on Firefox and incorporates most of Mozilla’s privacy and security features, plus several of its own. This makes the software itself safe to use, but – as with any browser – your security may be compromised by the sites you visit. We’ll explain how to enhance Tor’s protection later in this feature.

SEVEN REASONS YOU SHOULD USE TOR

Tor is free to use – with no catches

Most VPNs require a monthly or annual subscription, and even free services usually have a catch. For example, Windscribe VPN's free plan limits you to (an admittedly generous) 10GB of encrypted data per month, while ProtonVPN warns that its free servers are slower than its paid-for ones.

Tor Browser is completely free to use, with no data or speed restrictions, no features limited to a paid-for version (because there isn't one) and no limit to how many devices you can install its software on.

Although you can't choose which servers and countries your encrypted data passes through, the same is true of ProtonVPN's free plan, which automatically assigns you a server (usually in the Netherlands).

Tor doesn't collect or share your data

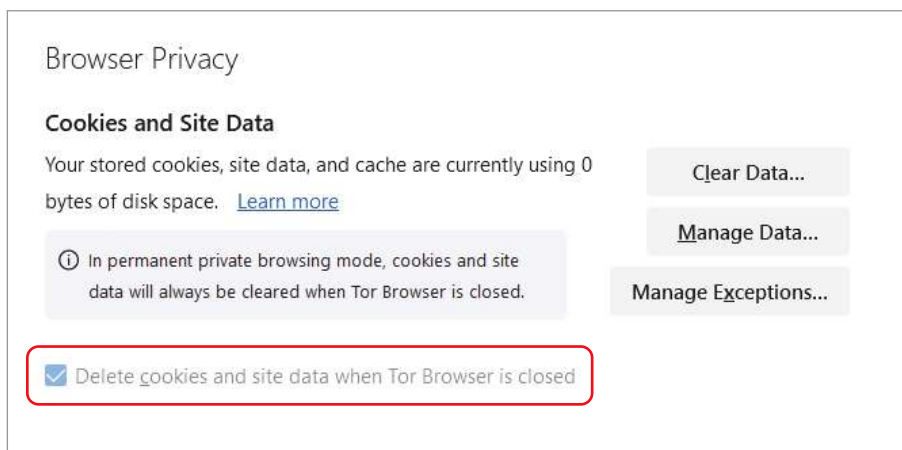
One risk with using VPNs – especially free ones – is that they may keep logs of your supposedly private online activities, and sell this information to advertisers and other third parties. Even otherwise trustworthy VPNs may be obliged to share your usage data with government agencies if they're based in a 'Fourteen Eyes' country (including the UK, US and most of Northern Europe) and don't have a strict no-logs policy.

There are no such concerns with Tor, because its decentralised network isn't managed or owned by anyone, but is instead run by volunteers. Nobody can collect or view your browsing data, let alone sell it to third parties, or link your activities to your identity.

The browser itself works in permanent private-browsing mode, which means it doesn't store your web history and automatically deletes all cookies and site data when you close it (see screenshot above right). You can't disable this option, but you can allow exceptions for specific websites.

Tor minimises browser fingerprinting

Another drawback of VPNs is that they don't protect you against browser fingerprinting. This tracking technique allows websites to identify you using a unique combination of information about your device – including details of your



Tor automatically deletes cookies and site data when you close the browser

operating system, hardware specifications, screen resolution, time zone and more.

Tor Browser minimises fingerprinting by limiting how much information it shares with sites, although some data, such as your operating system and language preference can't be hidden.

It also uses a technique called 'letterboxing', which adds margins to the browser window, making it harder for sites to identify you from your screen's size and resolution – see www.snipca.com/52278 for a full explanation.

Tor stops ads and trackers following you

Unlike Brave and DuckDuckGo, Tor Browser doesn't have a built-in ad blocker, so you will see adverts on web pages unless you install an ad-blocking extension such as uBlock Origin. However, by isolating each site you visit, minimising fingerprinting and running in permanent private-browsing mode, it stops ads and trackers following you around the web.

Tor strongly discourages installing add-ons because they contribute to your 'fingerprint' and compromise your



Tor advises against installing extensions, but you can do so if you wish

anonymity. What's more, hackers can hijack their code to steal your data and infect the browser with malware (see www.snipca.com/52277). The browser comes with the script-blocking extension NoScript installed, but Tor says "adding anything else could deanonymise you". If you're willing to take the risk, you can install additional privacy tools from the Firefox Add-ons store (www.snipca.com/52279, see screenshot below left).

Tor helps you beat internet censorship

As we explained in our Cover Feature in Issue 692 (page 55), until now only illegal online content has been censored in the UK. But that could change following the introduction of the Online Safety Act last October (www.snipca.com/51816), which will limit access to certain sites and services, and require age verification for adult content. Tor lets you bypass this censorship by hiding your IP address and fooling sites into thinking you're in a different, randomly chosen country.

More importantly, Tor enables people who live in countries that heavily censor the internet to access content their government or internet provider doesn't want them to see. It even incorporates a system called Snowflake that helps oppressed citizens use Tor in places where Tor traffic is blocked. Visit www.snipca.com/52276 to learn how to become a Snowflake volunteer, by setting up a proxy in your browser.

Tor lets you browse anonymously

By encrypting your data, blocking trackers, thwarting fingerprinting and



Online privacy tests confirm that Tor Browser keeps you anonymous

routing your connection through a series of relays, Tor stops anyone seeing what

you're doing online and who and where you are.

You can test your anonymity using online tools such as Cover Your Tracks (www.snipca.com/52283), which tells you how well you're protected against tracking and fingerprinting, and BrowserLeaks (www.snipca.com/52281), which reveals what information your browser is sharing – including your IP address, location and ISP. Tor passes both tests with flying colours (see screenshot left), confirming that it's the most private browser available (even Brave fails the BrowserLeaks test).

Tor protects you on public Wi-Fi

Another benefit of onion routing is that it adds a layer of security when using public Wi-Fi networks. These are often unencrypted, which means the network's owners can view your data. Criminals set up Wi-Fi hotspots for this purpose.

Public Wi-Fi is also vulnerable to 'packet sniffing', which lets hackers snoop on your online activities, and 'man-in-the-middle' attacks, which intercept your connection to steal your data. Tor safeguards against both threats, but for total peace of mind you should combine it with a VPN (see page 55).

HOW TO ACCESS THE TOR NETWORK

Browse with Tor on your computer

To access the Tor network on your PC, download and install Tor Browser from www.snipca.com/52284. It's available for Windows 10 and 11 (support for 7 and 8.1 ended recently), macOS and Linux. The latest stable release is version 13.5.6.

When you launch the browser, click the Connect button to connect to the Tor network. To save time in future, turn on the option 'Always connect automatically' (see screenshot 1).

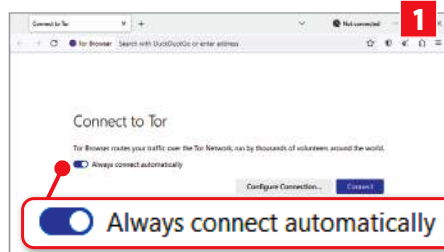
Once you've made a connection, Tor Browser will open a new tab page with a search box. The default search engine is DuckDuckGo (see screenshot 2), but you can change this to Startpage in the browser's Search settings. Unsurprisingly, Google and Bing are not listed as options.

To visit a website, just type its URL into the address bar as you would in any other browser. Because Tor is based on Firefox, its interface and features should feel familiar, including options for adding bookmarks, saving passwords and managing downloads. There are a couple of important extra buttons on the top-right toolbar, which we'll explain in the next section.

When you connect to any site – not just an onion one – you'll see a Tor Circuit button to the left of the address bar (see screenshot 3). Click it to view the three relays your connection has been sent through, including their locations and IP addresses.

Use Tor on your phone or tablet

You can browse the web anonymously on your Android phone or tablet by installing Tor's official mobile browser (www.snipca.com/52285). This works just like the desktop version, with the

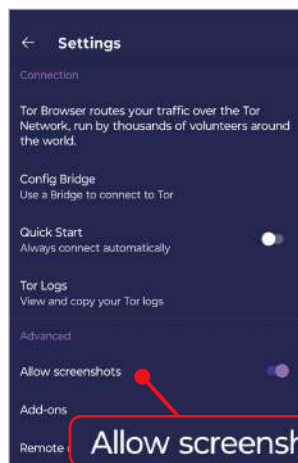


You can set Tor Browser to always connect to the Tor network automatically

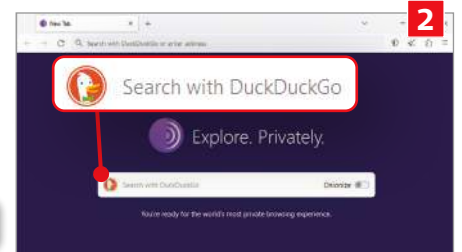
same privacy benefits, most of the same settings and access to both standard and onion web sites.

One notable extra option lets you choose whether to allow screenshots when browsing privately (see screenshot below). Unlike the desktop browser, the Android app also lets you search using your voice, but as this uses Google's speech service, it isn't private.

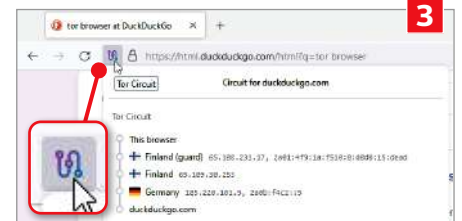
Apple's strict rules for apps mean Tor doesn't have an official iOS browser, but Tor recommends you use third-party apps Onion Browser (www.snipca.com/52287) or Orbot (www.snipca.com/52288, also available for Android) to access its network in relative security.



You can block or allow screenshots in Tor's mobile browser



Tor Browser's default search engine is the privacy-focused DuckDuckGo



Click the Tor Circuit button to view details of your relays

Access the Tor network through Brave

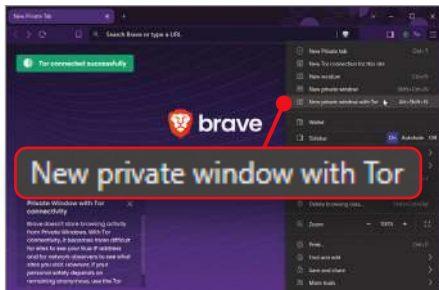
If you don't want to download and install yet another private browser, you can access the Tor network using Brave (www.brave.com) instead. This offers a Tor mode as well as its standard private-browsing mode, which hides your IP address from sites and stops 'network observers' seeing where you go online.

Activate the feature by going into Brave's Settings, selecting 'Privacy and security' and switching on 'Private window with Tor'. Press Alt+Shift+N to open a private Tor window, or click the three-line menu button and choose 'New private window with Tor' (see screenshot on page 54). Brave will then connect to the Tor network – click Connect if this doesn't happen – so you can browse the web more privately.

Usefully, when you're in standard browsing mode and visit a site with an

onion version, Brave shows a purple Tor button in its address bar – click it to open the site in a private Tor window.

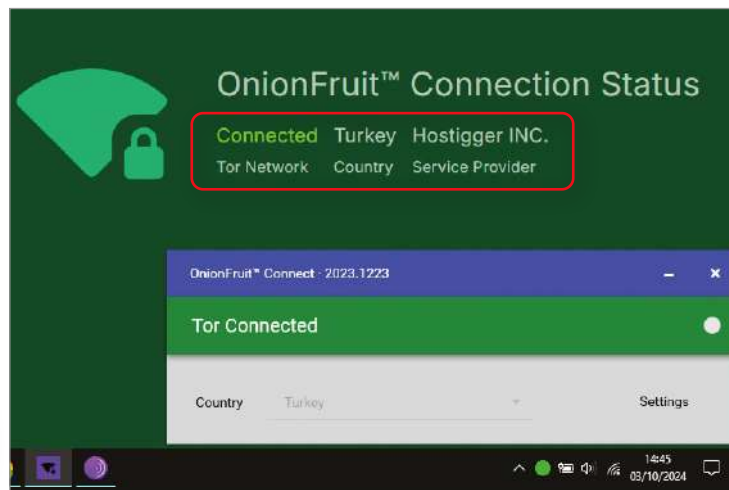
Note that, unlike Tor Browser, Brave's Tor mode doesn't route your connection through an encrypted circuit of relays. If you want to be completely anonymous, use the Tor browser instead.



Brave lets you connect to the Tor network without using Tor Browser

Connect to Tor using OnionFruit

Another way to use Tor without the Tor Browser is to install OnionFruit Connect (www.snipca.com/52292). This free tool routes your entire internet connection through Tor, so your data is encrypted and your activities concealed in any browser you use.



OnionFruit Connect provides an alternative free way to connect to Tor

Download and install the program (it requires Microsoft's .NET Framework from www.snipca.com/52293), then click the red button in your system tray to launch OnionFruit. Before you switch on the option to connect to the Tor network, you can choose a country to use for your Tor circuit's exit node. This is useful for pretending to be in a particular location, as you can with a VPN.

Once you've connected to Tor, OnionFruit Connect will open a new

browser tab confirming your connection status and fake location (see screenshot above). We found that it successfully convinced BrowserLeaks (see page 53) we were in Turkey, although information leaked by our Chrome browser revealed our real IP address.

OnionFruit has an experimental feature designed to give you access to onion sites, but we couldn't get it to work. To try it, open its Settings, click the DNS tab and switch on Enable Secure DNS.

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MAKE TOR EVEN MORE SECURE

Combine Tor with a VPN

It's important to remember that Tor is a proxy service, albeit a very secure one with its relay system and multiple layers of encryption. This means it only encrypts and protects web traffic routed through its browser – not the connection between your computer or mobile device and the internet.

Although Tor conceals your IP address, your ISP can still tell you're connected to the network, because it can see the entry node in your Tor circuit. Currently, no UK ISPs block access to Tor, but the fact it can be misused for dubious purposes could make your usage look suspicious.

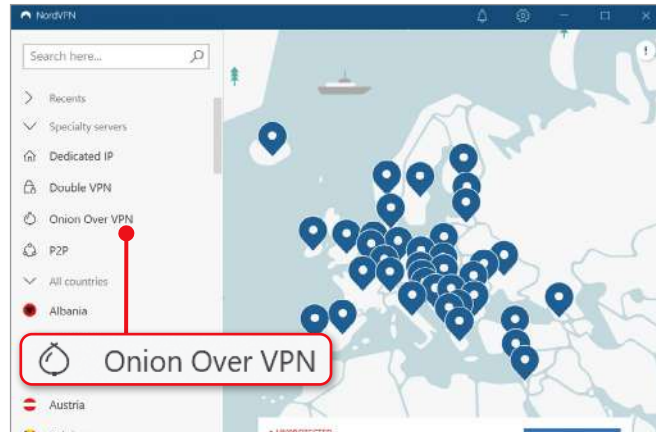
What's more, Tor can't prevent all tracking at the circuit's entry and exit nodes. The person who operates the entry node will see your real IP address, while at the exit node, your decrypted traffic is vulnerable to interception. Tor's network of volunteers are generally trustworthy, but a rogue entry or exit node could put your identity and data at risk – until it's reported and removed by the Tor community.

To address these privacy concerns, you can combine Tor with a VPN. While this will make browsing even slower, it adds an extra layer of protection by encrypting your entire network connection. Most security experts recommend connecting to the VPN before you connect to Tor, which is what happens with NordVPN's 'Onion Over VPN' feature (www.snipca.com/52299, see screenshot above right) and Proton VPN's 'Tor over VPN' option (www.snipca.com/52298 – paid-for plans only).

This has the advantages of hiding your Tor usage (but not your VPN usage) from your ISP, shielding your IP address from a circuit's entry node and allowing you to access onion websites. The disadvantage is that the VPN service can see your IP address, so it's important that you choose one you can trust.

Alternatively, connecting to Tor before the VPN stops the latter seeing your location and keeps your data encrypted as it passes through the exit node. However, this method will significantly slow your browsing and downloads, as well as signalling to your ISP that you're using Tor, and may prevent you from accessing onion sites.

Unless you're really paranoid, using Tor Browser or a VPN on its own will give you sufficient online privacy, but it's



NordVPN's 'Onion Over VPN' feature combines Tor with a VPN

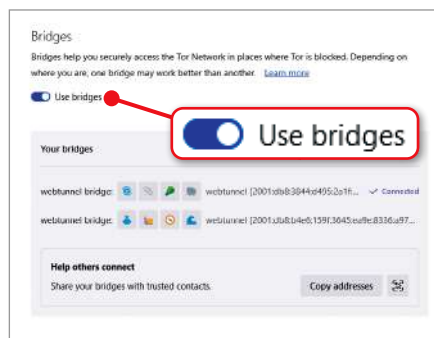
worth combining the two if you're engaging in particularly sensitive activities.

Disguise that you're using the Tor network

Rather than installing a VPN so your ISP and other snoopers can't tell you're using Tor, you can use the browser's 'bridges' feature. Bridges disguise onion routing as standard internet traffic, so you can avoid surveillance and beat censorship without third parties knowing that's what you're doing.

Snowflake (see page 52) is one example of a Tor bridge, and earlier this year the Tor Project launched an even more sophisticated bridge called WebTunnel (www.snipca.com/52303). This more closely mimics ordinary HTTPS traffic, "giving the impression that the user is simply browsing the web".

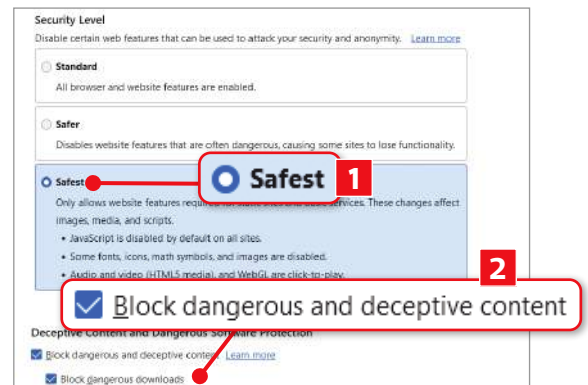
To use WebTunnel, visit Tor's Bridges site (www.snipca.com/52304), select 'webtunnel' and click Get Bridges. Click 'Copy All' to copy the bridge code, then go into Tor's Settings, click Connection and choose 'Add



Use the new WebTunnel bridge to stop anyone knowing you're using Tor

new bridges'. Paste the code in the 'Bridge addresses' box then click Next followed by OK.

This will activate the 'Use bridges' option (see screenshot below left), allowing you to conceal your Tor usage from nosy parkers. Switch it off again if you have trouble connecting to websites.



Tweak Tor's security settings to protect yourself from dangerous web content

Set Tor's security to its highest level

Tor Browser offers a choice of security levels to help you strike the right balance between blocking web elements that compromise your privacy and safety, and ensuring web pages load properly. This is particularly important on download and streaming sites, which are often riddled with deceptive ads, malicious scripts and intrusive pop-ups.

Click the 'Security level' (shield) icon in the browser's top-right toolbar and choose Settings to select your default security level. 'Standard' enables all browser and website features, and is therefore the riskiest option, while 'Safest' (1 in our screenshot above) disables all non-essential elements including JavaScript, some fonts and images, and autoplaying audio, video and animation.

If this stops a specific site loading, click the Shield icon again and change the Security Level to Safer. You should also enable the option to 'Block dangerous and deceptive content' **2**.

Open Tor downloads safely

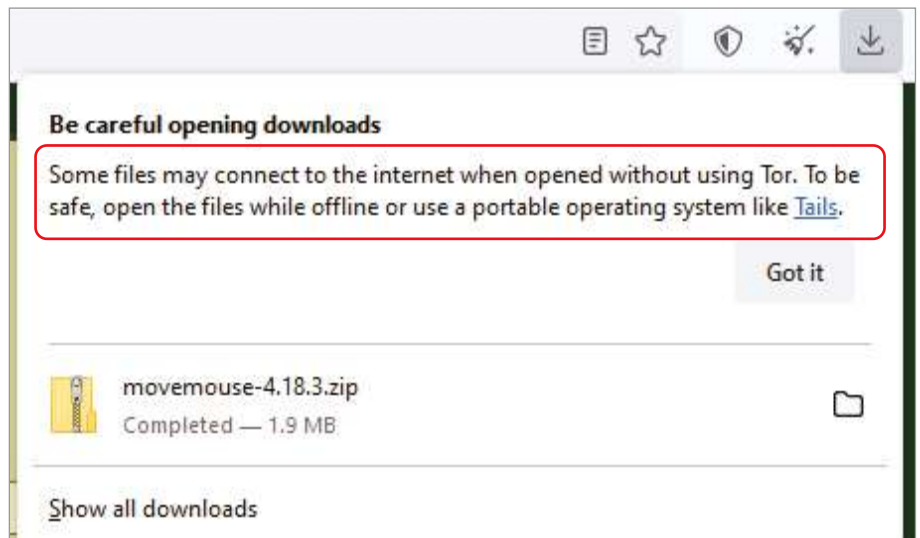
Although Tor Browser keeps you anonymous when downloading files from the internet, there's a risk that the files themselves could compromise your privacy. When you open a download, it may automatically connect to the internet without the benefit of Tor's protection, revealing information about you.

Your antivirus software should mitigate this risk, but to be on the safe side Tor recommends only opening downloaded files when you're offline (see screenshot above right). It also suggests using the secure portable operating system Tails (<https://tails.net>) to download and open files so they can't infect your main PC.

If Tails seems like overkill, consider using a sandboxing program such as Sandboxie Plus (www.snipca.com/52308) to isolate your downloads so you can open them safely and anonymously.

Switch to the 'onion' version of DuckDuckGo

As we mentioned on page 53, Tor Browser's default search engine is the privacy-focused DuckDuckGo, which doesn't store your search history or personal data and won't track you. To make sure nobody can see what you're searching for, switch to DuckDuckGo's onion version, which applies **end-to-end encryption** to your Tor searches (though it won't let you search the dark web).



Tor recommends that you only open downloaded files when offline or using Tails

The easiest way to do this is to use the search box on Tor Browser's New Tab page. Simply type your query and select the Onionize option to direct your search through DuckDuckGo's onion service. Alternatively, click the 'DuckDuckGo (.onion)' button when searching from the address bar, or access the site directly at www.snipca.com/52309 (this link will only work in Tor).



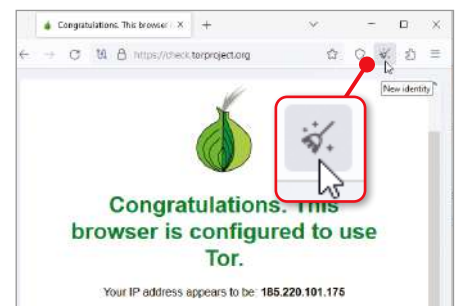
Search anonymously in Tor using DuckDuckGo's onion version

To make the onion version your default search engine, go into Tor Browser's Settings, click Search and select 'DuckDuckGo (.onion)' in the Default Search Engine menu (see screenshot below left).

Reset your Tor circuit and identity

The exit node in a Tor circuit is the point where your encrypted traffic rejoins the 'normal' internet, so it's essential that you can trust it with your data. To verify this, visit www.snipca.com/52310 to make sure Tor is working properly, then click Relay Search. This will provide detailed information about the exit node, including its IP address, location, host and uptime (how long it's been running).

If these details don't look right, click the 'Tor circuit' button and choose 'New Tor circuit for this site' to use a different path. If you suspect your anonymity has been compromised, click the 'New identity' (brush) button in the top-right toolbar (see screenshot below). This resets your connection and restarts the browser with a new identity and circuit, so your subsequent activity can't be linked to what you were doing before.

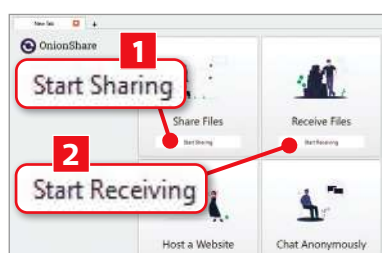


Click the 'New identity' button to restart Tor with a fresh connection

Share and receive files securely using Tor

A free tool called OnionShare (www.snipca.com/52311) lets you send and receive files securely and anonymously over the Tor network. Install the app on your PC (it's also available for macOS, Linux, Android and iOS), click 'Connect to Tor' and choose Start Sharing on the Share Files tile (**1** in our screenshot).

Add the files or folders you want to share and click 'Start sharing'. This will generate an onion address your intended recipient can use in Tor Browser to access the shared



items – click Copy Address to paste it into an encrypted email or chat. You also need to send the other person the private key generated by OnionShare, so they can unlock the download. Click 'Stop sharing' to remove files once downloaded.

To allow someone to send you files through Tor Browser, click Start Receiving on the Receive Files tile **2**, then Start Receive Mode to generate another onion address and private key. The sender can then enter these in the browser to upload files to you.

ONION SITES YOU CAN ACCESS WITH TOR

Although you can access standard websites through Tor, onion sites – which have a ‘.onion’ domain – are much more private. Their IP addresses and locations are hidden, your connection to them is protected with end-to-end encryption, and there’s no exit node where your data can be intercepted.

Tor Browser tells you when the site you’re currently visiting has an onion version, by displaying a purple ‘onion available’ button in its address bar (see screenshot below). Click this to switch and boost your privacy.

You can also visit onion sites directly if you know their 56-character address. Here are some of the most interesting – and legal – examples. We’ve shortened the URLs using our Snipca service (they won’t work in your standard browser).

BBC News

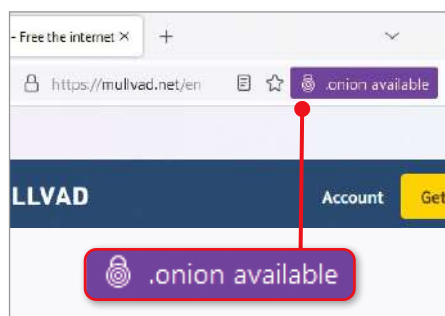
www.snipca.com/52314

Yes, you can access BBC News in any browser, but not in a country where the internet is censored. Launched in 2019, the Beeb’s ‘dark web mirror’ provides breaking news from around the world. It also has a UK version (www.snipca.com/52313).

Proton

www.snipca.com/52321

Proton tools, including Proton Mail and Drive, already use end-to-end encryption. Its onion website offers extra privacy by



Click this button to switch to the onion version of a site

Has Tor’s anonymity been compromised?

In September, German news outlet NDR reported that law-enforcement agencies had succeeded in ‘de-anonymising’ several Tor users, in what it described as a “major blow for the Tor Project” (www.snipca.com/52328). This triggered concerns that the private browser may not be as private as previously thought.

Tor refuted the allegation in a blog post titled ‘Is Tor still safe to use?’ (www.snipca.com/52330). Based on the “limited information” provided by NDR, it suggested that the de-anonymisation

related to a “long discontinued” messaging app called Ricochet, which let users chat securely over the Tor network.

Tor believes the outdated software allowed a user to be identified through a breach of the guard (entry) node in their Tor circuit, and that the attack is likely to have happened several years ago. It said: “one thing is clear: Tor users can continue to use Tor Browser to access the web securely and anonymously”, but stressed the importance of keeping any Tor-related software up to date.

letting you access its services anonymously, hiding your IP address and concealing that you’re using them.

ProPublica

www.snipca.com/52335

This Pulitzer Prize-winning news site launched a ‘Tor hidden service’ in 2016 to let visitors read its content without being spied on. Its investigative journalism covers topics including political corruption, digital surveillance and pharmaceutical profiteering.

Tor Metrics

www.snipca.com/52325

As well as the onion version of its main website (www.snipca.com/52324), the

Tor Project also offers this resource. It provides interesting statistics about Tor’s popularity, performance and traffic (see screenshot below left), and the number (but not addresses) of onion services.

Mail2Tor

www.snipca.com/52323

Logging into Gmail or Outlook in Tor will reveal your identity instantly. Mail2Tor offers a private free alternative for sending and receiving emails anonymously. Messages are encrypted, and the site doesn’t log your IP address.

Mullvad

www.snipca.com/52326

The company behind Mullvad’s VPN and browser, which was developed in collaboration with the Tor Project, has an onion service that lets you sign up for and download its software in secrecy.

Facebook

www.snipca.com/52327

Rather ironically, the social network that’s infamous for collecting its users’ data has a private version that can only be accessed through Tor. This provides a secure method of communication for users worried about surveillance. **ca**



Tor Metrics provides interesting statistics about the network

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10 apps that could save your life

When you find yourself in times of trouble, the phone in your pocket can provide you with a lifeline. **Jonathan Parkyn** reveals the 10 apps you'll need in an emergency



What3words

<https://what3words.com>

Clever, simple and British in origin, What3words (W3W) divides the planet into a grid of 57 trillion three-metre squares, and gives each a unique address

based on three random words. The front gate of Buckingham Palace, for example, is identified as hopes.fled.bind. This is particularly useful when you need to pinpoint locations that lack a street address – a specific bench in a park, say, or a particular stopping point along a

remote mountain path (such as 'tortoises.cases.handbags' in Snowdonia, see screenshot above) without having to reel off unwieldy GPS co-ordinates.

What3words has been adopted by many emergency and breakdown services (see list at www.snipca.com/52392). Last summer, South East Coast Ambulance Service went as far as recommending that holidaymakers install the app on their phones.

Not everyone loves the app, though. It's been criticised by the likes of Lake District Search & Mountain Rescue

Association due to problems that can potentially arise from mishearing or misspelling words. And, while it's free to use, the technology isn't **open source** and is owned by a private business.

Used carefully and correctly, however, it's clear that W3W can be a lifesaver. Maps are provided by your preferred map app and it's compatible with Google Maps, Apple Maps, Waze and more. There's an offline mode with compass navigation, while photo mode allows you to share a W3W address along with a photo of the location in question.

OS Locate

Android www.snipca.com/52378

iOS www.snipca.com/52379

Some *Computeractive* readers and emergency workers are wary of W3W because it can send you many miles in the wrong direction if just one of the words is spelled incorrectly. They prefer OS Locate from Ordnance Survey, which is free and uses your phone's GPS to view and share your current location as a compass reading (1 in our screenshot left), an

OS grid reference where available (2) or latitude and longitude coordinates, as well as your altitude (3).

OS Locate lets you share your location via a messaging app or email, and there's a compass to help you navigate. Beyond this, there are few features and the app itself doesn't support a map view – you need to subscribe to sister app OS Maps (from £6.99 a month) for this. Nevertheless, it's a useful way to share your location accurately.

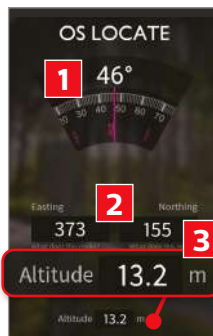
Met Office Weather Forecast

www.snipca.com/52380

Not only does the Met Office's app provide detailed local and national forecasts for the next seven days, it also delivers instant notifications of severe weather warnings – yellow (pictured right), amber or red – in your saved locations, including icy roads, snow, strong winds and so on. Extreme weather events are accompanied by a useful explanation of what to expect, along with recommendations for action you can take to stay safe.



What3words divides the world into 57 trillion squares and gives each a unique three-word code



OS Locate shows a compass reading, and your grid reference and altitude



Best to stay indoors – this yellow warning from the Met Office forecasts heavy showers and thunderstorms

First Aid by British Red Cross

www.snipca.com/52381

This app provides detailed guidance about how to respond in a wide range of crisis scenarios, from head injuries to heart attacks, complete with animated diagrams and videos. It will also alert you whenever the situation requires you to contact the emergency services instead. Best of all, the app works offline, meaning you can refer to it even when you're out of range of a mobile network or Wi-Fi connection.

Zello Walkie Talkie

Android www.snipca.com/52382

iOS www.snipca.com/52383

In an emergency, it can be hard to make a mobile phone call because masts have been damaged, or the networks are too congested with other people making calls. Sometimes **bandwidth** is prioritised for emergency services.

In these situations, you can use Zello, which effectively converts your phone into a push-to-talk walkie-talkie. It can send your voice over Wi-Fi, or any mobile network available – even 2G – and uses a fraction of the bandwidth of a standard call. This means your chances of getting through to the people you need to reach in an emergency are greatly increased. Just make sure those you want to call have installed the app as well. It's free for personal use.

The AA and RAC

www.theaa.com/apps

www.rac.co.uk/app

The apps for both the AA and RAC roadside assistance services provide a quick and easy way to report your breakdown or accident from within the relevant app itself. GPS tracking lets your engineer know exactly where you are – even when you're in remote, rural locations. You can also track the progress of your callout and get essential advice about how to stay safe while you wait for your responder to arrive.

Police UK

www.snipca.com/52384

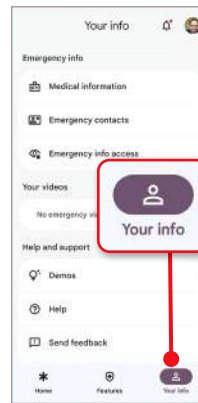
The Police UK app provides an alternative way to report crimes and incidents, learn about local policing teams across England and Wales, and access advice and support for victims of crime. It's designed to make it easier to get in touch with the police in

Life-saving features already on your phone

In addition to these apps, your phone has useful emergency features built in. Precise features will vary depending on your device's make, model and operating-system version.

Some phones include built-in crash detection and will call 999 if they think you've been in a car accident. Certain recent models (including the iPhone 14 or later and soon to arrive on Pixel 9 phones) let you send a free emergency SOS via satellite, when there's no mobile or Wi-Fi coverage.

All phones provide a way to make an instant call to emergency services, even when the phone is locked. On an iPhone, hold down the power button and one of



the volume buttons at the same time, then slide the SOS button. On an Android phone, hold down the power button, then tap Emergency, or just press the power button five times.

You can also add medical information about yourself, which emergency teams can access without needing to unlock your device. To set this up on an iPhone, open the Health app, tap your profile picture, then tap Medical ID. On Android, open the Safety app (you may need to install this from the Play Store if you're using Android 12 or earlier), sign in with your Google account and tap 'Your info' (see screenshot).



In a sticky situation? Tap 'Fake Call' and bSafe will ring your phone

situations where making a phone call or visiting a police station isn't convenient.

It's a very handy resource, but Police UK stresses that in any emergency situation where you feel threatened or in danger, you should always call 999.

bSafe

www.getbsafe.com

This personal safety app has an SOS alarm you can activate by touch or voice if you're feeling threatened. Once activated, your phone will start capturing audio and video automatically. You can also set it up to alert friends or family members, allowing them to track your location and stream video from your device until you return to safety. It even lets you set up fake phone calls (see screenshot above), as a way to help you extract yourself from potentially awkward or threatening situations.

The only problem is that bSafe isn't free – to use it you'll need to subscribe (from £4.99 a month). However, if you'll only use it occasionally, you can pay an ad-hoc fee of 99p for 24 hours of use as and when you think you might need it.

Medisafe Pill Reminder

www.snipca.com/52385

Use this app to get notifications for when it's time to take your medication. You can

track your pill consumption, set the correct dosage, and receive reminders whenever you're running low.

Core functions are free to use, but upgrading to the Premium version (£3.99 a month) unlocks additional features, such as multiple profiles, custom themes and more.

Red Panic Button

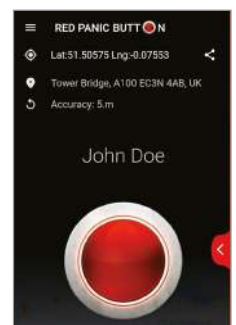
www.redpanicbutton.com

This app is based on a very simple

concept – to provide a quick, one-tap way for someone to alert a chosen contact in the event of an emergency. The main screen is literally one big red panic button (see screenshot right) – tap it and an alert will be sent to the email address or phone number of the contact you assigned, providing them with your location via GPS coordinates.

If you're worried about an elderly or disabled relative, for example, you could set this app up on their mobile as a way for them to let you know if they're in trouble and need assistance.

The app is free, but you can pay a one-off fee (99p) to remove adverts and allow for unlimited emergency contacts. **ca**



Tap the red panic button and an alert will be sent to a trusted contact

Cut your winter Energy Bills

Pay less for electricity and gas by investing in the latest smart-home technology. **Robert Irvine** picks eight new devices that will save you more money than last year

With the energy-price cap rising by 10 per cent in October and the Government scrapping the Winter Fuel Payment for millions of pensioners, many of us face paying a lot more for our energy bills over the next few months. You can offset some of the extra cost using smart-home technology that offers special energy-saving features and benefits.

Here, we recommend eight of the latest devices that help you monitor, manage and minimise your electricity and gas usage.

SMART PLUG TP-Link Tapo P110MA

£23 from www.snipca.com/52345

TP-Link's latest smart plug (pictured below), which went on sale in July, includes an updated Energy Monitoring feature that helps you more accurately track and reduce your electricity usage.



The new Tapo P110MA includes improved Energy Monitoring

Connect a device to monitor how much power it's using throughout the day, turn it off after a specific length of time and switch it back on during off-peak hours. You can also enter your energy tariff's rate to estimate how much the device will cost you in your next monthly bill.

The Tapo P110MA is Matter-certified, so it's compatible with all the main smart-home setups – Apple HomeKit, Amazon Alexa, Google Home and Samsung SmartThings – though Energy Monitoring is currently only available in the Tapo mobile app.

SMART THERMOSTAT Tado Smart Thermostat X

£160 from www.snipca.com/52348

Tado claims its new Smart Thermostat X (pictured above right), which is available to buy in the UK from 1 November, will cut your energy bills by an average of 19 per cent. It's designed to replace your existing thermostat and is compatible with most boilers and heat pumps.

The thermostat uses local weather data to adjust the temperature accordingly, and alerts you when windows are open. Sign up for Tado's Auto-Assist subscription (£3.99 a month or £29.99 a year) to adjust the temperature automatically when nobody's home, detect unusual behaviour in your heating system and receive detailed reports about your energy consumption.

The Smart Thermostat X comes with a router to connect it to the internet, works with other Matter-enabled devices and is simple enough to set up yourself.



Tado's Smart Thermostat X could cut your energy bill by 19 per cent

SMART RADIATOR VALVE TP-Link Kasa Smart Thermostatic Radiator Valve

£40 from www.snipca.com/52365

If your boiler won't support a smart thermostat – or you can't afford one – consider controlling specific radiators instead. This smart valve lets you adjust radiator temperature via TP-Link's Kasa app to keep energy costs down, prevent pipes from freezing and adhere to a heating schedule.

You can control it using Alexa and Google Assistant, through the Kasa Hub, which is included in the Starter Kit (pictured below) – additional valves cost £30 each. If the radiator has a manual



Control your radiator's temperature using a TP-Link thermostatic valve

valve, you may need to pay extra for installation.

SMART HEATER

GoveeLife Smart Space Heater H731A

£100 from www.snipca.com/52357

Electric heaters are the most expensive way to warm your home during the winter, but switching to a smart model can significantly reduce your costs. GoveeLife's Smart Space Heaters heat up in two seconds and offer a choice of heating modes (up to 1,500W), including a special Eco Mode. This suppresses unnecessary power consumption caused

by overheating and shuts the heater down automatically once the room achieves a set temperature.

You can control the heater via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth with the GoveeLife app, and using Alexa or Google Home. The H731A model (pictured left) is 16 inches tall, with an

80-degree oscillation, while the smaller H731B, designed for more compact spaces, is 12 inches tall and costs £80.

SMART BULB

Linkind Matter Smart Bulbs

£13 from www.snipca.com/52353

Linkind's 9-Watt smart LED bulbs (pictured above right) deliver the same light output as 60W incandescent bulbs, saving you energy and money, and can last for up to 15 years.

Launched in January, these dimmable multi-colour bulbs can be controlled using your voice or the app of your



Linkind's Smart Bulbs work with any Matter smart-home system

existing Matter smart-home system, as well as Linkind's own AiDot app. The latter was recently updated to provide energy-usage insights for individual rooms.

SMART DOOR SENSOR

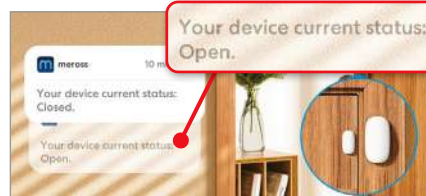
Meross Smart Door and Window Sensor MS200

£24 from www.snipca.com/52360

Losing heat through an open door or window can add extra costs to your energy bill. The Meross 'Smart Door and Window Sensor' alerts you when a door or window is opened, so you can quickly close it to keep the heat in.

These notifications appear in the Meross app on your phone (pictured below), even when you're away from home, so you can call a family member and tell them to "shut that door!". This makes the device useful for home security too.

The sensor works with all the main smart-home systems but requires the Meross hub. This is included in the Start Kit pack, while extra sensors cost £14 each.



Get alerts when heat is escaping through an open door or window



Aqara Presence Sensor stops you wasting energy on empty rooms

SMART PRESENCE SENSOR

Aqara Presence Sensor FP2

£80 from www.snipca.com/52362

This handy gadget detects when you and other household members enter and leave rooms, then turns your lights, heating and other smart devices on and off accordingly. This saves you wasting money on lighting and heating unoccupied areas of your home.

Rooms of up to 40m² can be divided into zones, such as sofa, bed and desk, to focus its detection on those areas, and you can set it to ignore your pets while recognising stationary humans.

Unlike most Aqara products, the Presence Sensor FP2 doesn't require the company's own hub, but works with Apple HomeKit, Google Home and Amazon Alexa.

SMART METER MONITOR

Ivie Bud

£50 from www.snipca.com/52364

If your smart-meter monitor breaks within 12 months of installation, your energy supplier will replace it for free. Outside of that

period, you'll probably need to pay – and the same applies if you're unhappy with the monitor's performance, or if you broke it yourself.

The Ivie Bud (pictured above) is a third-party replacement, which connects to your smart meter to provide clear information about your energy usage and costs. With the aid of its app, Ivie says you can reduce your monthly electricity use by 18 per cent and gas use by 24 per cent.

E.on Next and EDF are Ivie partners, so the Bud monitor will work with their smart meters – check its compatibility with other devices at www.snipca.com/52363. **ca**



Replace your old or broken smart-meter monitor with an Ivie Bud

Cut your energy bill using AI

Google's new 4th-generation Nest Learning Thermostat uses AI to help reduce your energy bill. Its new Smart Schedules feature studies changes in behaviour based on motion detected in your home – such as when you leave the house early – and adjusts your temperature schedule accordingly.

It also analyses how the weather outdoors will affect the temperature inside. For example, if it's a sunny winter day and your home warms up on its own,

the thermostat will pause your heating until your home starts getting cold again.

The device also learns which temperatures you set most often in different rooms. You can accept or reject the AI suggestions as required.

The 4th-gen Nest Learning Thermostat is currently only available in the US and Canada, priced at \$280 and \$380 respectively, but will hopefully come to the UK soon. See www.snipca.com/52368 for more information.

Problems Solved

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Can I make Windows 8.1 safe to use?

Q You often point out the risks of using Windows 10 after support for it ends in 2025. Well, I still use Windows 8.1. I can't upgrade to a more recent version without crashing my computer. What would you advise for people like me? Do I have to buy a new PC? I don't want to lose my data and images, and I'm reluctant to spend any money, but I still need to use Microsoft Word and access files from my PC.

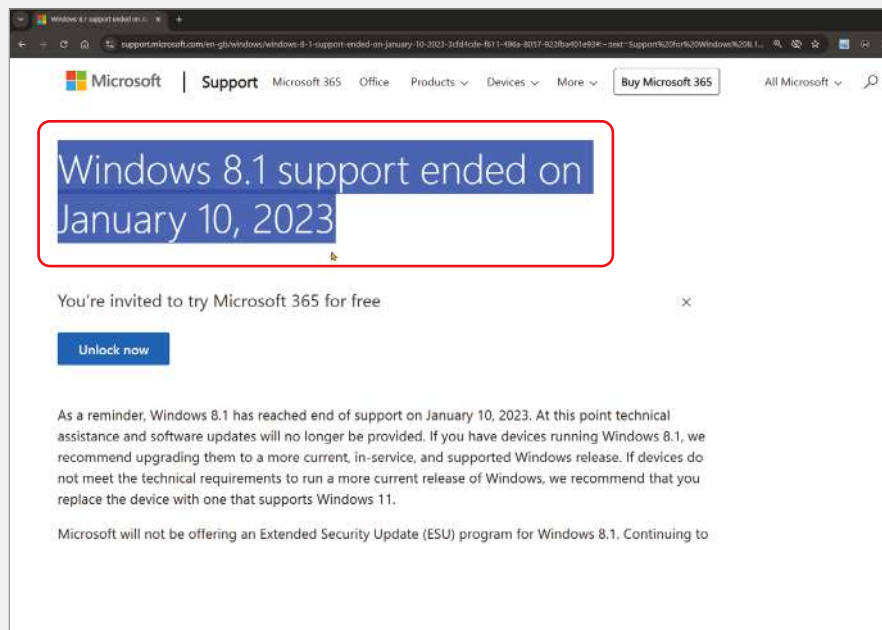
I do have an Apple MacBook Pro too, incidentally.

David Stone

A There's no magic wand that will make Windows 8.1 completely safe. Support for it officially ended in January 2023 (see screenshot above right), and Microsoft is no longer issuing security updates.

You can improve its safety by keeping your antivirus software up to date and minimising or eliminating your use of the internet. However, only Microsoft has the power to make Windows 8.1 secure, and it's not going to do that. This means you can either accept the ever-increasing risk of using Windows 8.1, or switch to using something safer.

Thankfully, you have a MacBook Pro. Microsoft makes both Word (www.snipca.com/52079) and Excel (www.snipca.com/52080) for macOS, which is the operating system Apple uses for its laptop and desktop computers. Any documents you've created in Word or



Microsoft's support for Windows 8.1 ended almost two years ago

Excel for Windows should work perfectly well in the Mac versions. What's more, basic versions of both apps are free for Mac – or you can subscribe to Microsoft 365 for the full versions (from £5.99 a month, www.snipca.com/52081).

You can copy files from your Windows PC to your MacBook Pro. The easiest way is perhaps to use a USB stick. The only caveat is that the stick must be formatted using a file system that both Windows and macOS recognise. Windows prefers Microsoft's NTFS standard but while macOS can **read** from NTFS drives, it can't **write** to them. A better option is the

exFAT file system, which is fully compatible with both operating systems.

To format a drive using exFAT in Windows 8.1, first press the Windows key+E

Linux Mint may be a better option for an old PC than sticking with unsafe Windows

to open File Explorer, then right-click the USB stick before choosing Format. Next, under 'File system, click to open the dropdown menu, choose exFAT, tick the Quick Format box and then click Start. Note that this will erase any data you have on your USB memory stick.

As for your ageing PC, one way to keep it running safely is to move away from Windows 8.1. You say it can't run Windows 10 or 11, but an alternative operating system such as Linux could keep it running safely for years to come. Linux Mint, for example, is a free download from <https://linuxmint.com> (see screenshot left). Its minimum system requirements are similar to Windows 8.1's, so it may work on your PC even if Windows 10 won't. What's more, although Word and Excel are not directly compatible with Linux, Mint comes with its own office software, LibreOffice, as part of the package, and this can open and work with files produced by Microsoft's tools.



What's eating all my laptop's storage?

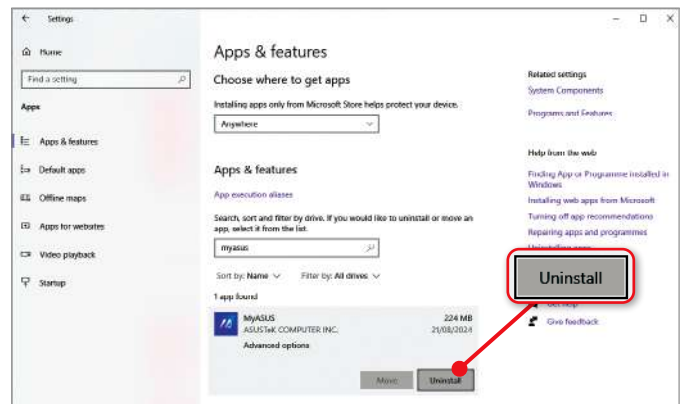
Q My Asus E406NA laptop is telling me that I need to make more space on my hard drive. Apparently, I have around 3GB of my hard drive's 59GB capacity left. I've no idea what's taking up all this space because I only use my laptop to do a bit of shopping, send a few emails and watch YouTube videos. I do have a small number of photos on the PC, but very little else. Can I fix this problem myself, or will I need to get in an expert?

Chris Gustar

A We think this is more a problem of perception than a practical one. Your Asus laptop doesn't have a lot of storage, with just 64GB built in. Those are **decimal gigabytes**, by the way, which some manufacturers use to inflate their specifications for marketing purposes. Windows correctly calculates the storage as 59GB **binary gigabytes**.

Windows 10 alone can occupy up to 20GB of storage space. Add a few more apps, and that 59GB can fill up very quickly. An easy way to find out what's taking up the most space is to click Start followed by the Settings cog, then Apps. Next, under 'Apps & features', open the

To uninstall an app, locate it in the Apps section of Settings, then click Uninstall



'Sort by' menu and choose Size. You could then uninstall any apps you don't need or find useful. This may or may not include the MyAsus app, which according to the screenshots you sent is the one that's nagging you about low storage.

Having said that, unless you want to install new software or need more space for your photos, it doesn't matter if you have 3GB or 30GB spare. The warning is just a warning – if low storage isn't causing you a problem, you don't have to do anything about it.

If you find you really do need more storage, plugging a **microSD card**

MicroSD cards such as this Amazon model are a cheap and easy way to give your laptop more storage space



into your laptop's built-in card slot would be a very simple and affordable way to add more. For example, a 128GB Amazon Basics microSD card costs around £11 (www.snipca.com/52082, pictured below), and would more than triple your laptop's total storage.

However, it seems to us that the main problem for you is the repeated warnings about low storage rather than any actual lack of storage space. So we'd simply advise you to ignore the warnings or remove the MyAsus app that's generating them. To do this, go to the Apps page within Settings, then click MyAsus followed by the Uninstall button (see screenshot above).

Can I buy a PAYG 4G dongle?

Q I connect my PC to the internet using a Three pay-as-you-go (PAYG) 3G Huawei E3231 mobile-broadband dongle. I pay for this using a 3GB monthly top-up voucher. This suits me, because I don't want a contract and I only go online to check my email. I don't own or want a smartphone.

Recently, Three sent a final reminder that it's switching off its 3G network, and that I'll need a 4G device. It sent links on how to change my device, but there was no mention of PAYG dongles and SIMs. I visited several phone shops but none had an off-the-shelf, ready-to-use 4G dongle. Do they still exist?

Graham Chaffer

A They do exist, but with the dominance of smartphones, they're simply not as popular as they used to be. Three does sell dongles, but as you say it seems to do so only as part of a contract, rather than PAYG (www.snipca.com/52083).

That's Three's prerogative, but unless the company is also killing your PAYG plan – which doesn't seem to be the case – there's no reason why you can't simply put your existing SIM into an unlocked 4G dongle from a different brand. The TP-Link M7000 (pictured above right), for example, should accept your current SIM card (as pictured right), which would allow you to carry on as before. It costs around £35 (www.snipca.com/52084).



TP-Link's M7000 dongle provides internet access over the 4G network



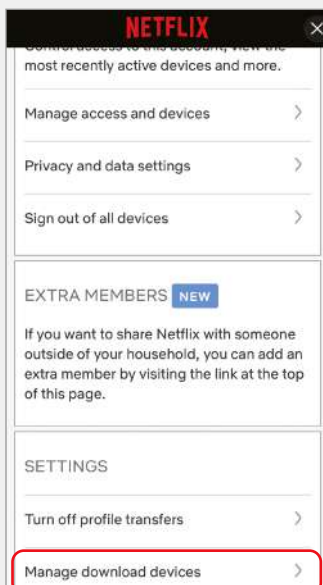
To insert your SIM, remove the battery and slot it into the holder

How do I remove old devices from my Netflix account?

Q I use Netflix only on my iPhone and iPad. Recently, I replaced my iPhone, because my old one had died and wouldn't switch on. Now when I try to download Netflix videos to my new iPhone, it tells me I have downloads on too many devices. I can fix this by deleting downloaded videos from my iPad, but I suspect it's my old iPhone that's causing the problem, and I can't switch it on to sort it out. Is there another way out of this situation?

Archie Mendez

A Yes. Log into Netflix from any device, then tap the My Netflix icon in the bottom-right corner followed by the menu button (three lines, top right). Next, tap Account then swipe up until you see the Settings heading. Below that, tap 'Manage download devices' (see screenshot). Finally, in the list of devices registered as holding downloads, identify the entry for your old iPhone then tap the 'Remove device' button.



Remove any device from your Netflix account in the app's Settings

Can I fit a second drive in my laptop?

Q I recently opened the case of my Dell Inspiron 15 3515 (pictured right) laptop to install extra memory, upgrading it from 8GB to 16GB. As I was doing this, I noticed an empty space next to the battery. Would it be possible to install a second hard drive in this space? If so, which drive would I need?

Bill Martin

A Yes, it's possible to install a second hard drive in your Dell laptop, though which type you need depends on the laptop's original specification, because Dell sells this model with various storage options. Thankfully, even if you don't know, it's pretty easy to work out.

An important decision when buying this laptop is whether to get one with a traditional hard-disk drive (HDD) or a modern solid-state drive (SSD). We don't know which you chose, but Dell's service manual for this model – available at www.snipca.com/52123 (pictured below) – tells us that the space next to the battery is for a hard drive. So if this is



Dell's service manual for the Inspiron 15 3515 explains that the space next to the battery is for a hard drive



The Dell Inspiron 15 3515 has an empty space next to the battery

empty, your laptop probably came with an **M.2** SSD, which fits in the smaller slot above the battery.

If that's the case, you can buy and fit a hard drive in addition to your SSD. According to Dell's specifications for this laptop, at www.snipca.com/52086, it supports standard 2.5in **SATA** drives of up to 2TB. The WD Blue model pictured below, for example, would do the job and costs around £68 (www.snipca.com/52087).



Dell's Inspiron 15 supports a standard 2.5in HDD such as the Western Digital Blue

Q: Can I charge an iPad wirelessly?

A: Issue 653, page 64 – find it on our 2023 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/48860



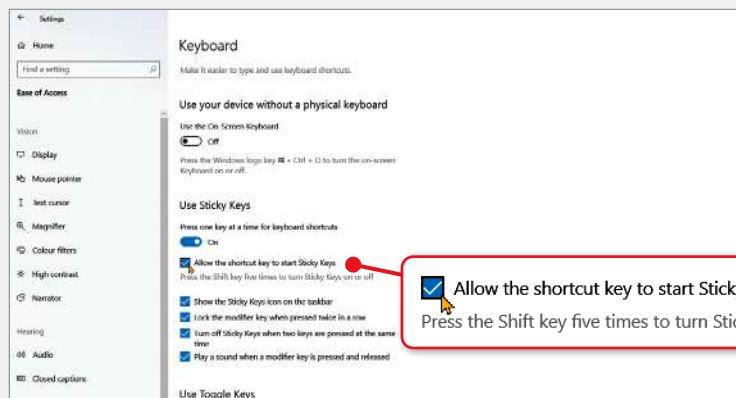
Why has my Alt+Tab shortcut reversed direction?

Q For years I've been using Windows 10's Alt+Tab keyboard shortcut to cycle through open windows and select the one I want. Recently, the direction in which it cycles through the windows mysteriously reversed, so they started moving from right to left instead of left to right. Restarting my PC sorted this out, but it has happened again several times since. Do you know what might be causing it?

Oli Reynolds

A First, it's useful to know that holding down the Shift key while carrying out the Alt+Tab shortcut also reverses the direction the windows move in. We think this is relevant to your problem.

It seems that something is activating your Shift key. It could be something physical, such as a stuck key, but as restarting your computer fixes the problem, we think it's probably a software setting.



If you're activating Sticky Keys by accident, disable the Accessibility shortcut that switches it on

Your keyboard's **driver** can cause something similar, but Windows 10 has an accessibility feature called Sticky Keys which can have this effect – and create confusion if you don't know it's enabled.

To check, click Start followed by the Settings cog, then 'Ease of Access' followed by Keyboard. Now, in the right-hand pane, look under the Use Sticky Keys heading. Here, you'll find a slider that switches Sticky Keys on and off.

Even if Sticky Keys is switched off,

there may be a tick next to the option below it, which is 'Allow the shortcut key to start Sticky Keys' (see screenshot). When this option is enabled, a few taps on Shift will activate Sticky Keys. Or, if Sticky Keys is already active, a couple of taps on Shift will 'lock' Shift so it's always on.

We suspect this is what's making your open windows cycle in reverse, so we'd advise disabling the Sticky Keys shortcut by unticking its box.

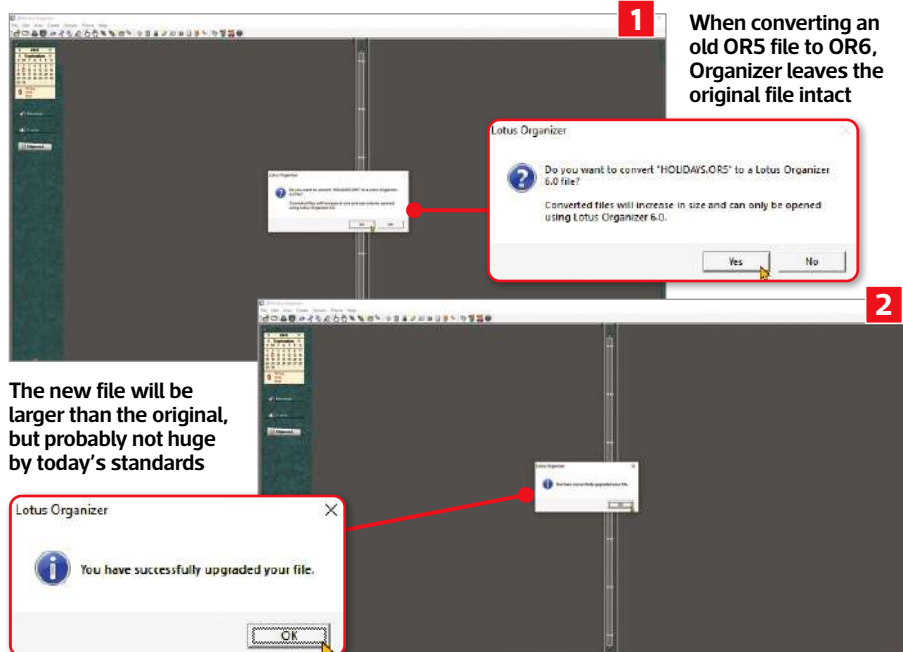
How do I open my old Organizer files?

Q Like James Munroe in Issue 691's Problems Solved section (page 65), I've been using Lotus Organizer for a very long time. Even though I own a genuine copy of Lotus Organizer 5, I wasn't able to get it working on the Windows 10 laptop I bought two years ago. Your answer to James solved that problem for me, and now I've successfully installed Organizer 6 – so a massive thank you for that!

However, when I try to open my old Organizer 5 files, which have a '.or5' extension, the program asks if I want to convert them to Organizer 6, and warns me that the file size will increase (see screenshot 1). It also says these files can only be opened in Organizer 6. What should I do?

John Wigley

A This is perfectly safe, so when the program prompts you to convert a file, you can click Yes to upgrade your file 2. Your original OR5



The new file will be larger than the original, but probably not huge by today's standards

files will remain intact. Instead of replacing them, Organizer 6 creates new OR6 files containing all the imported data, and stores them in the same location as the original OR5 files, which by default is `C:\lotus\work\organize`.

It's true that the OR6 files are likely

to be a bit larger than their originals. However, we're talking about file formats that are nearly 30 years old. While we don't know how big your data files are, by modern storage standards they're likely to be tiny, which means the 'larger' OR6 versions will be tiny too.

Would a graphics card fix blurry Google Maps and Earth?

Q I have a basic Palicomp desktop PC that came with integrated graphics. This is generally fine for me because I don't play games on it. However, I can't upgrade it from Windows 10 to 11, so I was thinking of replacing it with the Palicomp AMD Cobra you recommend in your Buy It pages. This also comes with integrated graphics as standard. I like to look at archaeological sites on Google Maps and Google Earth, but can't get a close view, as the picture gets blurrier the more I zoom in. Is this the fault of my PC's integrated graphics or the sites themselves? Would a dedicated **graphics card** help?

Jim Fraser



Images from Google Earth get blurrier the more you zoom in, and a graphics card won't fix that

A As a rule, standalone graphics cards perform better than integrated equivalents. However, that's pretty much irrelevant in your case, because the blurriness you describe in Google Maps and Earth is almost certainly due to the quality of the original satellite imagery, rather than the capabilities of your PC's integrated graphics. The

resolution of satellite images can vary from one location to another, and some areas simply have lower-quality images available.

Upgrading to a dedicated graphics card won't improve the resolution of these images, and nor will zooming in. There's only so much detail the satellites can

capture. The resolution might be anything from a few centimetres to couple of metres (or more) per pixel. So, while a dedicated graphics card might enhance your system's performance overall, it won't have any effect on the quality of the particular satellite imagery you're viewing.

Can I hide VLC's controls?

Q I like to watch films with my laptop literally on my lap. My son brings me the files on a USB stick and I play them using VLC, which he also installed for me.

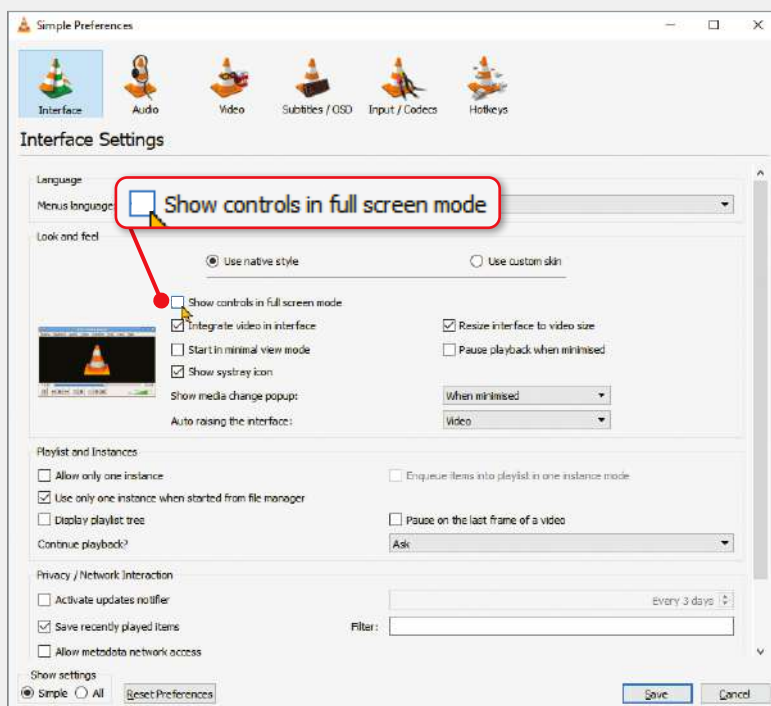
I find all this quite confusing, but it's not really a problem because I simply click the Play button, then choose the Fullscreen option in the Video menu. However, sometimes I find that my round tummy jogs the laptop, making the control bar appear at the bottom for a few moments. It's not a big problem as such, but it is annoying.

Is there a way to watch in full screen without having this bar appear every time I breathe in too deeply?

Gerald Cook

A VLC's interface can be a little daunting, but it's pretty easy to achieve what you want.

First, open the Tools menu and choose Preferences, or use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+P. Next, select the Interface tab and then, in the 'Look and



In VLC's Interface tab you can stop the control bar popping up in full-screen mode

feel' section, click to remove the tick from the 'Show controls in full screen mode'

box (see screenshot). Click Save, then enjoy your movies uninterrupted.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

Copilot, Copilot+ and Copilot Pro?

Q I've seen lots of hype for Microsoft's Copilot (pictured), but there seem to be several different versions of it? I've seen mention of Copilot, Copilot Pro and Copilot+, all in the space of a few web clicks. Could you explain what they all mean?

I'm not sure I want to, but I was wondering if I could use Copilot on my Windows 10 laptop. I could upgrade this to Windows 11, but I've decided to wait for now, because I prefer the look of Windows 10.

Bobby Turner

A Copilot is the name Microsoft has given its artificial intelligence (AI) offerings. It's essentially an easy-to-use front end for the ChatGPT AI tool that has created such a buzz in recent years.

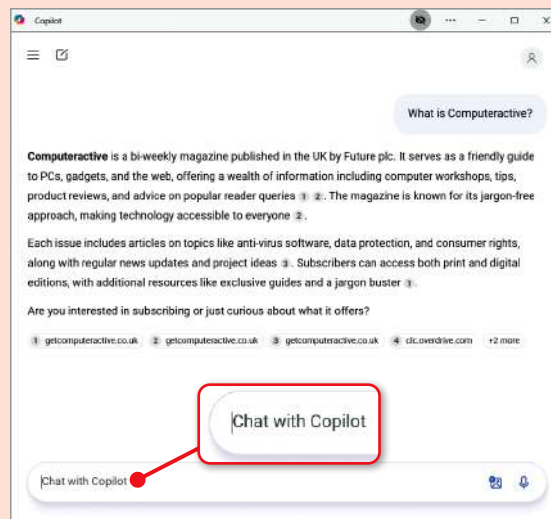
As you seem to have already noticed, Microsoft's version is shaping up to be yet another branding mess. Part of the reason is that Microsoft wants to build an 'ecosystem' of software and hardware, for which it has created different labels.

Copilot is Microsoft's attempt to integrate ChatGPT's AI with Windows 10 and 11


With this in mind, the Copilot+ label is reserved for the next generation of PCs that are going on sale around now. These have specific hardware built in, such as neural processing units (NPUs), to speed up AI-related tasks. We imagine most – if not all – new PCs will eventually be labelled Copilot+.

However, you don't need a Copilot+ PC to use Copilot. It's been a standard feature of Windows 11 since version 23H2 (released October 2023), and you can access it by clicking its icon in the taskbar. You can also download it from the Microsoft Store for Windows 10 (at www.snipca.com/52088).

Both are free to use, with some limitations (such as which version of ChatGPT it uses and how many queries



you can make in a given period). If you want to unlock all its features, you can pay Microsoft £19 a month for what it calls Copilot Pro. To see the differences between the free and subscription versions, check the comparison chart at www.snipca.com/52089.

 Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Can I rescue my TV recordings?

Q I have three 2TB hard drives attached to a Panasonic DVD player/recorder, which in turn is plugged into my TV. Everything was working well until the player/recorder died. It seems that my three hard drives (full of documentaries, films and so on) are somehow linked to the dead recorder, so I can't play any of my recordings on a computer or even another DVD player.

Is this really the case? I'd be very disappointed to lose the many gems I've recorded over the years.

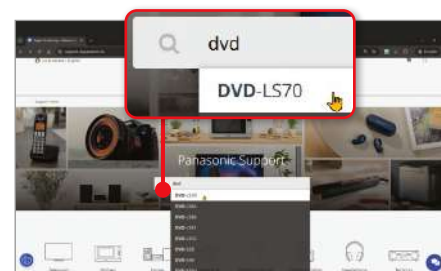
D E Killingley

A Sadly, it's very common for TV-recording equipment such as your Panasonic device to 'lock' recordings to the original device. Manufacturers do this to comply with any number of digital-rights-management (DRM) agreements. And when we say the original device, we

mean literally the device that recorded them, which in your case is now broken. Even though your recordings are on external USB hard drives, the Panasonic device will have encrypted them using a digital key embedded in a chip.

If your device was still working, you might have been able to transfer your recordings to another medium – such as to a DVD-R disc, for example – while playing them back. But now that the unit is faulty, that's obviously not possible.

We're afraid your only option now is to try to get the original device repaired. Without knowing exactly which model it is, we can't say how realistic your prospects are, but you could start by searching Panasonic's European support pages, at <https://support-uk.panasonic.eu> (pictured). Type your model number into the search box to see what options are available to you.



Panasonic's support pages might offer help for reviving a dead DVD recorder

Next Issue

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Weds
6 Nov

- Why is my PC shutting down?
- What's holding back my Windows 11?
- Can I open my old Freelance files? ...And many more

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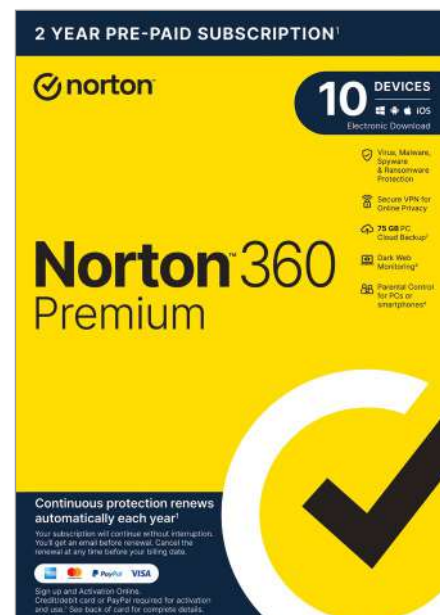
Norton 360 Premium 10 devices, 2 years

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10 devices for two years NOW ONLY £19.99*
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*while stocks last



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Should I switch from RoboForm to Microsoft Authenticator?

Q I've been using the password manager RoboForm (www.robiform.com) ever since you recommended it years ago. I pay for an annual subscription and now have over 100 passwords saved. But in Issue 691's Workshop (page 38), you recommended using Microsoft Authenticator (Android www.snipca.com/51573, iOS www.snipca.com/51575) to save passwords instead. Why is this better than RoboForm? I'm worried because you've mentioned plenty of password managers recently, but not RoboForm.

W J Wildman

A Microsoft Authenticator's main function is to generate single-use security codes for accounts that are protected by **two-factor authentication** (2FA), but it also works as a basic password manager. It has a decent set of features, including the ability to generate complex passwords and sync logins across devices (using Microsoft's Edge web browser), and it's free.

That's not to say it's better than RoboForm, which remains a solid choice. If we haven't sung RoboForm's praises much recently, it's mainly because the free version of the tool is quite limited compared with other free password managers – for example, you can't sync your logins across all your devices unless you pay for the premium version. However, as you're already subscribing, these limitations won't affect you. So, as long as you're happy with RoboForm – and happy to continue paying for it – there's no reason to switch.

Why doesn't 4K Video Downloader work for me?

Q As you recommended, I've been using 4K Video Downloader (www.snipca.com/45349) to download videos from YouTube to my Windows 10 PC. However, it stopped



If you can't download 4K Video Downloader, try the Incognito version of your browser

working recently, and although the website says a new version is available, the download won't work for me. Do you know what's wrong?

Michael Wood

A When we tried downloading 4K Video Downloader using that link, it worked perfectly for us. However, it looks as if the developer has recently renamed the tool 4K Video Downloader Plus. We also noted that the free version now limits you to downloading 10 videos per day (reduced from 30 downloads).

If your problem is with installing this latest version, try uninstalling the old one first, then reinstalling 4K Video Downloader Plus from scratch. If you can't download the new version at all, try opening the program's homepage in a new private/Incognito tab (see screenshot above), or use a different web browser.

Should I keep using IBM Security Rapport?

Q After reading in your News pages that many Chrome extensions will stop working when Google introduces Manifest V3 (Issue 690, page 6), I turned to page 42 to follow your advice on how to check my extensions. Surprise, surprise, the only one Chrome deemed 'safe' was Google Docs Offline. Those considered 'unsafe' included IBM Security Rapport, which my bank recommended I use when I started to bank online.

I decided to look up IBM Security Rapport online, and it seems to have



Open Chrome's Extensions, then Manage Extensions to remove IBM Security Rapport

received a lot of bad press over the years. My bank offered no advice, so can you tell me whether I should keep using it.

Vic Downer

A Some banks have recommended IBM Rapport to their customers, but it has a dreadful reputation, with many users saying it makes their browser slow down or crash. Thankfully, you don't need IBM Rapport to log into your online banking service – its main function is to block dangerous websites. We think you'd be better off uninstalling Rapport and using an alternative instead.

To remove Rapport completely, you may need to uninstall both the Windows program and the Chrome extension. Open the Windows Settings app and click Apps (then 'Installed apps' if you're using Windows 11) and look for Rapport. If it's there, click it and select Uninstall, then Uninstall again. In Chrome, click the top-right Menu button (three vertical dots), Extensions, then Manage Extensions. Next, click the Remove button under IBM Security Rapport, then click Remove again when prompted (see screenshot above).

Many security tools offer protection against malware-infected web pages and **phishing** sites – including free programs such as Bitdefender Antivirus Free for Windows (www.snipca.com/52162).

If yours doesn't, you could install Bitdefender's TrafficLight extension, which is free from www.snipca.com/52164. This will continue to work even when Chrome stops supporting Manifest V2 extensions.

Jargon **Buster**

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

7Zip A format for compressing files into an archive.

Administrator Someone who can make changes to a computer that will affect others who also use it.

AES-256bit A form of encryption based on a key length of 256 bits.

AI Intelligence demonstrated by a machine rather than a human.

APK Android Package Kit. The file format Android uses to install apps.

Architecture A set of rules and language that govern how hardware and software work.

ARM Processors that are more energy-efficient and used in more devices than AMD and Intel chips.

Backhaul The process of sending data to a wired access point to reach the wider internet.

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

Benchmarking Comparing software and products with an accepted standard.

Binary gigabytes A unit of data storage equal to 1,073,741,824 bytes. This is in contrast to a gigabyte in decimal notation, which is equal to 1,000,000,000 bytes.

Bitrate A measure of data transfer speed, or of the quality of digital video or audio files.

Buffering Downloading a certain amount of data before starting to play a video.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

Cast Send content from your PC to TV.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot A computer program designed to recreate conversation with human users.

Code Programming languages used to create software.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website.

Copilot+ An enhanced version of Microsoft's Copilot AI tool. Also used to classify Windows 11 computers with a neural processing unit (NPU) that can perform over 40 trillion operations per second (TOPS).

CPU Central Processing Unit. Another term for a computer processor.

Dark web Websites that can only be accessed using special software such as the Tor browser.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

Decimal gigabytes A unit of data storage equal to 1,000,000,000 bytes. This is in contrast to binary gigabytes, which is equal to 1,073,741,824 bytes.

Deprecation When a software feature is phased out and no longer recommended for use.

Digital key Password, PIN or other sign-in method that provides access to digital systems, devices or services.

dpi Dots per inch. A measure of printed image quality.

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.

Dual-band router A Wi-Fi router that operates on two bands: 2.4GHz and 5GHz.

Dynamic tracking Video technology that follows objects within a video frame, allowing cameras or software to adjust focus, zoom or position.

End-to-end encryption Ensures that messages can be seen only by the sender and recipient.

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

exFAT Microsoft's file system for USB sticks and SD cards.

Fingerprinting A tracking method used by websites to identify you from the device and software you're using.

Frame rate The number of still images or frames shown per second (fps) to create a moving image.

GHz Gigahertz. A measure of how many instructions a chip can process per second.

GPS Global positioning system. Satellite-based navigational system.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

HDMI Connection that transmits high-definition video and audio.

HTTPS The secure version of HTTP, the technology that sends data between your browser and the web.

IP address A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IR camera Infrared camera. Captures images using infrared light.

ISO file A type of image file that contains data from a CD or DVD.

JavaScript An older programming language developers use to make web pages interactive.

LAN A computer network in one place, such as a home or office.

LED Light-emitting diode. An electronic device that emits light.

Linux developer mode Features and tools that let developers experiment with Linux software.

M.2 A standard specification for PC expansion cards and connectors.

Machine learning The science of teaching computers how to learn by themselves.

Manifest V2/V3 Second and third versions of the software that runs Chrome browser extensions.

Matter Open-source standard that lets smart-home devices made by different companies work together.

Mechanical keyboard Keyboards that use a spring-loaded mechanism to press a physical switch.

Mesh Wi-Fi Wireless network system that uses multiple, connected routers.

Metadata A set of data that gives information about a file.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

NAS Network-attached storage. A hard drive attached to a network that can be shared with other PCs.

Noise cancellation Method for reducing unwanted sound in headphones by adding a second sound designed to cancel the first.

NPU Neural processing unit. Specialised chip designed for performing AI tasks.

NTFS New Technology File System. A file system used by all recent versions of Windows.

OEM Refers to components or software installed by the manufacturer.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Onion address URLs for websites on the dark web, accessible only through the Tor browser.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone.

Phishing A form of internet fraud that tries to trick you into revealing personal details.

Picture-in-picture Shows video in a small moveable screen while you browse the web or watch TV.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software or to your web browser.

Polling rate How often your mouse tells your computer where it is on screen.

Proxy server A computer that sits between your computer and the internet and filters the connection.

RAM Used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

Ransomware Malware run by hackers who lock files on your PC and demand a payment to release them.

Read To access data saved on a computer.

Refurbished A second-hand device that has been repaired by its manufacturer so that it can be resold and reused.

Roaming charge Fee incurred for using your phone to receive data via overseas mobile networks.

Root directory The top folder in any hierarchy.

SATA An interface for connecting hard drives to a PC.

Script A program that's stored on a server to control part of a website.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

Secure Boot A security standard designed to make sure your PC avoids malware when booting.

Sideload To install apps without using the official Android store.

SIM The smart card used by all digital mobile phones.

SSD Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts.

TAR A format for archiving files and directories.

TOPS Trillion operations per second. A measure of a PC's processing power when performing AI tasks.

Torrent A file that can be downloaded using Bittorrent software.

TPM Trusted Platform Module. A chip that stores keys which encrypt data on your hard drive.

Tracking parameters How much information a website can gather on you when you visit.

Transparency effects See-through visual elements that appear in parts of Windows. They create a semi-transparent or frosted-glass appearance.

Two-factor authentication A system that uses two different means to identify the user.

Ultrawide Offering a field of view that's wider than traditional digital cameras.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C A connector that's reversible.

VGA An older standard socket for connecting a monitor to a PC.

Virtual machine A software-based computer running inside another computer.

VoIP The routing of voice conversations over the internet.

VPN Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

WAN Wide Area Network. Exists over a large geographical area.

Wi-Fi 7 Faster successor to Wi-Fi 6, with speeds up to 46Gbps.

Wildcard A character that can be substituted for one or more characters in a web search.





WPS An easy way to make a wireless connection between a device and a router by pressing the WPS button on both.

Write Save data to a hard drive.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

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Easy when you **Know How**



Hoping to save 360-degree images from Google Maps to view offline, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Download Street View panoramas

It's 15 years since Google launched Street View in the UK, giving us all the chance to gawk at our houses through the lenses of a 360-degree camera. I believe it's one of the wonders of the web, and I rarely visit any new area without first sneaking a preview from the yellow 'pegman'.

“

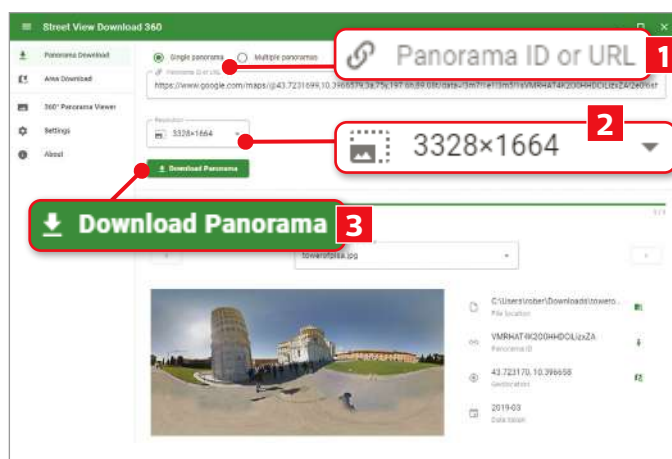
I spotted the shadow of the Street View car's 360-degree camera

”

I love rotating the panoramic images to see locations from every angle, including the blurry faces of people caught scoffing chips and flicking V-signs at the Street View car. And I especially like virtually visiting far-off places I've never been to, and probably never will. Google recently announced that it's expanding Street View imagery to include Bosnia and Herzegovina, Paraguay and Liechtenstein (www.snipca.com/52200), which will save me a fair whack on airfare.

One thing Street View lacks is the option to download its 360-degree panoramas. Yes, you can save or share a link to an immersive view, but that entails opening it in the Google Maps website or mobile app, rather than keeping a copy to explore offline.

So I was pleased to discover a free program called Street View Download 360 (www.snipca.com/52201), which is designed for that very purpose. It's been around since 2016, but released a new version in June to improve its panorama downloads. Eight years is plenty of time for Google to block the third-party tool for pilfering Maps content, so I was hopeful it would work.



Robert used Street View Download 360 to download panoramic images from Google Maps for free

To find out, I downloaded the Windows version of Street View Download 360 – it's also available for macOS and Linux – and installed it without any problems. In Google Maps, I searched for a notable vista to download – the Tower of Pisa in Tuscany – and dragged the pegman onto the marker to switch to Street View. I found myself at the base of the wonky edifice among a throng of tourists.

Back in Street View Download 360, I clicked the 'Path to save the file' box, chose a target folder for the panorama and entered a name for the file-to-be. I then clicked the three-dot button next to the name of the location in Street View and chose 'Share or embed image'.

When the Share box opened, I clicked 'Copy link' next to 'Link for sharing' and pasted the link into the 'Panorama ID or URL' box in Street View Download 360 (1 in our screenshot above). I set the resolution to '3328x1664' – which was the middle option in the dropdown menu (2) – and clicked Download Panorama (3).

Disappointingly, this displayed an error message saying that "shortened Maps URLs are not supported. Please enter the full link." So instead I copied and pasted the lengthy URL from my browser's address bar, then clicked Download Panorama again.

This time, the panorama quickly downloaded and a preview image appeared in the area below. This looked

rather flat, but clicking it opened the panorama in all its 360-degree glory in the program's 360° Panorama Viewer.

Here I was able to rotate and tilt the image through every angle, gaze up at the top of the leaning tower and zoom into the scaffolding on the adjacent cathedral. I also spotted the shadow of the camera mounted on the Street View car – oops! When I opened the file in my usual image viewer, IrfanView, I could see only the flat panorama, but Street View Download 360's own viewer loads quickly and allows you to drag and drop files directly into its window. You can even 'play' the stitched images like a video.

I set about exploring and downloading panoramas of other attractive locations, such as Machu Picchu, Glencoe and Central Park (where the pegman turned blue), with similar success. Some of the program's options are reserved for its Pro edition, which costs £49.99. These include saving every available panorama for a specified area and adding metadata to 360-degree images. But the free version will be sufficient for most people and gives you plenty to explore offline.

Now if you don't mind, I need to check out some roundabouts in Milton Keynes.

 Need help with downloading 3D panoramas from Google Street View? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

PHASE

Alpha Phase [IVY3]



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COBRA

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i5

Aurora

i5 Aurora [AUR2]



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£999.99

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