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I have three key rules when deciding which subjects deserve to be Cover Features. The most important is that they have to trigger one of two reactions from readers: "I didn't know you could do that!" or "I always wanted to do that, but didn't know how!". Either response tells me that we've come up with a winner.

I hope you'll think both while reading our tips for mastering your Windows folders. We look at advanced tricks for using File Explorer, explain how to share folders over your network, and recommend brilliant

programs to replace Windows' built-in tools – plus much more.

The feature also follows my second rule, which is that I must learn something from it too. I've been writing about computers for more than 20 years, so if a feature teaches me something new, it will probably do the same for you.

My final rule is to avoid readers thinking "I don't care how to do that!" Please tell me whether we succeeded.

Daniel Booth
editor@computeractive.co.uk



THIS ISSUE IN NUMBERS

£65 to £143

How much one reader was quoted for fitting an SSD – [p64](#)

£309

Price of the Samsung Galaxy Tab S6 Lite, our new favourite Android tablet – [p30](#)



700MHz
Radio frequency that Ofcom has switched from TV to phones – [p49](#)

HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLs

We use snipcas 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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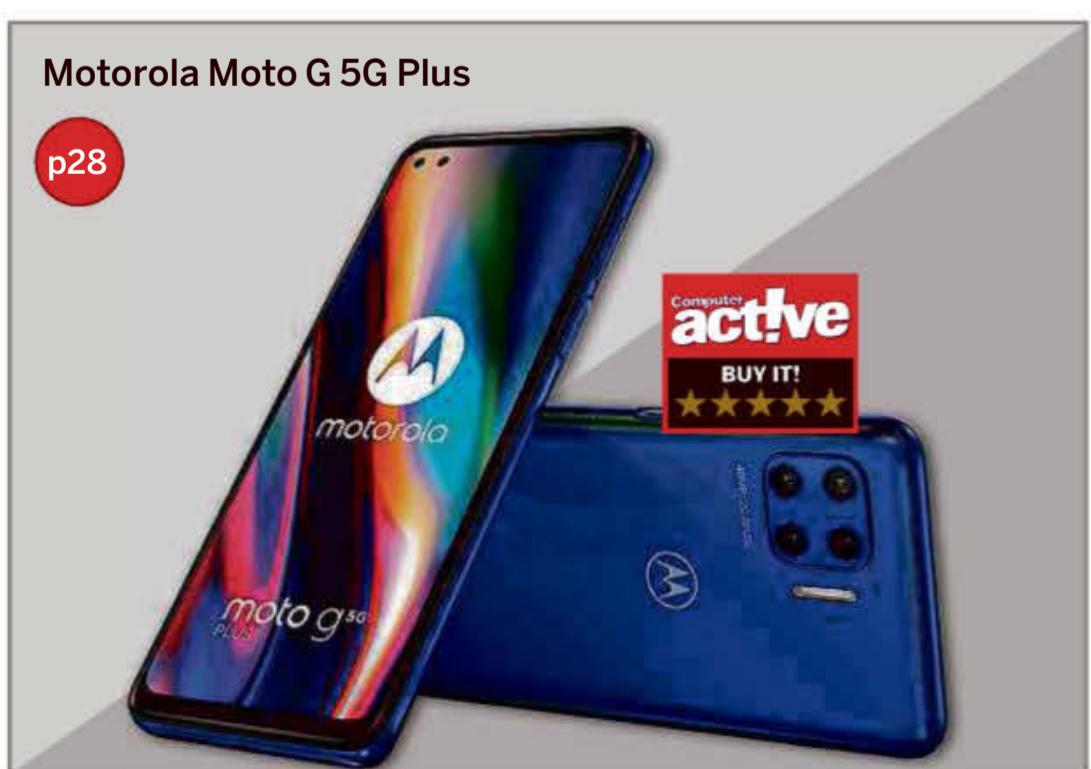
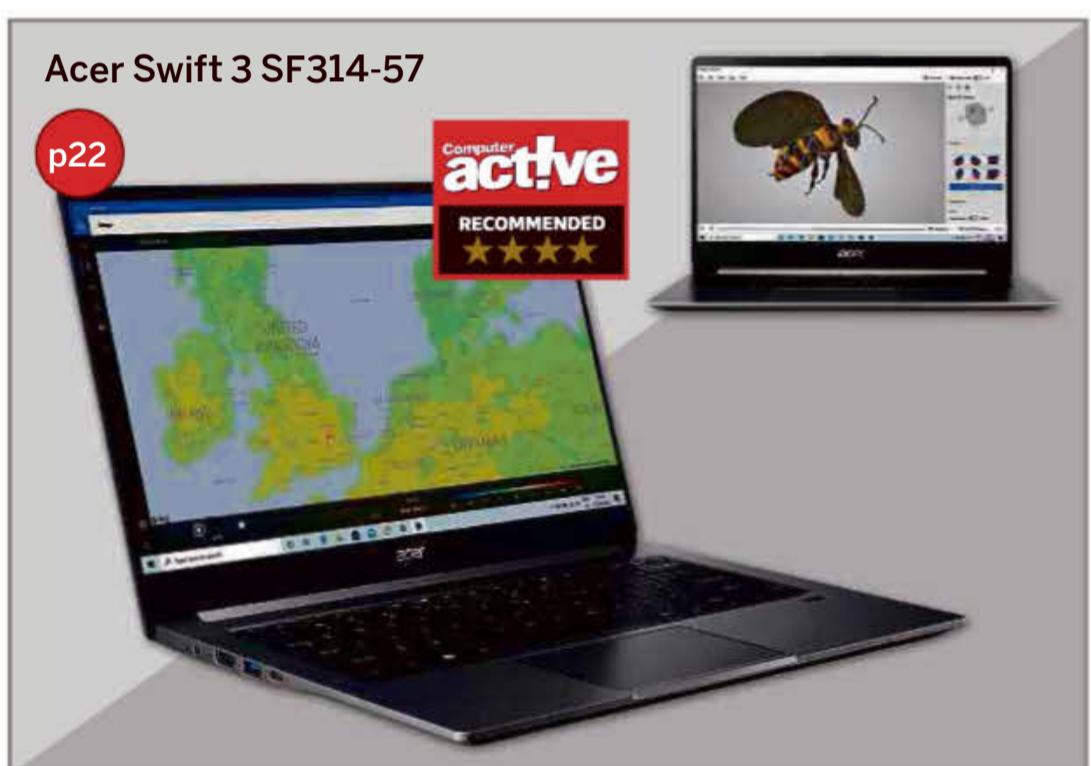
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Is no news good news for TV?



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Had enough of ads? Start blocking now

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```

Format View Help
Copyright (c) 1993-2009 Microsoft Corp.
#
# This is a sample HOSTS file used by Microsoft TCP/IP for Windows.
#
# This file contains mappings of IP addresses to host names. Each
# entry should contain a tab character between the address and the
# name. The IP address should be placed in the first column followed by the
# corresponding host name. The IP address and host name should be separated by at least one
# space.
#
# Additionally, comments (such as these) may be inserted on individual
# lines or following the machine name denoted by a '#' symbol.
#
# For example:
#
#      192.54.94.97    rhino.acme.com    # source server
#      192.54.94.98    x.acme.com       # x client host
#
# localhost name resolution is handled within DNS itself.
#      127.0.0.1        localhost
#      ::1              localhost

```

www.bbc.co.uk refused to connect.

What You Must Change In Your WINDOWS FOLDERS

Master secret settings that'll transform your PC



COVER FEATURE P50

Make virtual computing a reality

p62



IE and old Edge doomed as Microsoft ends support

Microsoft will end support for Internet Explorer 11 (IE11) across its subscription Office tools next year, as well as for the old version of Edge.

WHAT WE THINK

Many technology firms are guilty of forcing change on to users before they're ready, but Microsoft has got the timing right. It's been clear since 2015 that Internet Explorer will eventually be replaced by Edge, giving IE's users time to prepare. Microsoft also didn't rush to shut down the original Edge – by next March, when the plug is pulled, you would have had 14 months to move to the new version. We urge you to do that as soon as possible, whether as your main browser or an alternative to Chrome.

The move is part of the company's long-term aim to move users on to the new version of Edge, which launched in January having been rebuilt using Google's Chromium [source code](#).

Released in 2013, the 11th version of IE will be the last. In 2015, Microsoft said it had stopped building new tools for the browser, as it prepared to promote Edge in the forthcoming launch of Windows 10. It ended support for IE8, 9 and 10 in 2016.

It has continued to support IE with security updates, and you can still run it in Windows 10. But axing support in Microsoft 365 is a significant step towards the company abandoning the browser completely. Recent figures show that only about one per cent of people still use it.

Microsoft wrote (

snipca.com/35829) that after 17 August 2021, using IE in Microsoft 365's online Office tools will be – at best – a "degraded experience", with some features no longer working. At worst, you won't even be able to connect to use them through IE.

In addition, Microsoft will end support for the old 'legacy' Edge on 9 March 2021, having upgraded "most" Windows 10 users to the latest

version, which it calls "our best expression of a modern browser".

Programs and sites built to use the old Edge will continue to work, but Microsoft will no longer fix problems with it.

If you're not yet using the revamped Edge, download it from www.microsoft.com/edge. You'll see its blue-green 'wave' logo appear in your taskbar, replacing the old blue 'e' logo of Edge.

Manage your drives in Settings, not Control Panel

Disk Management has become the latest tool to be moved from the Control Panel into Settings, as Microsoft continues to modernise Windows 10.

The change is part of Build 20197, a preview version of Windows 10 available to people signed up to the Insiders program.

Microsoft has recently tested moving other tools

from the Control Panel, such as System. In future, it wants all important functions to be housed in Settings, which you can access by pressing the Windows key+I shortcut.

In its Insider blog (www.snipca.com/35831), Microsoft said that the change means you'll be able to perform tasks like "viewing disk information, creating and formatting volumes, and assigning drive

letters" from Settings.

If you have Build 20197 you can see the new Disk Management tools by opening Settings, then clicking System, followed by Storage on the left. Click 'Manage Disks and Volumes' to bring up the main page (pictured). It's not known whether the change will be part of the next Feature update, codenamed 20H2, due this autumn.



You'll like this... Microsoft celebrated Windows 95's 25th birthday with a video online (www.snipca.com/35817)



but not this... Hackers can clone keys by listening to the noise they make when inserted in locks (www.snipca.com/35832)

Buckingham Palace becomes office block in Flight Sim 2020

Buckingham Palace has been turned into an ugly office block (pictured) in the new version of Microsoft Flight Simulator, which is now available to buy for Windows 10.

It's one of several landmarks to be unintentionally altered in the game. Others include Edinburgh Castle, the Wallace Monument near Stirling, and Sydney Harbour Bridge, which has been replaced by a dull road bridge.

The errors were caused by the artificial intelligence Microsoft used to recreate the



world. Most of the landscapes and buildings have to be generated by special algorithms that interpret satellite data. This typically produces accurate results for generic buildings like skyscrapers and factories, but can cause problems with more distinctive structures.

Other errors include tall obelisks appearing where they shouldn't, such as in Melbourne and the Italian countryside.

Despite these glitches, the graphics in the game have been acclaimed as some of the most realistic ever seen in a flight simulator. There are three versions – Standard (£59.99), Deluxe (£79.99) and Premium Deluxe (£109.99) – all available from www.snipca.com/35822.

• We'll review Flight Simulator 2020 in our next issue – out 23 September.

WHAT ON EARTH ARE THESE?

Sydney Harbour Bridge



Edinburgh Castle



Wallace Monument



Obelisk in Italian countryside



Transcribe text in Word – but only if you subscribe

Microsoft has released a tool that transcribes text in the online version of Word, but it's available only in the subscription version of Office.

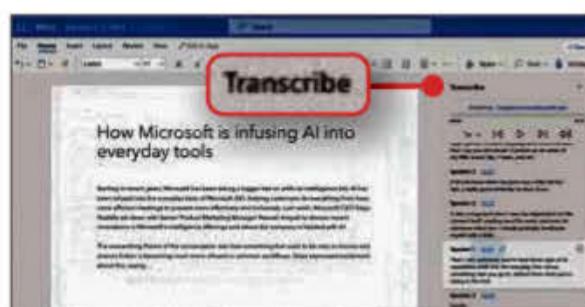
'Transcribe in Word' understands both live text and audio in uploaded files, 'typing' words into a document as it hears them.

You can use it to transcribe live speech, such as from video calls. But it will probably be used more by people who need to record meetings, interviews and lectures, and want to avoid the hassle of typing them up. Once you've uploaded a file (MP3, WAV, M4A or MP4), you just need to

press play for transcription to begin.

It appears in a sidebar in Word (see screenshot), and identifies different speakers, so you can jump between interviewer and interviewee, for example. You can add a quote by clicking the plus icon.

However, to use it you need to subscribe to Microsoft 365 (formerly called Office 365), which is available in Personal (£59.99 a year) and Family (£79.99) editions – compare these at www.snipca.com/35827. You get all the



Office tools you're familiar with in the one-off downloadable purchase.

Also, it works only in Edge and Chrome, not Firefox, and there's a limit of five hours per month for uploaded files. In addition, files can't be more than 200MB, and currently the only supported language is US English, so 'colour' appears as 'color'.

Read more on Microsoft's blog: www.snipca.com/35825.

IN BRIEF

CHROME SAVES AND TAGS YOUR PDFS

The new version of Chrome (85) saves what you've typed into online PDFs, letting you pick up later where you left off. Also, when you print a web page and choose 'Save as PDF', Chrome will generate a 'tagged' PDF that includes headings, lists, tables, paragraphs, and image descriptions. Screen-reading software will be able to read this information, making PDFs easier to use for people with poor eyesight.

£15 'UNIVERSAL CREDIT' VIRGIN BROADBAND

Virgin Media is to launch a broadband-only package for people on Universal Credit. The service, due to go live this autumn, will offer 15Mbps for £15 a month. There's no fixed-term contract length and the price won't change while benefit payments are being received. It'll be available initially to existing Virgin Media customers, who'll need to complete a form and prove they receive Universal Credit. Visit Virgin's site for details: www.snipca.com/35821.

TOMORROW'S WORLD



Here's a quick experiment: click your fingers. That's how long it would take to download 22 million HD photos at 178Tbps (178,000,000 megabits a second), which is the world-record data-transfer speed achieved by researchers at University College London. They did this by transmitting data through a much wider range of colours of light, or wavelengths, than is typically used in optical fibre. Read more on UCL's site: www.snipca.com/35807.

IN BRIEF

USE SONY CAMERA AS PC WEBCAM

Sony has released software that lets you use some of its cameras as high-quality webcams via USB, so you don't need extra accessories like video-capture cards. The tool, called Imaging Edge Webcam, lets you use the camera's full autofocus powers during video calls, even if the audio can only be handled by your PC or an external mic. It works on 64bit Windows 10 PCs only. Visit www.snipca.com/35806 to download it and check compatible cameras.



NEW 5G BLACKBERRY PHONE IN 2021

Texas company Onward Mobility has announced it's releasing a new BlackBerry phone next year, after buying a licence to make them. Little is known about the phone, but the company said it'll be an Android device, will work on 5G, and have the physical QWERTY keyboard that made BlackBerry phones so popular around 10 years ago. For more details visit www.onwardmobility.com.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

This may be the richest person who never lived. Her name is Lil Miquela and she's a 'virtual influencer' – a computer-generated 'celebrity' who promotes brands online. It's thought she earns her creators around £9m a year recommending Prada handbags and Calvin Klein perfume. Let's hope for their sake she never goes on strike.



ISPs refunded record £20.8m to customers under new scheme

Broadband providers paid a record £20.8m in compensation to customers in the final six months of 2019, as new rules to protect consumers started to take effect.

Under a new scheme set up by Ofcom, providers have to pay £8 per day for delayed repairs following a loss of broadband, assuming it isn't fixed within two working days. They also have to pay £25 for missed appointments, and £5 for each day a new service is delayed.

Ofcom said just £8m was paid to customers in the first six months of 2019, before the rules were changed.

Between July and December last year firms paid £9.7m for delayed repairs following loss of service, £1.6m for missed appointments and £9.5m for delaying a new service. Over 600,000 customers were compensated this way, Ofcom said.

Seven providers have signed up to the voluntary scheme: BT, Sky, TalkTalk, Virgin



Media, Zen Internet, Hyperoptic and Utility Warehouse. EE, Plusnet and Vodafone have yet to join, despite pledging to do so. Ofcom has urged them to sign up to ensure "customers get fair compensation when things go wrong".

There's evidence to suggest that the penalty of paying automatic refunds is motivating companies to fix problems earlier. Ofcom's annual customer service report (www.snipca.com/35805) showed that every provider that signed up to the scheme repaired faults

within an average of two days or less. EE was the only company to exceed this, averaging up to three days.

The report, covering the 12 months up to January 2020, showed that Plusnet customers were the happiest with their service, with a 93-per-cent satisfaction rate, despite having one of the longest call-waiting times, at an average of 3 minutes, 48 seconds.

TalkTalk came bottom, with a satisfaction rate of 78 per cent, though it answered calls in an average of 39 seconds. Only EE answered calls quicker, in 26 seconds.

Phones can now work out when you're drunk

Smartphones can detect when you're drunk by monitoring how you're walking, a study has found.

Researchers at Pittsburgh University in the US used sensors in phones to detect when somebody was over the legal drink-drive limit, claiming they could measure this with 90-per-cent accuracy when users walked just 10 steps.

They hope the breakthrough will inspire developers to make phone alerts that warn people not to drink and drive.

In the study, 22 participants

aged 21 to 43 were given a vodka and lime juice drink every hour until they reached the UK and US drink-drive limit of 80 milligrams of alcohol per 100 millilitres of blood.

Every two hours they tried to walk in a straight line for 10 steps, before turning around and walking back. A smartphone strapped to their back detected changes to their movements as they walked. Researchers found that lateral movement – swaying back and forth – was the best predictor of drunkenness.



Lead researcher Dr Brian Suffoletto said he has spent the past 10 years testing "digital interventions to prevent deaths and injury related to excessive alcohol consumption" after losing a friend in a drink-drive road accident in college.

He hopes to carry out further tests to better mimic the different ways people carry their phones, such as in hands or pockets.

Google Maps get added colour to make them more realistic

Google is adding extra colour and detail to its online maps to show terrain and streets more accurately.

On its blog (www.snipca.com/35777), Google says it's using a new "colour-mapping algorithmic technique" to add geographical features to its satellite images, helping you to "easily distinguish tan, arid beaches and deserts from blue lakes, rivers, oceans and ravines".

It added: "You can know at a glance how lush and green a place is with vegetation, and even see if there are snow caps on the peaks of mountaintops".

As examples, it showed images from around the world as seen before and after the technique is applied. In the map above, Google says "Iceland's rich landscape is now much easier to visualize".

"You can see the varying densities of greenery



throughout the country and more easily spot Vatnajökull – the largest ice cap in Iceland, which is now depicted in white," it added.

Google uses artificial intelligence to identify natural features in its satellite images, focusing on "arid, icy, forested, and mountainous regions". It then assigns areas colours from the HSV (Hue, Saturation, and Value) model, which turns makes RGB (red, green and blue) primary colours easier for humans to see on a computer screen.

This method lets Google use

dark green for a densely covered forest, and lighter green for shrubland. It increases detail in towns and cities also, showing the shape and width of roads to scale, though only in London, New York and San Francisco to begin with. Other cities will be added in the "coming months".

Overall, the changes will apply across all 220 countries and territories that Google Maps covers, which is "over 100M square kilometres of land, or 18 billion football fields".

Phone masts to spray 5G vandals with 'smart' water

Mobile networks are protecting their phone masts from attack by spraying vandals with a special type of water that can "forensically link them to the crime".

The liquid, made by UK firm SmartWater, remains on skin for months, and can be seen only under an ultraviolet black light (pictured). It contains a code that indicates where it was sprayed.

It's being used by the Mobile Broadband Network Limited (MBNL) organisation, which runs the infrastructure used by EE and Three. They've taken the measure following a rise in attacks on masts in the past few months.

In particular, arsonists set fire to 5G masts during lockdown because they falsely believed the technology was spreading coronavirus. One attack was on a phone mast in Solihull that provided a signal to the Nightingale Hospital set up at the National Exhibition Centre.

Several arrests have been made throughout the country, while in June 47-year-old Michael Whitty of Kirkby was jailed for three years for burning a mast in Knowsley Industrial Park.

Openreach already uses SmartWater to protect some of



its copper cables from theft. SmartWater claims this has cut thefts by 77 per cent.

The technology is also used to protect cash machines, while trials in homes in Kent, London and Nottingham have seen burglary rates plummet. SmartWater claims it has had a 100 per cent conviction rate. Watch this video for more details on how it works: www.snipca.com/35770.

IN BRIEF

SEND YOUR OLD TECH KIT TO BE REUSED

Nominet, the UK internet-domain registry, has launched a scheme that lets you donate old or unwanted devices to community groups and schools. The aim is for vulnerable people to use equipment like computers, routers and tablets that would otherwise be binned. The Reboot Project (<https://rebootproject.uk>) follows the DevicesDotNow initiative, which gave emergency digital access to people affected by coronavirus.

VODAFONE'S SECOND BROADBAND LINE

Vodafone has launched a second-broadband line for homes, offering speeds of 35Mbps. Its new 'Work and Play' service (www.snipca.com/35773) costs existing pay-monthly customers £21 per month, while new customers will pay £23, rising to £25 for 67Mbps. BT launched a similar service in June, priced from £49.99 a month (see www.snipca.com/35774). Other ISPs are likely to follow suit as the trend for working from home continues.

MICROSOFT TURNS F1 INTO BLUETOOTH KEY

Microsoft is rumoured to be working on a keyboard that lets you turn Bluetooth on and off via the F1 button, switching between three devices. A picture leaked on Twitter by tech insider WalkingCat (www.snipca.com/35776) also showed a heart icon on a button that appears to be for emojis.



Question of the Fortnight

Will the internet kill TV news programmes?

There could be fewer daily bulletins as viewers move online

Here is the news: there is no news. Or rather, there's no news at six o'clock or one o'clock, only at 10 o'clock, by which time you may have given up waiting for the headlines and headed upstairs for an early night. That could soon be the BBC's stripped-back approach to TV bulletins, according to Fran Unsworth, the corporation's head of news.

In an interview with the *Telegraph*, she said that the number of traditional TV news programmes may be cut over the next decade because more people are getting their news from the internet. She predicts the current three-bulletin schedule (1pm, 6pm, 10pm) will shrivel to one a day.

TV journalism will still be around, she said, because of "the power of pictures to tell a story", but it will appear more



testament to the enduring popularity of TV bulletins. Back in 1967, when ITN created the UK's first half-hour news show, it was only commissioned for 13 weeks because managers feared viewers would find it too dull.

“The head of BBC News predicts that the current three-bulletin schedule (1pm, 6pm, 10pm) will shrivel to one a day”

prominently in the "digital space", such as on the iPlayer on phones and tablets.

Despite the rise in people consuming news online, TV bulletins remain among the most watched programmes. On the BBC, the *News at Six* and *News at Ten* are usually behind only the regional 6:30pm news as the highest-rated broadcasts.

Such viewing figures are a

But Unsworth said that habits are changing. Many of the millions who still tune into TV news belong to an older generation who grew up when the only way to catch up with the headlines was to switch on the telly at the right time. People in their twenties and thirties no longer do that, Unsworth said, and the BBC must adapt accordingly.

Her comments may surprise

defenders of TV news who point to a resurgence in the numbers tuning in during the coronavirus lockdown. Before the internet, 75-80 per cent of people regularly watched a daily bulletin. By January 2020 that had slumped to 55 per cent. Just two months later, during the early weeks of lockdown, that figure was back up to 71 per cent, as the public sought reliable information.

Figures for the *News at Six* and *News at Ten* doubled, attracting eight million and six million viewers respectively. Even young people were watching. "They're sitting down and watching a television bulletin in a way that I thought they weren't ever really going to again," Unsworth said.

However, she doesn't expect this to last, saying she's seen viewing peaks like this before, notably during the terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015, and on London Bridge in

THE FACTS

- The boss of BBC News says the number of traditional TV bulletins might be cut as more people get their news from the internet
- Fran Unsworth said news will be in "the digital space" via the iPlayer on phones and tablets "for young people"
- The proportion of viewers regularly watching TV news during lockdown rose to 71 per cent from 55 per cent in January

2017 and 2019. "The audience falls off again quite rapidly," she said.

But she's hopeful that coverage during lockdown has "changed our image in the mind of the younger viewer", and that if they "really do want to know what's happening they will come to us to find out".

Her key hope is that people realise TV news isn't "just any other news source" – making a distinction between what she sees as credible broadcast journalism and fast-spreading rumours online. But as she acknowledges, people seem to value this difference only in times of national crisis or emergency.

The danger for the BBC lies in changing its schedules for younger viewers who may not even be grateful because they increasingly regard the TV licence as being out of date. It needs to be careful it doesn't alienate older viewers as it chases this Netflix generation.

Protect your tech

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

TV Licence scams targeting over-75s

What's the threat?

Scammers are targeting over-75s with emails demanding they pay the TV Licence fee, exploiting the BBC's decision to end free licences for that age group.

The National Cyber Security Centre, part of GCHQ, said the number of scam licence-fee emails rose in July, and it was working hard to block them.

Fraudsters are using a variety of devious tactics. One email, titled 'Information about your TV Licence', reads: "Oops! Something went wrong with your payment. We're sorry to let you know that your TV Licence could not be automatically renewed."

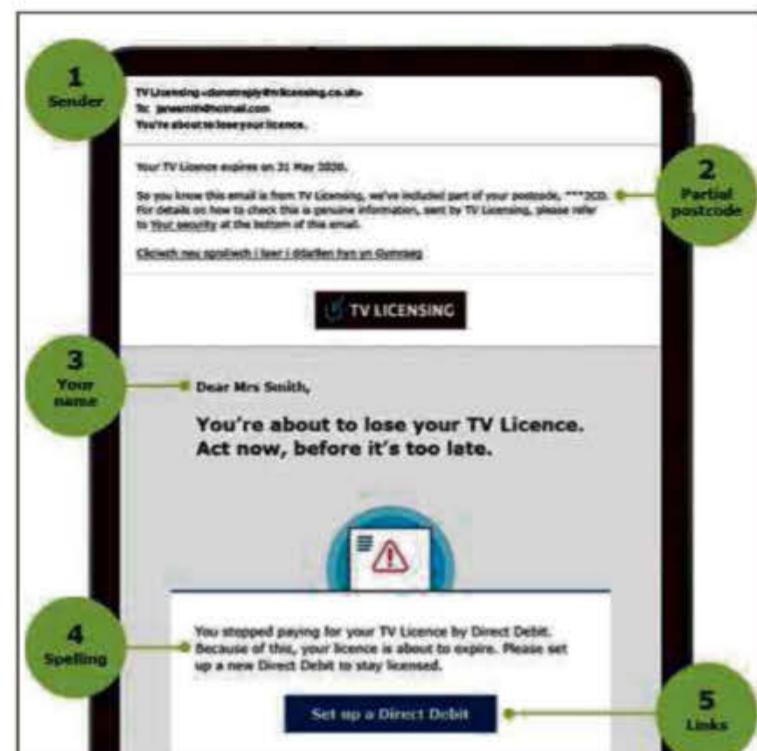
It adds: "If you don't keep up with your payments, we may be forced to cancel your licence or pass your details to a debt collection agency."

The email urges you to click a link and submit your bank details.

How can you stay safe?

First, ignore any emails that say you now have to pay the licence by email. As TV Licensing explains (www.snipca.com/35764), it's contacting people by post *only*. You should check that the letter contains your licence number, title and last name, and has been sent from the address TV Licensing, PO Box 578, Darlington, DL98 1AN. You should have received a letter by the end of September.

TV Licensing does send emails, and they include the name and/or part of your postcode. They never begin with 'Dear Customer', and always come from either donotreply@tvlicensing.co.uk or donotreply@spp.tvlicensing.co.uk. Its customer-support team may also ring you, but only from numbers 0300 790 6075,



0300 555 0285 or 0300 555 0355.

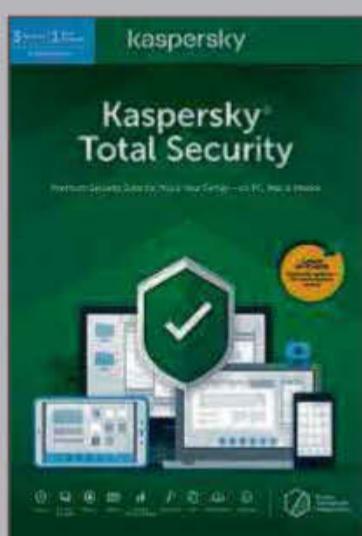
For more advice on how to spot a scam, visit the TV Licensing website (www.snipca.com/35765), which shows an example of a genuine email (pictured).

New tools

Kaspersky's anti-stalkerware

Security experts have long since worked out that sticking 'ware' after a threat makes people sit up and take notice, pausing only to shudder a little. It worked with spyware, which silently steals your data, often pretending to be legitimate programs. And it should work with stalkerware, which can be secretly installed on computers to track your emails, websites you visit, video chats you make – anything you'd rather keep private, basically.

Does that sound like spyware? Well, it is similar. But spyware rarely targets specific individuals. It doesn't get personal – it just goes after large groups.



Stalkerware by contrast knows its target. It's usually installed not by shadowy hackers lurking in basements, but by people you know and who have had access to your computer.

As it becomes easier to buy these tools, security companies have started to build anti-stalkerware protection into their antivirus tools.

Kaspersky, for example, has added it to the 2021 versions of Internet Security and Total Security. You can buy both at large discounts (over 50 per cent) from our Software Store. Visit www.snipca.com/35786 and www.snipca.com/35787 respectively.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers



No council tax refund

With so much help being given to citizens at the moment – such as discounted meals and payment holidays for bills – I can easily see some people falling for a scam email that promises a refund on your council tax. The message claims you've been overcharged, and asks you to visit <http://counciltax-gov.uk>, where you're told to submit details of your bank account. For scam-watching veterans like me, it was an obvious con. But I bet that in these strange times it would catch out a lot of people. If in doubt, always ring your council – they'll know whether it's a scam or not.

Charles Birtles



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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

I still get satisfaction from buying CDs

✉ Like Nik Rawlinson, I have hundreds of CDs accumulated over the years (How To, Issue 587, page 35). Many years ago I digitised my entire collection and now have copies in MP3 format on my laptop and on my Samsung Galaxy A71 phone, plus a copy backed up on a portable hard drive. Each album includes the artwork and track information. I now listen to music either in the car or at home via a bluetooth connection – the actual CDs never see the light of day. So why do I keep them? I sometimes wonder, but I just can't bring myself to part with them.

I don't often buy new CDs these days, but when I do they are immediately transferred to my laptop and phone, stored with the others and never played again. I think the next time I hear about an album I fancy I may just download a copy rather than buy the CD, but I have to say it just doesn't feel right (old habits die hard!)

I'm a lifelong Rolling Stones fan and have every official release in CD format (41 albums and counting!) so when their next album is released I may just have to buy the real thing to maintain the collection.

John Lattimore

I live in a BT Openreach 'black hole'

✉ I am delighted (really, I am) for those to whom BT Openreach is going to provide a superfast fibre service eventually, even if they have to wait up to five years for it (News, Issue 586, page 7). I'm just hoping that during the same period Openreach will find the interest, time and money to tidy up some of the other black holes which exist in their current urban networks and bring them up to at least a reasonable current standard. I live in one of those.

My BT fibre service (here in a suburban area of Worcestershire) gives me download speeds which never exceed 12Mbps and uploads are only 0.5 to 1.5Mbps (official maximum is 35Mbps – if only!).



Over the past few years I have had several visits from engineers who start from scratch and do as good a tweak as they can, but nothing ever changes. The reason is clear, although I'm not sure whether I'm supposed to know it. I'm connected to a 'box' which is some 700 metres away, not to the one which serves newer houses locally and is within 100 metres of my home. I

might just as well live down a nice long, country farm track, rather than cheek by jowl. I wish I did.

One BT helpline lady told me that I'm doing far better than some people. I was hugely consoled by that. And felt a little guilty about even raising the matter. It seemed so *ungrateful* of me. But, ungrateful as it might sound, could anyone advise me what to do to get this improved?

All I ever get out of BT is permission to walk away from my contract early because they can't meet their minimum download guarantee. That's not much compensation when, in the absence of Virgin in my area, any other ISP is going to have to use the same 50-year-old connections.

Chris Myers

DAB is worse than the technology it replaces

✉ Regarding the debate about digital radio, there was a time when new technologies brought improved audio quality into the home. Mechanical recording and reproduction gave way to electronic systems; amplitude-modulated (AM) radio with its narrow frequency range, poor dynamic range and vulnerability to varying signal strength gave way to frequency-modulation (FM) and its improved performance. But DAB, as implemented, is the new AM.

Audio quality improvements ground to a halt when DAB broadcasters, particularly commercial ones, realised they could transmit either a few high audio-quality stations with a high **bitrate**, or a large number of lower-quality ones with a low bitrate. They opted for the latter and the better revenues they're likely to make from them. Nobody seems to have cared about the consequences for audio quality. Where is Ofcom?

The promised improved audio was audible in the early years of digital radio, when it was just the BBC with Radios 1 to 4 and the bitrates were high. Then along came 1 Extra, 5 Live, 5 Live Sports Extra, 6 Music, etc. In order to accommodate them, the existing bitrates were reduced. Add to that the common use of drastic

Internet saved me from sitting on the sofa all day

✉ It was interesting to read that there's been a big rise in the number of over-65s who live alone using the web, because I count myself as one of them. I lost my wife in 2018, and turned 70 this year. Until last year I had never bothered going online, but friends had told me it would be a good way to 'reconnect' with the world.

They've been proven correct. Nothing can replace a lifelong companion, but through the internet I've joined lots of local clubs (bowls, conservation, local history), making more friends in 12 months than I had in the past 30 years of my life. Lockdown was a lonely time for people like me, but the internet provided a lifeline. We shared



experiences and concerns while talking online. I think it has helped to make those new friendships firmer and more compassionate.

I don't like to dwell on what may have happened to me without the internet. I probably would have become more withdrawn, neglected my health and sat on the sofa all day watching dreadful TV.

Thomas Cope

dynamic-range compression (already used on FM, because it is assumed everyone listens in noisy cars) and we are left with a broadcast system that's no better than the technology it replaced. Indeed, in many respects, it is worse.

Hector J Hill

Microsoft is 'hypocritical' to warn about CCleaner

 How hypocritical of Microsoft to be warning us not to install or use CCleaner (News, Issue 586, page 6) when Microsoft regularly installs PUPs under the guise of a Windows 10 update. It also leaves so much mess around in the registry after an update that it is necessary to do a cleaning operation to ensure efficient running.

I use CCleaner to help me run my PC smoothly and to regularly clear out the dross that so easily accumulates. Yes, the recent sneaky inclusion of PUPs by Avast/Piriform is to be deplored, but they do have the opportunity of claiming a moral high ground over Microsoft by letting you remove them.

If Microsoft did their job properly in providing secure and efficient software, with suitable cleaning processes included, there would be no need for the likes of CCleaner.

Colin Howard

Hard-of-hearing can't have video chats with GPs

 Regarding video appointments with GPs, there are two problems. One, the non-computer-literate, non-smartphone-owning population is ruled out by definition. Two, the charity Action on Hearing Loss (<https://actiononhearingloss.org.uk>) tells us that around 12 million people in the UK suffer from hearing loss (I'm one of them). Even if I could make video calls (which I can't and don't), I would not be able to take part as I would have no idea what the other person was saying.

Also, we live in Scotland so come under NHS Scotland. Our local health centre operates only by telephone landline. I've tried writing to them and have asked them to email or text me, to which they replied by telephone!

Fortunately, my wife is alive and well, and although somewhat deaf, can use the phone, albeit with lots of "pardons" and "I didn't quite catch that". Were she to die, or become disabled, or if her deafness got worse, there would be no

STAR LETTER

Local shops can't compete with ease of online shopping

 I was interested in David McGill's theory that lockdown will remind people of the importance of local stores (Letters, Issue 587). I'd like to think he's right, but my experience doesn't bode well. I run a small electrical store in the kind of 'left behind' high street David describes. I offered a phone and postal service during lockdown, which many loyal customers appreciated.

When shops reopened, we had a mini rush of customers who I suspect were just delighted to be able to buy things again in person. But that only lasted a week or so. Since then, it's been terrifyingly quiet. If it continues, there's no way I'll be able to continue into next year.

It's obvious to me that many shoppers bought items online for the first time during lockdown and were surprised by how easy it was. If they don't need an item urgently, and it's raining outside or they don't have time to nip to the shops, why would they



make the effort to venture out to their local stores?

Yes, there will be some who come through a sense of loyalty, or as a moral crusade to keep their local stores open. But these are likely to be in wealthier areas, where people are happy to spend a little bit more to keep their high street alive. In areas where every penny counts, we don't stand a chance. The only solution I can see is a tax on online purchases. That would benefit me, and help keep the high street alive, but I'm not sure that morally it's the right thing to do. If anyone has any better ideas, maybe they could drop me a line!

Frank Ashley



The Star Letter writer wins a Computeractive mug!

option but to visit the health centre in person. During the pandemic we're not allowed to go to the health centre unless we've made an appointment – which has to be done by phone.

Ian Sheppard



Why do laptops lack DVD drives?

 One aspect of modern laptops that I find very disappointing is the complete lack of DVD drives, making it necessary to buy and plug in a separate device.

While I know that the usual airy response is along the lines of "nobody uses these any more", I respectfully beg to differ. Having recently upgraded to a Windows 10 laptop, I needed a DVD drive for the disc to install my beloved HP Laserjet printer.

Also, it is all very well to assert that everything can be backed up digitally and put into online storage, but I still feel there is much to be said for having the option to make DVD copies of important and precious items.

Alison Bromley

 In Issue 586 Paul Edwards mentioned the reluctance of older men in seeking help from GPs via video chats. This resonates with me regarding my father because he is totally bewildered by anything to do with computers. He's reluctant even for me to help him do anything if it means doing it on my computer or iPhone.

A case in point is that I offered to renew his bus pass for him on the internet, but he said he'd rather do it face to face at the council offices, even though this involved a seven-mile journey on two different buses and took him about six hours.

David Childs

Consumeractive

We stand up for your legal rights



Why did Currys refuse to honour my warranty?

Q I've had problems with a new HP computer I bought from Currys two months ago, with the screen freezing. Currys said it's an "operating fault", so wasn't covered by warranty and has charged me £45 to fix it. Why didn't the warranty cover me?

Ernest Dempsey

A The warranty probably does cover Ernest, but it was issued by HP (the manufacturer), not Currys (the retailer). If he wants to continue pursuing the warranty, he should get in touch with HP.

But a better route would be to contact Currys, citing the Consumer Rights Act. If the fault is inherent, as seems likely, then Ernest will be entitled to return the laptop. Currys will be allowed to attempt one repair (because less than six months have passed since purchase), but will have to replace the computer, or refund Ernest, if it can't be fixed.

We can understand Ernest's confusion because we're not sure what Currys means by "operating fault" – a meaninglessly vague term if ever we



heard one. Perhaps Currys meant the problem was with the operating system, ie Windows 10, thinking that meant it was Microsoft's responsibility. But it would be mistaken.

Anything that comes installed on a computer, such as operating systems, are considered integral to it. If the operating system is at fault, then so is the computer, and is therefore the responsibility of the retailer.

But whatever Currys thinks isn't relevant anyway. Unless it can prove that the fault was caused by accidental damage or misuse, it has no defence. We've contacted Currys, saying that as well as dealing with Ernest's computer it must also refund him the £45 it charged him for the repair.

CASE ONGOING



CASE UPDATE

No 72-day wait for monitor from Currys



We're happy to report that Gillian Crisp's father won't have to wait 72 days for a monitor he bought from Currys online (see Issue 587). That's how long delivery would take, it said, after couriers DPD initially sent the monitor to the wrong address.

Whoever spoke to him from Currys doesn't understand the law. Retailers have 30 days to deliver your item, unless you've paid for faster delivery, or told them you're happy to wait longer for whatever reason.

They can't simply set their own random delivery period. Even with the challenges posed by the coronavirus lockdown, a large retailer like Currys should be able to meet this deadline.

After 30 days, your contract with the retailer is null and void, and you can demand either a replacement or a full refund (including delivery costs), which must be paid within 14 days.

Happily, after we contacted Currys, it sorted out the problem and sent him the missing monitor.

Gillian was helped by DPD's policy of taking photos of deliveries rather than signatures (due to social distancing). It sent her the photo of the monitor at the wrong house, which she passed on to Currys.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

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

Am I covered by eBay for non-delivery?

Q eBay refuses to refund me for £90 worth of goods I've never received. They were meant to be delivered to my local Argos via Click & Collect, but I never got confirmation that the goods arrived, and now they've gone missing. I've no dispute with the seller, but why doesn't eBay's Buyer Protection scheme cover me?

Catherine Petts

A Catherine may think that the seller has, in her words, "bent over backwards" to help her, but they are still responsible for ensuring safe

delivery of the goods. As such, her dispute should be with the seller. Only if the seller can't (or won't) help should she turn to eBay's Buyer Protection.

What's not clear is whether using Click & Collect counts as delivery in this case. If it does, then it means Argos has a contract with the seller, not Catherine. Argos must tell the seller what's happened to the goods. But Catherine doesn't need to worry about this. It's up to the seller to guarantee delivery within 30 days: when that time passes, it must refund Catherine the full amount, including delivery.

If the seller won't refund Catherine,



eBay should be able to, but it may have special rules regarding using Argos' Click & Collect service to deliver goods. We'll find out. This is an interesting case, so we'll dig deep to find an explanation and publish an update.

CASE ONGOING

Will Virgin charge me for 'free' upgrade?

Q On 1 February, Virgin Media upgraded my broadband speed from 50Mbps to 100Mbps. It said it was a reward for loyal customers. Although I'm not being charged extra, I didn't ask for this, and my concern is that the price will go up to something I can't afford. Virgin's just ignoring my concerns, so can you help?

Ian Fairclough

A We understand Ian's concern. Broadband providers sometimes upgrade users as a marketing tactic to persuade them of the benefits of faster speeds, hoping they'll want to go even faster in the future – which they can get only by upgrading to a more expensive package.

But we can allay Ian's fears: Virgin isn't allowed to suddenly increase his bill to pay for the months he's enjoyed faster speeds.

It may of course charge him more



when his contract ends, but it will contact him to give him at least 30 days' notice, giving him enough time to shop around for a better deal.

He doesn't have to wait until then, though. He could ask Virgin when his contract ends, and make a note to contact it a couple of months before to negotiate a better deal – spending some time beforehand to research prices of rival providers in his area.

If he wants to pay a lot less, he may be able to revert to 50Mbps, although Virgin is currently saying only new customers will get this speed.

CASE CLOSED

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Towering service from Castle Cameras

 Desperate to find a replacement for my faulty 4K Panasonic videocam, I located the best deal at Castle Cameras (www.castlecameras.co.uk) in Bournemouth (there's also a Salisbury branch), and bought their final model online. Next day, however, they phoned to say it had been requested by an earlier customer and the lockdown had meant their records were not as up to date as they would have been normally.

They contacted the other customer three

times, allowing a few days for response. As my deadline approached to use the videocam, I had to decide whether to cancel and try elsewhere, but knowing Castle Cameras' reputation, I decided to wait. Staff kept me informed on progress.

Finally, because no answer had been received from the other customer, it was delivered to me 24 hours later. What a relief to be able to rely on a traditional UK company like this even in these weird times.

JB McGuire



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

Contact
Castle Cameras

- Email enquiries@castlecameras.co.uk
- Tel 01202 526606

Grow Your Family Tree



One hundred years ago another deadly pandemic swept the world. Follow **Nick Peers'** advice to...

Check who died of Spanish Flu

The current coronavirus pandemic has no parallels in modern history. For the most recent comparison, you have to go back to 1918 when Spanish Flu infected one-third of the world's population over the course of four deadly waves in two years. The pandemic swept through Britain, killing over 220,000 people, so your ancestors' lives would have been affected. Here, we'll reveal how to identify which family members succumbed to the deadly disease.

Identify potential victims

First, you need to identify relatives who died between the years of 1918 and 1920. Rather than go through your tree one person at a time, use your family-history program's reporting tools to generate a

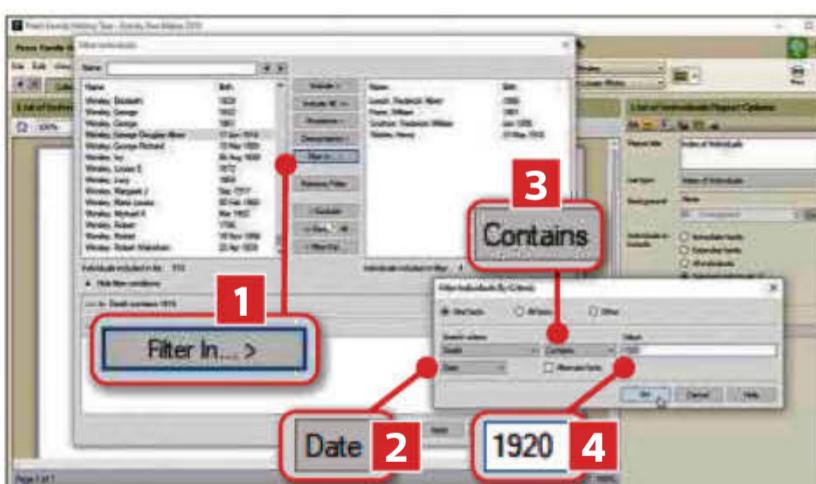
list you can print or save.

For example, Family Tree Maker users should switch to the Publish tab, then choose 'List of Individuals Report' under Person Reports. Click 'Create Report' followed by the 'Individuals to Include...' button to bring up the Filter Individuals. Click the 'Filter In...' button (1 in our screenshot below) and set the following conditions under 'Search where:' – Date 2 and Contains 3 – to 1918. Click OK and repeat the process twice to create filters adding individuals who died in 1919 and 1920 4. Finally, click Apply to generate the list.

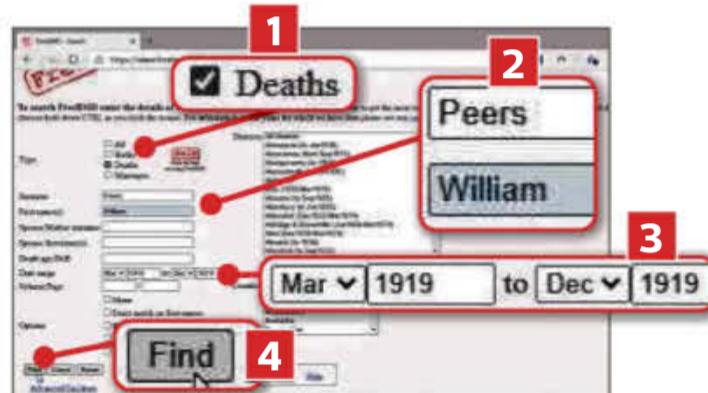
Confirm cause of death

Once you've identified potential victims, you'll need to buy a death certificate to determine cause of death – these cost £7 as PDFs through the General Records Office (GRO) website. First, though, you need to identify their entry in the death indexes.

If you don't know this, visit FreeBMD (www.freebmd.org.uk) and click Search. Tick 'Deaths' (1 in our screenshot above right) under Type, fill in the surname, first name 2 and



Use your family-tree program to generate a list of individuals who died between 1918 and 1920



Fill in these details to find a specific entry in FreeBMD's death indexes

date range fields 3, then click Find 4. If you're lucky, you'll be able to identify them by their age and place of death. Once located, make a note of the quarter (such as April-June 1919), district, volume and page numbers – these make up their GRO index reference number.

Now go to www.gov.uk/bmdcertificates, then scroll down and click the green 'Start now' button. You'll need to register for an account if you've not used the service before. Once you're logged in, click 'Place an Order'. Choose 'England or Wales', followed by Death. Enter the year the death was registered, then select 'I know the GRO Index Reference' before clicking Submit.

A new form will appear – enter your ancestor's surname and forename, plus the information you recorded earlier. Scroll down to the 'PDF copy of the entry' option. Enter a personal reference and click Submit, then follow the prompts to complete your order and make payment.

Once completed, you'll need to wait a few days – you'll be informed by email when the certificate is ready to download. Log into your Gov.uk account, then click My Orders to access the files (you have three months to download them before they disappear). When reading the certificate, examine the 'Cause of Death' section to see if your ancestor died of influenza, pneumonia or a similar disease that may indicate Spanish Flu.

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

Over the years I've been adding to my tree using Family Tree Maker 2005. Since the start of lockdown, I've spent more time on it. It's become obvious I need to upgrade to a more recent version of the software. How difficult would it be to transfer all my data to a newer version?

Frank Payne

The latest version of Family Tree Maker can import your tree directly from your old 2005 file: choose 'Import an Existing Tree' to select your file. To import your tree directly into RootsMagic: select 'Family Tree Maker (2014 and earlier)'.

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

AMD IMPULSE (RYZ7)

AMD Ryzen 5 2600 - 6 Cores (O.C 4Ghz)

ASUS PRIME B450M-A

CORSAIR 8GB DDR4 3000Mhz

INTEL 512GB M.2 nVME 660P

AMD RX 560 2GB

GAMEMAX Expedition

MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro

£499.99

Impulse

£599.99

mercury

£1249.99

NAVIGATOR

INTEL i5 MERCURY (COF9)

INTEL Core i5 9600K (O.C 5Ghz)

ASUS PRIME Z390-P

CORSAIR 16GB DDR4 3000Mhz

INTEL 1TB M.2 nVME 660P

INTEL UHD 630 Integrated Graphics

KOLINK Stronghold

MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro

AMD NAVIGATOR (RYZ8)

AMD Ryzen 5 3600X (O.C 4.3Ghz)

ASUS TUF X570-Plus Gaming

CORSAIR 16GB DDR4 3600Mhz - RGB

INTEL 512GB M.2 nVME 660P

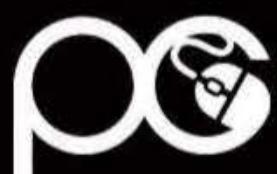
SEAGATE 2TB Sata3 HDD

AMD 5700XT 8GB

CORSAIR iCUE 220T RGB White

MICROSOFT Windows 10 or 10 Pro



 palicomp

01270 898 104
sales@palicomp.co.uk

Best Free Software

Wayne Williams recommends new programs that won't cost anything

OFFICE SUITE

LibreOffice 7

www.libreoffice.org

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10, Mac OS, or Linux



You don't need to spend money on Microsoft Office because the free **open-source** LibreOffice provides much of the same functionality. It offers a word processor (Writer), spreadsheet (Calc), and presentation and slideshow creator (Impress), as well as a drawing program (Draw) and database (Base).

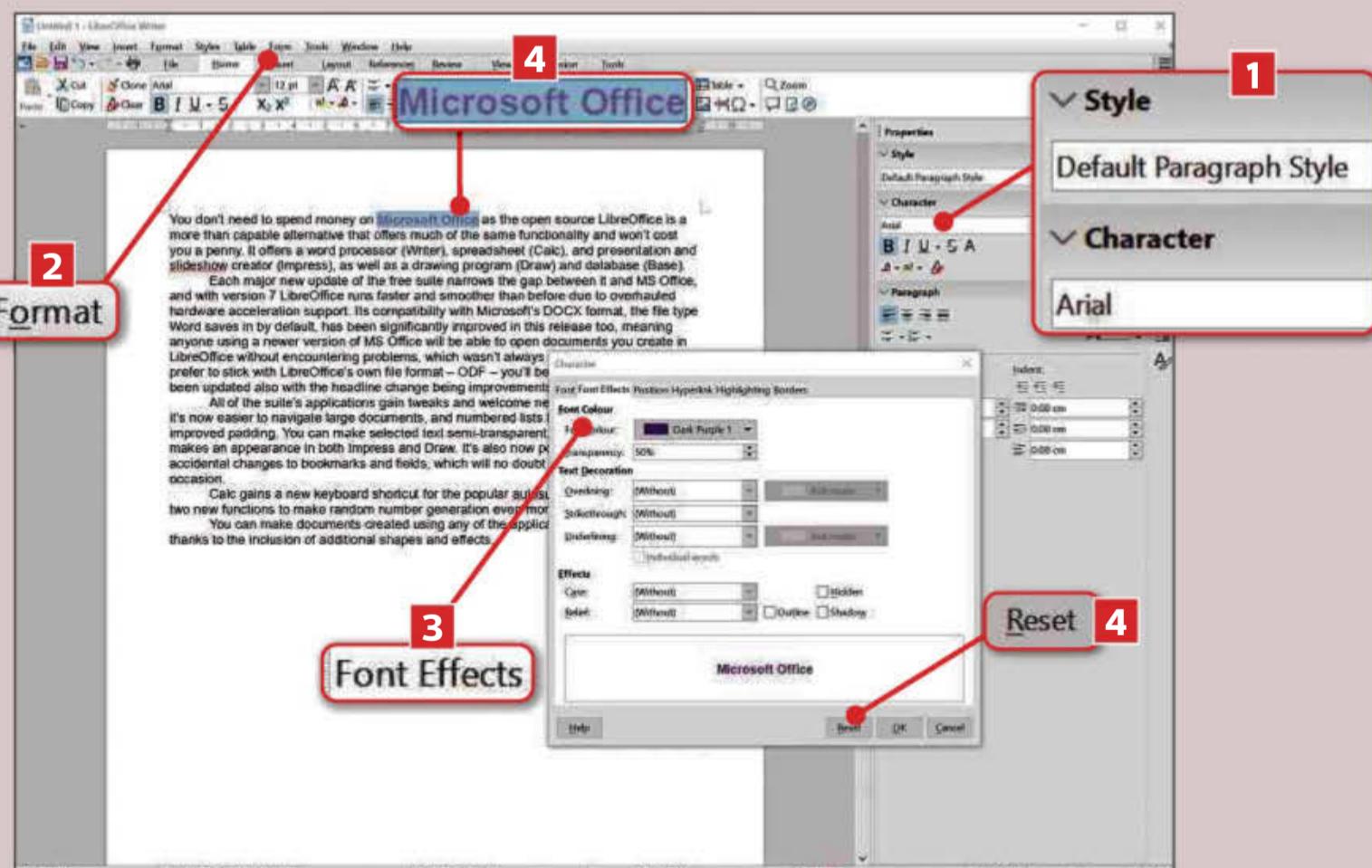
Version 7 runs faster and smoother than ever due to enhanced support for **hardware-acceleration**. Its compatibility with Microsoft's **DOCX** format has been significantly improved in this release too, meaning anyone using a newer version of MS Office will be able to open documents you create in LibreOffice without encountering problems, which wasn't always the case previously.

All of the suite's programs gain tweaks and welcome new additions. In Writer, the Navigator's right-click options

now include Go To, Edit, Delete, and Rename. In addition, improved padding makes numbered lists look better - this intelligently adjusts the size of tab spacing to make sure each item in a list lines up with the others.

You can make selected text semi-transparent, an option which is also new to Impress and Draw. You can also prevent accidental changes to bookmarks and text fields by going to Tools, then Protect Document.

Calc gains a new keyboard shortcut (Alt+=) for the popular autosum feature, and two new functions improve how random numbers are generated, making it faster and more consistent. And you can make documents created in any of the programs more attractive thanks to new shapes (arrows, diagrams, and icons) and effects (glow and soft edge).



1 The Properties sidebar in Writer lets you change the format of a paragraph, as well as the font and size, and provides formatting options, such as bold and italics.

2 To use the new semi-transparent text feature, click Format, then Character to open a new window.

3 In this window, click the Font Effects tab to change the font colour, then adjust the transparency percentage in the dropdown menu below and click OK.

4 The text shown here is 50 per cent transparent. To remove the effect, click the Reset button, or change the transparency in the dropdown menu back to 100 per cent, then click OK.



EBOOK MANAGER

Calibre 4.23

<https://calibre-ebook.com>

What you need: Windows 7, 8.1 or 10, Mac OS, or Linux

If you enjoy reading ebooks, Calibre is an essential program that lets you browse and manage your collection. It can handle all popular ebook formats, such as ePub and Kindle, and comes with a book viewer and editor. It also works on all major ebook devices, including Amazon's Kindle, iPad and Android tablets. You can buy books through the app, add titles you've downloaded, edit their information, and sort your library by title, author, language, series, formats, publisher and rating.

This release works with the latest Kobo ebook readers (www.kobo.com), and adds useful actions to the QuickView menu. Press Q to open QuickView and then right-click inside the window to see new options for searching for a book and to open one (see screenshot).

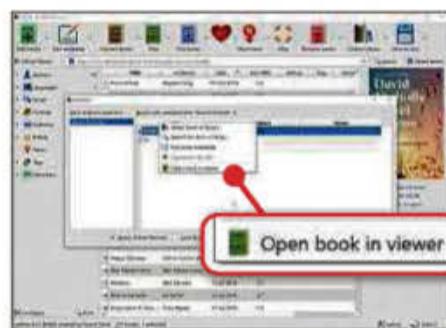


IMAGE MANAGER



digiKam 7

www.digikam.org

What you need: Windows 10, Mac OS, or Linux

Smartphones allow us to take photographs wherever we go, but the downside is that you quickly end up with thousands of images to browse when you're looking for a particular picture. DigiKam makes life easier by organising your photos on your PC as thumbnail albums, while offering several ways to search them, such as by date and time, location, and tags. This version has a new Image Mosaic Wall tool, which creates a base image from tiny thumbnails of other photos (see our self-portrait in our screenshot). Facial recognition has been improved, which can find all images of any person you identify. The program also now supports RAW files produced by some digital cameras, which require your PC, rather than a camera, to generate the actual image file.

WHAT SHOULD I DOWNLOAD?

We tell you what software & apps to use

What can I use to back up and restore my PC?

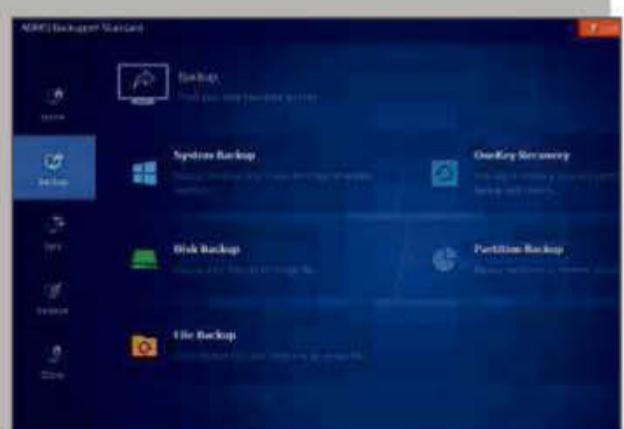
Q Earlier this year, I had the misfortune to have a complete desktop PC crash, which I thought had wiped all my files. I couldn't get my PC running no matter what I tried. However, by putting my hard drive into a caddy I could see that the files were still intact. I've bought a new PC (a Palicomp AMD Impulse RYZ7), and I've decided I need a new working backup and imaging system. I need software that's reliable and easy to use. I don't mind spending a bit of money.

Dave Thompson

A Although paid-for programs will offer you more features, such as the ability to back up your files online, there are some excellent free tools available. One of the best is AOMEI Backupper Standard 5.9 (www.snipca.com/35816), which backs up your system drive, disks, partitions, files and folders – as well as your cloned drives and partitions. In other words, it creates a complete, identical copy of your PC.

You will need to provide an email address before you can download it, but AOMEI doesn't check the validity of this address, so you could make something up. It also prompts you to upgrade to the paid-for version at the start of installation, but you can bypass this by clicking the Skip button.

To get started, click the Backup button on the left and choose one of the options on the right – System Backup, Disk Backup, Partition Backup or File Backup (see screenshot). Follow the onscreen instructions to choose what to back up and where to save it. Files can be saved to your PC's hard drive, an external drive, or USB stick, or to a free online storage service such as Microsoft's OneDrive. You can also schedule backups at a time and frequency that suits your needs.



Click the Restore button on the main screen to load a backup or image file you created previously.



Do you need our advice on what software to use? Just email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk

HOW I USE...

Portable Apps

Wayne Williams explains how this tool helped him when his laptop developed a drink problem

If you've ever ruined something in a moment of clumsiness, you'll know how I felt when I reached over to grab my favourite drink (rum and lemonade, since you ask) and managed to knock a nearly full glass all over my laptop. I reacted quickly by turning off the computer, unplugging it and removing the battery, but the damage was done. The laptop was fried, and probably a bit tipsy.

Fortunately, I have an old spare laptop. Unfortunately, it doesn't have a very big hard drive, and it's a **dual-boot** system – I can choose between Windows 10 or Linux Mint when it boots – which divides my drive in two. When I start Windows, I only have 200GB of usable space, which really isn't enough to install all the software I use regularly.

My solution was to start using

PortableApps (www.portableapps.com), which is a Start menu and organiser with a built-in app store that makes it easy to find and install portable (and therefore smaller) versions of free software. I use this to install copies of my favourite programs on a USB stick, rather than on my laptop's puny hard drive. It also means I can take and run my programs on any computer I use.

You simply need to download the installer from the website, and plug a USB stick (it should be at least 8GB) into a spare port on your PC. Run the installer, then choose the 'New install' option in the 'Install type' box. Click 'Next', select Portable for the 'Install location', click Next again, and select your USB stick. Click 'Install', then run the program on the stick by double-clicking the 'Start.exe' file.

The menu will appear, but without any apps. The directory will also open, and this is where you choose which programs to add. Scroll down the list and tick those you want. It's easy to add extra tools later by clicking Apps in the Start menu.

I always carry around a copy of

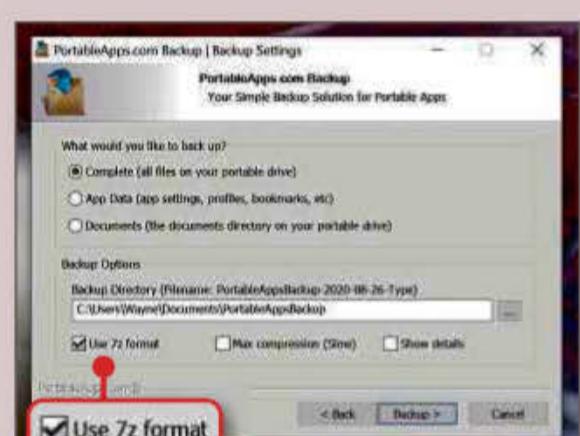


Wayne runs all these programs from his USB stick via PortableApps' handy Start menu

Chrome, VLC Media Player and LibreOffice, as they are the programs I use most, but I include Firefox, GIMP, and Emsisoft Emergency Kit too (you'll see them all in the screenshot above).

During installation, PortableApps also creates folders for documents, music, pictures and videos which can be opened through the menu, and I store anything I might need in those.

USB sticks are easy to lose, so I make sure to regularly back up stored files by clicking Backup, then selecting the files and save location. I tick 'Use 7z format' (see screenshot above left) because this reduces the size of the backup file. This saves me if I ever do anything daft like stir my drink with a USB stick rather than a cocktail stick.



When backing up his portable files Wayne ticks this box to ensure they take up less storage space

WHAT I'D LIKE TO SEE IN PORTABLE APPS

You can select multiple items to install in one go from the built-in app directory. The directory shows you the download and install sizes of each program (the latter is the space it will take up on your USB stick), but I'd also like it to give a

running total of all selected apps and how much free space will remain on my stick afterwards. The Start menu shows drive-usage information in a bar at the bottom, so there's no reason it can't be added to the directory window as well.

Named & Shamed

Jonathan Parkyn puts the boot into tech villains, jargon-spouting companies and software stuffed with junk



WARNING: JUNK AHEAD

Junk offender: Auslogics Duplicate File Finder

Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks? In this particular scenario, the old dog is Auslogics – a software developer with a long and unhappy history of serving up junk with its tools, while simultaneously nagging users to fork out for premium upgrades. The new trick is Auslogics' Mystery Box.

Opt to download Duplicate File Finder (or any of Auslogics' other free tools) and you'll be faced with an exciting-looking screen telling you you've qualified for a Mystery Box (see screenshot). It looks for all the world like a daytime quiz show, destined for endless repeats on Challenge TV. But it's actually a timed "exclusive" offer that's cleverly turned into a game by getting you to choose from one of three on-screen boxes.

When I tried it out, my 'prize' was 45 per cent off any Auslogics product. "Wow," says the website. It's all classic marketing baloney designed to make you feel like you're getting something



The only 'mystery' here is that Auslogics thought this marketing humbug was a good idea

worthwhile. Except you're not.

If you continue with Duplicate File Finder's installation, you'll find pre-ticked boxes that allow the tool to run automatically on Windows startup (which you definitely don't need) and gather your usage data (which you definitely don't want). It's easy to miss

both if you don't notice the Custom option when you're installing the tool.

I counted no less than four further attempts to get me to install junk I don't need, either via pre-ticked "optional offers" or via a "limited time chance" to add unnecessary tools to my PC. Bad dog, Auslogics! Back in your bed!

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Mitchell Baker, Mozilla CEO
www.snipca.com/35739

"To refocus the Firefox organization on core browser growth through differentiated user experiences, we are reducing investment in some areas such as developer tools, internal tooling, and platform feature development, and transitioning adjacent security/privacy products to our New Products and Operations team."



WHAT THEY MEAN

250 staff have been 'transitioned' to the dole queue.

JONATHAN'S VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Eurostar

I can't help wondering whether some companies are using coronavirus as an excuse for incompetence. Take Eurostar. While I fully understand that the virus has wrecked the travel industry, I'm less clear how it might affect the availability of Wi-Fi in the company's standard-class carriages. But, bafflingly, it tweeted last month that free Wi-Fi was restricted to Premier class passengers "as a result of



coronavirus" (www.snipca.com/35734).

So, if you're rich enough for Premier class, you're immune to the disease? Or could it be that someone made an unpopular cost-cutting decision and attempted to divert the blame on to big, bad Covid?

Either way, after complaints and bad press, Eurostar miraculously found a cure for its Wi-Fi ills, and access is now restored to all travellers.



LAPTOP | £881 from Amazon www.snipca.com/35744

Acer Swift 3 SF314-57

The right angle

"When you choose that thin laptop," says Acer's blurb for the Swift 3, "you're making a statement. A statement that says, 'I go where I like – just with style.'" To be honest, that's not the statement we'd be making if we chose this thin laptop. We'd be saying something more like: "I want a portable PC with a decent processor and screen that isn't too heavy, and I don't want to spend a grand."

With a good screen and performance, the Swift 3 comes at a reasonable price

This isn't an ultra-slim affair like the LG Gram 14 (from £1,069, see Issue 586, page 23), just reasonably compact, and a little bit flimsy in the lid and wrist rest. Still, although the metal case lacks the minimalist precision of pricier machines, it looks quite smart, comes in three colours, and has a robust hinge that folds back a full 180 degrees so you can find your ideal working angle.

The backlit keyboard is average, leaving empty space at the sides while squashing up some keys, while the large trackpad worked reliably, which is more than we can say of the fingerprint reader.

The narrow border around the screen contains a webcam in the correct place at the top centre, not pointing up your nose like those in the cheaper Huawei

MateBook D and Honor MagicBook, and the display itself is a very pleasant surprise. At 14in, it's a little less cramped than 13.3in rivals. Our test meter reported that it covered 94 per cent of sRGB with excellent accuracy, and our eyes found it particularly bright and vibrant, so it'll suit a full range of tasks, including photo editing.

Our model came with Intel's latest i7-1065G7 processor, but couldn't keep up with the same chip in the Dell XPS 13 (see Issue 585, page 23), implying less effective heat dissipation. In fact, the fans produced a constant low hum even when idle, although this could have been a vagary of our test unit. Then again, the XPS 13 starts at a whopping £1,399.

The Swift 3 is a capable Windows 10 system, and the integrated G7 graphics cope well with less demanding 3D games. The 512GB SSD had a file-write speed of up to 1,382 megabytes per second and read speeds of 1567MB/s in our sequential file tests, which isn't bad, but we often

see higher speeds now, particularly on the read side. As for battery life, at only 6½ hours in our relatively light video-playback test, it might not quite let you go where you like. The Swift 3's numerous options (see www.snipca.com/35746) range up to 16GB of memory and a 1TB SSD. At the time of writing, our configuration cost £900 in grey or silver, discounted to £850 in pink, while grey was also available at £850 from Amazon.

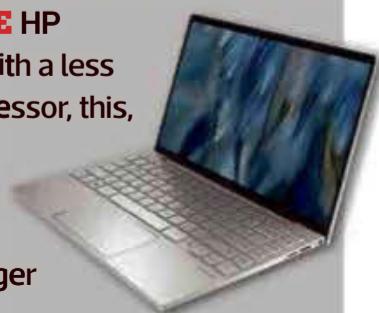
An i5-1035G1 version was £800 (see www.snipca.com/35743, or www.snipca.com/35742 for pink), which isn't much of a reduction for the slower processor, but Amazon was advertising this at a tempting £700 if you could wait '1 to 4 weeks' for delivery.

VERDICT A few compromises get you a slim metal laptop with a very good spec for the money



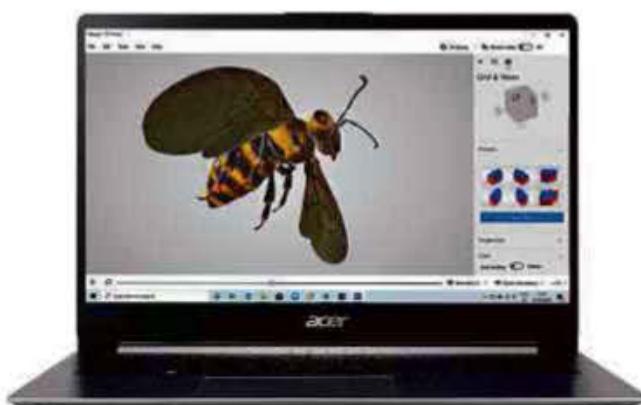
ALTERNATIVE HP

Envy 13 £850 With a less powerful i5 processor, this makes the Swift 3 look good value, but its battery lasts longer



SPECIFICATIONS

1GHz Intel Core i7-1065G7 quad-core processor • 8GB memory • 512GB SSD • 14in 1920x1080-pixel screen • Webcam • 802.11ax Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 5 • USB-C Thunderbolt 3 port • USB-A 3 port • USB-A 2 port • HDMI port • Windows 10 Home • 15.6x320x217mm (HxWxD) • 1.19kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/35748



TABLET £799 from Samsung www.snipca.com/35749

Samsung Galaxy Tab S7+

Top flat

Samsung's Galaxy Tab S6 tablet fell awkwardly between the basic iPad and iPad Pro, but it's continuing its attack in three forms. While the S6 Lite (£319 from Amazon www.snipca.com/34950, see Issue 582, page 23) takes on the 10.2in iPad, the S7 and S7+ tackle the 11in and 12.9in iPad Pro. We tested the S7+, which is £170 cheaper than its Apple rival. If you need to get online where there's no Wi-Fi, 4G adds £230 to the iPad Pro, while Samsung offers 5G for £200, both requiring a network tariff.

“It’s good value, but Samsung’s tools can’t match those in iPadOS.”

Finished in black, bronze or silver, the design is simple, thin, and an ounce-and-a-half lighter than its slightly bigger Apple rival. The two rear cameras match the iPad Pro's, but the front webcam now sits at the centre of one side, assuming you'll video chat in landscape rather than portrait. That makes sense – a work tablet will often be attached horizontally to a keyboard. Samsung's comes in two parts, incorporating a trackpad and snapping



on to a magnetically attached cover with hinged kickstand. It costs £190 extra, and there's no equivalent of Apple's more ergonomic Magic Keyboard (£349). An enhanced S Pen stylus is included, saving you £119 on Apple's Pencil 2. Unlike the iPad Pro, the S7+ has a microSD card slot for extra storage, but there are no built-in options beyond 128GB. The battery lasted us about 11 hours, similar to the iPad Pro.

Like Apple's, the screen now goes up to a 120Hz refresh rate, so it feels even more 'real'. HDR10+ is supported, and the high-contrast Super AMOLED makes colours pleasingly vivid. Oddly, though, it doesn't cover the wider P3 colour space, although sRGB accuracy is good. The 11in version has a different LTPO LCD screen with P3 but not HDR10+.

Inside, the Snapdragon 865 Plus processor can't match Apple's A12Z, especially in graphics. For Android, it's plenty. And here's the problem. With Google having given up on matching iPadOS's tablet features, it's up to Samsung's DeX, which adds multitasking in resizeable windows, drag-and-drop, mouse support and the option of an external monitor. But not many apps are designed for DeX. If you want a fantastic tablet, this is one. For work, consider a Windows Surface device.

SPECIFICATIONS

Snapdragon 865 Plus 8-core processor • 128GB flash storage • 12.4in 2800x1752-pixel screen • 13- and 5-megapixel rear cameras • 8-megapixel webcam • USB Type-C port • microSD card slot • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 5.0 • Android 10 with DeX • 285x185x5.7mm (HxWxD) • 575g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/35755

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Dennis Publishing, 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.

Dennis Publishing also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *Computer Shopper* and *Web User* and the websites Expert Reviews (www.expertreviews.co.uk) and IT Pro (www.itpro.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 The best Android tablet you can buy, at a reasonable price – but it's more for entertainment than work



ALTERNATIVE

Microsoft Surface Pro 7 £899 With Windows 10 and an i5 processor, this seems like what the S7+ wants to be



LAPTOP | £1,599 from Dell www.snipca.com/35766

Dell XPS 15 (2020)

Boot space

If the XPS 13 is the VW Golf of laptops, this is the Volvo. This year it gets a long-awaited new design, with a more streamlined body and higher performance, but it's more about fitting in all your stuff than impressing the neighbours.

Dell has stuck to its two-tone styling, silver aluminium on the outside and black carbon fibre within. By our reckoning, the solid-feeling chassis is the same weight as before and slightly thicker, despite Dell's blurb calling it "8 per cent thinner". We'll never understand PC marketing maths. Undeniably, it's smaller, with almost all the space around the screen shaved away. The screen itself, in Full HD or 4K with 10 per cent extra height, is completely new.

Our test unit had the 4K touchscreen option, which outdoes the Apple MacBook Pro's video-industry P3 colour by covering the even larger Adobe RGB space used by photographers and designers. With high brightness and contrast, it's also compliant with HDR400 and Dolby Vision for wide-colour games and videos. Here, unfortunately, things go awry. Aggressive dynamic contrast brightens and darkens the whole screen as the scene changes, often with a visible lag, and the refresh rate in HDR mode seems to be halved to 30fps, rubbish for games. We turned off HDR for work to stop it messing up the Adobe RGB accuracy, and ended up leaving it off.

An excellent backlit keyboard, with proper UK layout, is complemented by a 60-per-cent bigger glass touchpad. At the sides are stereo speakers, each with a woofer and tweeter, and a 3D audio



Computer
active
RECOMMENDED
★★★★★



“Fast doing most tasks, and battery lasts over seven hours”

feature also works with headphones. The webcam, somehow squeezed into the tiny top bezel, has been improved, and you can log in via face recognition or fingerprint reader. Ports are now USB-C only, a sign of the times, but there are three, two with Thunderbolt 3 for the fastest external SSDs, and USB-A and HDMI adapters are provided. There's even a full-size SD card reader for your digital camera cards.

Inside, 10th-generation Intel processors are paired with an optional Nvidia GTX 1650 Ti graphics card. The latter is hardly cutting-edge; rivals like the Razer Blade 15 (see Issue 585, page 25) and Gigabyte Aorus 15G (Issue 586, page 24) offer better 3D graphics. It runs most games well, though, and supports creative software needing up to 4GB of video memory. The six-core i7 is fast enough for a full range of tasks including photo and video editing, and the battery lasted nearly 7 hours 30 minutes in our video-playback test. Dell's new cooling system, however, still showed signs of struggling.

SPECIFICATIONS

- 2.6GHz Intel Core i7-10750H six-core processor
- 4GB Nvidia GTX 1650 Ti graphics
- 32GB memory
- 1TB SSD
- 15.6in 3840x2160-pixel touchscreen
- Webcam
- 802.11ax Wi-Fi
- USB-C port
- 2x USB-C ports with Thunderbolt 3
- SD card reader
- Windows 10 Home
- 18x345x230mm (HxWxD)
- 2kg
- One-year warranty www.snipca.com/35757

Although the range starts at £1,599, that only gets you a 1920x1200-pixel non-touch sRGB screen with an i5-10300H, 8GB of memory, a 512GB SSD and no graphics card. The i7 with 16GB of memory and the GTX 1650 Ti comes in at £1,949, but you'd be daft not to pay the extra 50 quid to double the SSD to 1TB. Our model, with the 4K screen and 32GB of memory – sensible for ambitious work, since you can't upgrade it later – comes in at £2,499.

Considering Dell's inability to leave a price undiscounted, it's worth checking the website for offers. But it's fair to say the XPS 15 isn't cheap, even by comparison with the 16in MacBook Pro, with its superior-feeling dark aluminium unibody. Unlike Apple, however, Dell doesn't overcharge for higher options. The MacBook Pro costs £3,199 in an i9 configuration with 32GB of memory, versus £2,899 for the XPS 15.

At the time of writing, Dell's 64GB option was reduced to just a tenner extra, undercutting the MacBook Pro by 700 quid.

VERDICT A very capable laptop in a more compact format, if not as flawless as we'd like for the price

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Razer Blade 15 £2,310

Only 16GB of memory and 512GB SSD, but 4K and RTX 2070 graphics



SOLID-STATE DRIVE | £171 from Ballicom www.snipca.com/35784

Kingston KC2500 1TB

Supersonic rocket chip



How fast is fast? We expect **SSDs** to cost more than traditional hard drives, and in return we expect them to shift more data in a given time. A bog-standard hard drive might manage 150 megabytes per second (MB/s). The cheapest SSDs, which use the same **SATA** interface inside your PC, triple that. This is about as fast as SATA can go, so we now have **NVMe** SSDs, which use the **PCIe** interface via an **M.2** socket.

For about £100 per terabyte, you can get an NVMe SSD with performance like the WD Blue SN550 (£95 from Amazon www.snipca.com/34127, see our review, Issue 575, page 26), with **read speeds** of 2408MB/s and **write speeds** of 1976MB/s in our file-transfer tests. So that's about four times the price of hard-drive storage for about 15 times the speed.

But SSDs are still getting faster. Released at just under £240 and already discounted by dealers to just over £170, the 1TB KC2500 claims maximums of 3500MB/s reading and 2900MB/s writing. Our own test results were within a whisker, at 3445MB/s and 2795MB/s respectively. Note that the drive comes in smaller capacities too, but with SSDs, smaller means slower.

Although these 'lab condition' tests show what such drives are capable of, trickier tasks reveal what you can expect in practice. The CrystalDiskMark **4K** benchmark test involves large numbers of tiny files, an extreme challenge for hard drives, which have to physically locate thousands of sites on their drive surfaces. SSDs don't struggle quite so badly, but the WD Blue managed to read only 279MB/s and write 190MB/s. The KC2500 beat it

SPECIFICATIONS

M.2 NVMe SSD • 3D TLC NAND • 3.5x22x80mm (HxWxD) • 600 terabytes written • Five-year warranty www.snipca.com/35782

In everyday Windows 10 file transfers, this is the fastest SSD we've ever tested

comfortably at 481 and 374MB/s.

It was in everyday Windows 10 file transfers, however, that this drive really proved its worth, reading 1987MB/s and writing 1839MB/s. These are the fastest results we've ever seen in this test, indicating that even if the first (and very expensive) SSDs now coming out for the enhanced PCIe 4.0 interface can promise higher maximum rates, the KC2500 is likely to perform just as well, or even better, in real-life use. It also kept up very well when we tried batches of smaller files.

We're talking about such high speeds here that cheaper drives are already fine for most purposes. But if you work with huge files, or jobs like 4K video editing that handle lots of data in real time, this is a great choice, and easy to install in any desktop PC with an M.2 socket.

VERDICT You don't have to spend this much on an SSD, but if you do, you'll get your money's worth



ALTERNATIVE WD SN550 £95 Still excellent value for an M.2 drive that's more than fast enough for most users



DO I REALLY NEED...

A transparent TV or PC screen?

What is it?

Made possible by new TOLED (transparent organic light-emitting diode) technology, Xiaomi's Mi TV Lux Transparent Edition (pictured) is a 55in telly that's almost completely see-through. Most of the electronics are built into a flat cylindrical base. On top of that, the screen has a narrow border around what looks, when idle, like a sheet of slightly tinted glass. Turn it on, and the picture appears.



What does it do?

Otherwise, pretty much the same as any other TV or monitor. Xiaomi's publicity photos and demos show images displayed on a transparent background, with the room visible behind characters on the screen. This would require content with an **alpha channel** to define the transparent area in the background – something we commonly see online with still images in formats like **PNG** but not so much with video. Unless directors start using green-screen effects not to replace backgrounds with CGI scenes, but simply to leave them out, you'll only see this effect with built-in menus or screensavers.

What's the catch?

We won't know until reviewers get a look at the Mi TV Lux Transparent Edition in action, but TOLED may struggle to match the contrast and clarity of conventional screens. Oh, and it costs around 50,000 renminbi (China's currency), which would come to about £5,500 before VAT.

So can I do without it?

You might fancy the idea of a TV or monitor that almost disappears when not in use, rather than dominating your desk or living room. Whether it works well enough to catch on and become more affordable remains to be seen.

MESH WI-FI | £400 from CCL www.snipca.com/35769

TP-Link Deco X60

Sixth sense

Wi-Fi 6, the official branding for the new **802.11ax** technology, is built into a rapidly increasing number of new phones, tablets and laptops. Although they'll connect to existing **802.11ac** routers, you could get improved speed and reception with a Wi-Fi 6 router – or even better, a Wi-Fi 6 mesh network. This is one of the first, and certainly the most affordable we've seen, especially considering the price includes three units, helping you spread the signal around a larger home.

“We got 250Mbps in our kitchen, where some networks can't reach at all”

The first unit connects your broadband modem with an Ethernet cable. If you have a combined modem/router, check that the router part can be disabled to allow this. That leaves one free Gigabit Ethernet port on this unit for a nearby PC

SPECIFICATIONS

Three-box 802.11ax mesh network • Supports 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands • Requires Android 4.3 or iOS 8.0 or higher device • 114x110x110mm (HxWxD) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/35775

or game console, while the other two have two apiece. As for Wi-Fi connections, setup is simple with the companion app, and you get a full range of options including priority, parental controls and guest access. Unlike pricier systems, the Deco X60 doesn't create a separate **backhaul** network between the units, but we still got excellent speeds, falling from 638Mbps downloading and 499Mbps uploading, when close to the base, to 181Mbps and 144Mbps at the furthest range. In our kitchen, which some networks can't reach at all, we were still getting around 250Mbps.

Rather than top-end Wi-Fi 6 kits such as Netgear's RBK852 (£710 from Amazon www.snipca.com/34246), the Deco X60's immediate competition comes from the best 802.11ac products, such as Netgear's Orbi RBK50 (£300 from Amazon www.snipca.com/35771).

When we tested this two-box system, it matched and even beat the Deco X60's speeds upstairs, but wasn't as fast close to the router and couldn't reach as far away. It's no longer sold as a three-pack, and adding a single extra unit costs £200, so unless you have a smaller home it's unlikely to be a better buy.

If you don't need extreme speeds,



however, BT's Whole Home Wi-Fi (£170 from Amazon www.snipca.com/35772, see Issue 580, page 24) is still a good choice.

VERDICT Expect even quicker rivals, but this is an affordable Wi-Fi 6 mesh kit that gives very decent results



ALTERNATIVE

Netgear Orbi RBK50 £300
Similar performance at medium range, but can't reach as far or as fast



WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

Can you recommend a £50-£100 printer for home use?

Q I have an HP Photosmart 6520 inkjet printer/scanner that's been making a few grinding sounds recently. This model is no longer available from HP. Can you recommend a replacement for £50-£100? My requirements are modest: letters, home accounts, occasional colour copying and AirPrint.

Terry Harvey

Keep your Photosmart going as long as you



can – it's a tricky time to be shopping for a printer. Manufacturing slowdowns and high demand from home workers have left only a few models on the shelves, at inflated prices. Epson's XP-6100, for example, was previously a good buy at around £90, but currently sells for £160.

HP's budget Envy printers are solidly average, and at the time of writing the Envy 6020 is in stock (£70 from Amazon www.snipca.com/35767, pictured). Although we haven't tested it, it ticks all

the basic boxes, including double-sided (duplex) printing. Without a built-in screen, it relies on HP's PC software or smartphone app to change settings. A 305XL two-pack refill, rated for 240 black or 200 colour pages, should cost around £35, although you may need to shop around. That's slightly pricier than just over £40 for Photosmart 364 refills, rated for 250 black pages and 300 colour.



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



C27G2ZU
1920x1080 (16:9)

240Hz

0.5ms

**FreeSync
PREMIUM**

Curved



Available at:



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[amazon](#)

[OVERCLOCKERS.UK](#)

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GROUP

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Reviews

PHONE | £300 from John Lewis www.snipca.com/35799

Motorola Moto G 5G Plus

The fifth element

This is the first mid-priced phone we've seen with 5G, the faster cellular connection that's gradually rolling out across the country. If you search online for '5G map UK' you can get an idea of coverage across the various networks, but suffice it to say it's not widespread enough yet to make it worth paying extra for a 5G phone. The Moto G 5G Plus does a good job of making you feel like you haven't paid extra, though, with a surprisingly high all-round spec.

Differing from other Moto phones, the shiny case has a square camera bulge on the back and a fingerprint reader button

SPECIFICATIONS

6.7in 2520x1080-pixel screen • Three rear cameras with depth sensor • Two front cameras • 64GB flash storage • MicroSD card slot • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 5.1 • 3G/4G/5G • 168x74x9mm (HxWxD) • 207g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/35809

on the right edge, which didn't always work reliably for us. Available in blue or pink, it's plastic and not waterproof. The big IPS screen offers a fast 90Hz refresh rate and fairly accurate sRGB, and although contrast can't match AMOLED, it's bright enough to make HDR content look fine. The same Snapdragon 765G processor as the OnePlus Nord ensures Android 10 apps and games run smoothly, and the battery lasted 22 hours 15 minutes in our video-playback test.

Three cameras plus a depth sensor give you regular, wide-angle and close-up photography options, and we found all kinds of pictures came out well, just not as strikingly natural as with the Google Pixel 4a below. As with rivals, 4K video is supported but 60fps fast action capture is



limited to Full HD. There's an extra wide-angle selfie camera, too. The 64GB of storage can be expanded with a microSD card.

VERDICT It lacks the feel of something really special, but it's hard to fault this phone for the money



ALTERNATIVE Realme X50 5G £299 Look out for our upcoming review of this similarly affordable 5G phone



PHONE | £349 from Google www.snipca.com/35796

Google Pixel 4a

It's alive!

The poor old Pixel 3a had a shorter honeymoon than the Bride of Frankenstein. At launch, this mid-priced phone seemed solid, but so many exciting rivals followed, all with at least one extra camera and a full-height screen instead of the 3a's top and bottom borders, that it instantly felt out of date.

This successor still has only one rear camera, despite a square bulge housing its flash and depth sensor. It's also now up against the OnePlus Nord (£379 from www.snipca.com/35717, see our review,

SPECIFICATIONS

5.81in 2340x1080-pixel screen • 12.2-megapixel rear camera • 8-megapixel front camera • 128GB flash storage • 802.11ac Wi-Fi • Bluetooth 5.1 • 3G/4G • Android 10 • 144x69x8.2mm (HxWxD) • 144g • One-year warranty (two years with John Lewis) www.snipca.com/35798

Issue 487, page 28), with a bigger screen, three cameras plus depth sensor on the back and two on the front. But it's no horror story for the 4a.

Although the case isn't waterproof, the matt black plastic finish doesn't feel cheap, more like your money's been well spent elsewhere. Android 10 runs extremely smoothly on the Snapdragon 730G processor, with some Google extras like transcribing speech to text. A Google Pay fingerprint reader is on the back. There's no wireless charging, but the battery lasted almost 19 hours of video playback.

The tall and nearly borderless AMOLED screen is sharp, with a choice of accurate sRGB colour or a more vivid mode covering about 90 per cent of P3, though not quite bright enough to do full justice to HDR movies. The single camera delivers



excellent photos, including some of the best portraits you'll see from any phone plus night and astrophotography modes, and stabilised video. 5G is reserved for a later model, but it's hardly essential.

VERDICT If smooth operation and perfect pics matter more than flashy features, this is ideal



ALTERNATIVE OnePlus Nord £379 Adds a glass finish, ultra-wide and macro cameras and an even faster processor



WIRELESS EARPHONES £79 from OnePlus www.snipca.com/35810

OnePlus Buds

Easy listening

We've seen plenty of fully wireless earphones in the past couple of years, but the OnePlus Buds are unusual in resting in the outer part of your ear, a bit like Apple's original AirPods, rather than having soft tips that push inside. They even share the AirPods' dangling tails, like the start of a cable that doesn't go anywhere, which accommodates some of the electronics, leaving the main part of the earpiece smaller and neater than most rivals.

“Both music and audiobooks sounded very good”

If you've tried different earphones, you'll know whether or not this type suits you. If you normally avoid earphones because you don't like the feeling of something stuck in your ear, you might be pleasantly surprised. We found them comfortable and unlikely to fall out, even when running, although results will vary depending on the shape of your ears.

We didn't expect the richness and bass quality to match earphone tips that seal the sound in, and we weren't wrong, but in fact both music and audiobooks sounded very good, with punchy low-end audio. If anything, it was high frequencies that were a little harsh. Despite having three microphones built into each earpiece, the Buds made voices on phone calls sound rather hollow, but our callers could at least hear what we were saying without any trouble.

As usual, the Buds come with a case that incorporates a battery from which they can be recharged, eking out their already practical seven-hour life (halved if using the mics) to 21 hours. OnePlus

SPECIFICATIONS

In-ear wireless headphones • Bluetooth 5.0 • 6x microphones • Charging case with USB-C port (cable supplied, power source required) • Requires a device running Android 6.0 or iOS 12 or higher • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/35811



reckons 10 minutes' charging gets you 10 hours' listening. Pairing the buds with Android or Apple phones is easy, and they stop playing automatically when you take them out of your ears, saving battery. Long, short or double taps on the earpieces' touch panels let you answer the phone and skip music tracks. Other options were due to be added in a software update, but this would require a OnePlus phone to install.

The Buds come in white, grey or blue. At the time of writing, OnePlus had only blue in stock, while searching eBay or Amazon brought up either the genuine article at much higher prices or similar-looking buds from random brands, so take care if shopping around.

VERDICT These affordable wireless earphones are easy to wear and sound as good as most people will need



ALTERNATIVE

Creative Outlier Air £55 Bulkier, but great value for excellent sound, using Bluetooth aptX with compatible phones



GADGET GRAVEYARD

Devices that never caught on

Sony Mylo

What was it?

Released in 2006, the Mylo COM-1 (pictured) was every marketing cliché about technology and 'the youth' in one pocket-sized blob. A 2.4in landscape colour screen, surrounded by buttons and a thumb stick, slid up to reveal a bright orange QWERTY keyboard with which to text friends via then-popular instant messaging services. Music and video could be stored on 0.4GB of built-in memory. Priced at \$350 (then about £190), it was sold by UK importers for £250. This was more than most people would spend on a mobile phone, but they didn't need a network contract, because it only supported Wi-Fi.



Why did it die?

The Mylo didn't do enough. Web browsing made little sense on the tiny screen, there was no proper email program, it could only make phone calls on Skype, and there were no games. Slow sales resulted in a price cut before it was withdrawn. The arrival of the iPhone in 2007 made it clear that people would rather pay more for a more powerful mobile gadget.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 23 Sept

Chillblast Photo Zen

Incredible eight-core processing power for £1,560



Netgear Nighthawk MK62

A Wi-Fi 6 mesh router for under £250

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

LAPTOP

Honor MagicBook 14

£550 from www.snipca.com/34688
Tested Issue 580



Using an AMD Ryzen 3500U processor, this lightweight metal laptop beat Microsoft's Surface Laptop 3 with Intel's i7-1065G7 in our tests. The 14in Full HD screen lacks colour accuracy but looks decent. For the money, it's a great buy.

ALTERNATIVE Dell XPS 13 New

Intel CPUs and a taller screen make this a more powerful, all-round slim notebook, although prices now start at a steep £1,399. www.snipca.com/35349

DESKTOP PC

Palicomp

Intel Mercury
£600 from www.snipca.com/34223
Tested Issue 576



If you don't need advanced gaming, your money's well spent here on a six-core Intel i5-9600K processor overclocked to 5GHz. 16GB of memory and a full terabyte of fast SSD storage round off a powerful PC with good expansion potential.

ALTERNATIVE Chillblast Fusion Onyx

Ryzen Adds decent 3D graphics and a 6GB Nvidia GeForce GTX 1660 Super. £1,060 from www.snipca.com/34675

APPLE iPAD

Apple iPad 10.2in

£349 from www.snipca.com/24022
Tested Issue 566



This enlarged edition of the basic iPad is superb value. With a great screen and plenty of processing power, it supports Apple's Pencil stylus (£89) and Smart Keyboard (£159). The 32GB storage could be tight, so consider 128GB at £449.

ALTERNATIVE iPad Mini With 64GB

the improved Mini has an even better, but smaller, screen than the otherwise similar 10.2in iPad at a similar price. £399 from www.snipca.com/33050

ANDROID TABLET

Samsung Galaxy S6 Lite

£309 from www.snipca.com/35795
Tested Issue 582



Competing with Apple's cheapest 10.2in iPad, this slim aluminium tablet comes with an S Pen stylus and a generous 64GB of storage at a reasonable price. It's less powerful, but a great buy if you prefer Android.

ALTERNATIVE Amazon Fire HD 8

Now with USB-C and 32GB of storage, this plastic-cased tablet is more limited, with no stylus option, but good for the money. £90 from www.snipca.com/35336

APPLE iPhone

Apple iPhone 11

£729 from www.snipca.com/32938
Tested Issue 565



At over £300 less than the iPhone 11 Pro, this has two rear cameras rather than three, but it's a superb phone for the money and takes fantastic photos and video. With full-day battery life, the only flaw is its 64GB of unexpandable storage – 128GB is £50 extra.

ALTERNATIVE iPhone SE

With a single camera and smaller screen but the same powerful A13 processor and 64GB storage as the iPhone 11, it's great value. £419 from www.snipca.com/34773

ANDROID PHONE

Google Pixel 4a

£349 from www.snipca.com/35796
Tested issue 588



Still only one camera on the back, but it takes some of the best photos around. In other respects the 4a is a thoroughly modern phone that runs Android very smoothly, with 128GB of storage, fingerprint reader and all-day battery.

ALTERNATIVE Xiaomi Redmi Note 9

Ridiculously good value, with a big OLED screen, triple camera, fingerprint reader and 128GB. £163 from www.snipca.com/35397

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GET IT EARLY

SAVE MONEY

Hello,

I'd like to thank you for continuing to read *Computeractive* during lockdown. It has been a difficult time for everyone, but I'm glad we could provide a semblance of normality.

Getting to the shops was obviously tricky during lockdown, so it didn't surprise me that we saw a rise in people subscribing to *Computeractive*. It must have been a comfort to know you could rely on the magazine dropping through your letterbox once a fortnight. A big thank you to everyone who signed up.

There remains the possibility of further lockdowns, both regional and national, with shops closing again. Should that happen, I expect there'll be another rise in subscriptions. To prepare, we're putting additional effort into our deliveries to make sure you get your copy on time (several days before it goes on sale in the shops).

If you're thinking of subscribing, please see details below. And if you have any questions about subscribing, please don't hesitate to email me: editor@computeractive.co.uk.

Kind regards,
Daniel Booth



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Buy It

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

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle (2019)

£70 from www.snipca.com/31621
Tested Issue 555



Now with built-in light and audiobook support, this budget model is fine for most users, though limited by its 4GB of storage. The Paperwhite (£120) is even sharper, waterproof, and has bigger storage options as well as a cellular data option (£100 extra).

ALTERNATIVE Kobo Clara HD

Not waterproof, but has more lighting options to avoid blue light. £110 from www.snipca.com/32586

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Kaspersky Internet

Security 2020
£14.99 from www.snipca.com/21532
Tested Issue 564



Kaspersky Internet Security has won our past nine antivirus tests and the 2020 version is now available at an exclusive reader discount on our Software Store. Go to the link above for a one-year, one-device licence or buy a two-year, two-device licence for just £26.99.

ALTERNATIVE Norton 360 Deluxe

Almost as good as Kaspersky, but blocks more legitimate software. £15 from www.snipca.com/32069

PHOTO EDITING

Serif Affinity Photo

£49 from www.snipca.com/23739
Tested Issue 498



Designed for both full-time professional image retouchers and the rest of us keen amateurs, this is a beautifully designed and comprehensive program for both Windows and Mac users, although so far it performs better on Macs.

ALTERNATIVE Xara Photo & Graphic

Designer For all-round design and drawing plus photo filters, this affordable app has a lot to offer. £50 from www.snipca.com/26514

PC MONITOR

BenQ GL2780

£145 from www.snipca.com/34834
Tested issue 581



This budget 27in screen offers accurate sRGB colour with good contrast, plus auto brightness and low blue light modes. Speakers are built in. Using TN LCD rather than IPS, it needs to be viewed straight on, but works well for games too.

ALTERNATIVE Philips Brilliance

241B7QPJEB With a great picture, stylish design and speakers, this 24in Full HD IPS is an excellent smaller screen. £165 from www.snipca.com/34869

ROUTER

D-Link DIR-1960

£105 from www.snipca.com/32849
Tested Issue 564



Giving us download and upload speeds of 460Mbps and 375Mbps respectively, this is phenomenal value. Even two floors away we got 329Mbps and 284Mbps. It has four Ethernet ports for wired devices and a USB 3.0 socket to share storage via your network.

ALTERNATIVE Synology RT2600ac

Comprehensive sharing features, controls and plenty of add-on apps complement excellent long-range performance. £209 from www.snipca.com/30710

PRINTER

Epson Expression Premium

XP-6105
£96 from www.snipca.com/35017
Tested Issue 554



With many leading all-purpose printers having sold out during lockdown, this white version of the XP-6100 wireless six-ink printer/scanner/copier is a good choice for photos first and text second. It's easy to use and speeds aren't bad, but ink costs can work out high.

ALTERNATIVE Epson WorkForce

7710DWF Although its price has drifted up from a low of £132, this full A3+ printer/scanner/copier is a very practical buy. £200 from www.snipca.com/35016

Buy It



COMPETITION

Win... 1 of 2 Linksys WRT 1200AC dual-band routers



LINKSYS

Linksys' dual-band WRT 1200AC wireless AC router provides secure, high-speed Wi-Fi connections around your home. Its adjustable, high-gain antennas deliver a strong and reliable signal on both 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands, while beamforming technology directs the signal where it's needed.

It has USB 3.0 and eSATA/USB 2.0 ports for adding extra storage and sharing across your network, while the dual-core 1.3GHz processor

supports simultaneous high-bandwidth connections. Gigabit Ethernet connections allow for fast wired access for up to four devices.

Using the Linksys app, you can closely monitor and manage your home Wi-Fi remotely using a smartphone or tablet. The overall result is better efficiency and performance, particularly in today's multi-device world.

To enter this competition, email your

home address to cacomp@dennis.co.uk with 'Linksys' in the subject line by midnight 22 September. Good luck!

Buy Linksys' WRT 1200AC router for £199.99 from Amazon: www.snipca.com/35524. For information on more Linksys and its products, visit Linksys.com/gb and follow @[LinksysUnitedKingdom](https://www.facebook.com/LinksysUnitedKingdom) on Facebook.

MESH ROUTER

BT Whole Home Wi-Fi
£172 from www.snipca.com/26990
Tested Issue 496



BT's set of three discs, managed from an Apple or Android app, connects to your broadband and spreads high-speed Wi-Fi all around the house. Reception is far better than a single router, and the price is lower than any rival.

ALTERNATIVE Zyxel Multy X
These two pillow-shaped boxes are powerful enough for most homes and provide four Ethernet ports apiece.
£250 from www.snipca.com/27309

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

Samsung 970 Evo Plus
500GB
£103 from www.snipca.com/31265
Tested Issue 552



Although its price has fluctuated since we tested it at £99, this is a very fast (over 3GB per second) M.2 SSD unfazed by tests that make others slow to a crawl. Also consider the Adata XPG SX8200 Pro if you find it a bit cheaper.

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 500GB
As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £54 from www.snipca.com/30188

WEB DESIGN

Xara Web Designer Premium
£70 from www.snipca.com/34150
Tested Issue 453



This visual program makes creating sites more like laying out a document than writing HTML code, and sites can be responsive, meaning they look good on big and small screens. A cheaper, basic version is also available for £35.

ALTERNATIVE Incomedia WebSite X5 v13 Evolution It may feel basic, but this program outputs efficient HTML code and responsive pages. £39 from www.snipca.com/31179

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HOW TO...

Block adverts everywhere without using plug-ins

by Nik Rawlinson

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

There are dozens of **plug-ins** that promise to block adverts and help speed up the web. Many work well, but they each have a shortcoming: being add-ons for your browser means they only work in that particular window on the web. If you switch between different browsers you'll need to install two plug-ins – and, if you make changes to the default settings on either, you'll have to repeat the process on the other.

That's not the only reason we'd prefer not to use a plug-in: there's also the question of speed. The more extras you bolt on to your browser, the more it has

to analyse and process before loading a web page. That can slow things down. Plus, of course, unless you know for sure that the plug-in is trustworthy, you can't guarantee that it's not telling its developers which sites you're visiting.

Happily, there is a better option: use the settings within Windows itself. As the master of your PC, Windows is the gateway for every piece of data that arrives in your applications. Browsers can't address the web without negotiating via Windows so, if you block access to ad servers, **cookies** and questionable sites at the Windows level,



you only need to specify the rule once and it will apply to every browser. Not only browsers, either: anything that relies on a web connection, like your email program and messengers, will be protected. The best news, though, is that setting it up doesn't take long and needs nothing more complex than Notepad, the plain-text editor built into Windows.

1 Discover what happens when you visit a website

Before we begin, it will help to explain precisely what happens when you type a web address into your browser. Most web pages are constructed piecemeal using resources stored on several different servers. Text might be stored on the site owner's server, images may be on a content delivery network (effectively, a worldwide mesh of computers that keeps several copies of each piece of media and serves you the version closest to your geographical location so the page loads more quickly),

adverts on a third server, tracking technologies and scripts on a fourth, and so on.

The addresses of each will be coded into the web page itself, which you can think of more like a recipe in a cookbook: a series of ingredients (the content and the servers that store it) and the method (instructions on how to lay them out that the browser interprets).

Browser-based ad blockers check each ingredient, compare it against a known list of elements it shouldn't include in a web page and, if it finds a match, stops the browser from retrieving it.

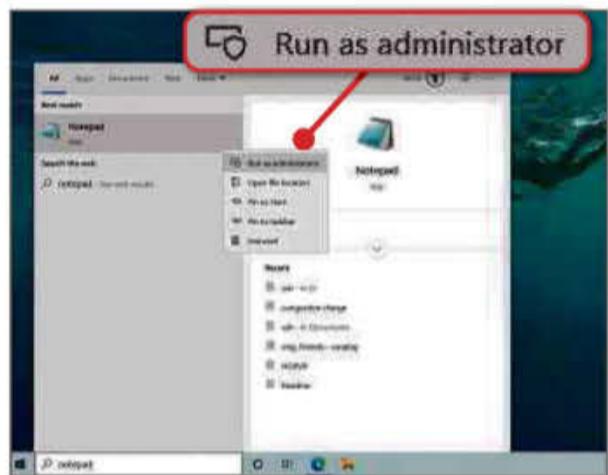
Each of the servers that hosts a web page's content has a numeric address. The character-based web address you type in, like www.facebook.com or www.bbc.co.uk, is just there for our benefit. When you type it, or a web page mentions it in its code, the browser looks it up – first in a file stored on your computer and, assuming it doesn't find a match there, again on a remote Domain Name Server (**DNS**). It extracts the matching numeric address, uses that to locate the server it needs to get the resource from, downloads it, and adds it to the page.

2 Open Windows' Hosts file in Notepad

The Hosts file stored on your PC that the browser checks first is a hangover from the very earliest days of the web, before there was any such thing as DNS, when every computer needed its own record of the numeric addresses of every machine on the internet (which was a much smaller place back then). It's by editing this that we're able to block ads at their source.

Because the file is so important, you can only edit it if you have administrator access. So, press the Windows key and type **notepad**, but rather than clicking Notepad, right-click it and pick 'Run as administrator' (see screenshot below). Windows will check that you're happy for it to make changes to your system. Click Yes.

Next, press **Ctrl+O** and type **c:\windows\system32\drivers\etc\hosts** into the 'File name' box (see screenshot



You'll need to run Notepad as an administrator to edit your hosts file

How I block unwanted content

I've gone a bit further than outlined here and implemented a server-based program called Pi-Hole (www.pi-hole.net), running on a £9 Raspberry Pi Zero (www.snipca.com/35752). The Zero is a tiny, silent computer, about half the size of a credit card, and draws very little power, so can be left running around the clock.



Pi-Hole analyses all the internet traffic heading for any of my computers, removing unwanted content before it arrives in the browser window, or any other program. This helps everything run smoothly.

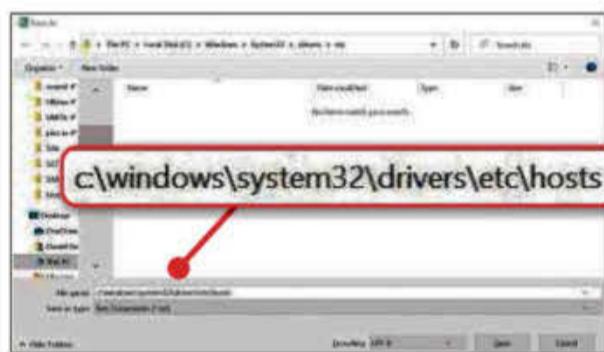
Nik Rawlinson



How do you block ads? Let us know:
letters@computeractive.co.uk

below), then click Open.

This will open the Hosts file, which is just a list of numeric and written addresses in plain text, with each line preceded by a # (hashtag – **1** in the screenshot bottom). This hashtag is important because it tells Windows to ignore anything after it. So, every time it's accessed, the browser or other program that's trying to locate a resource on the



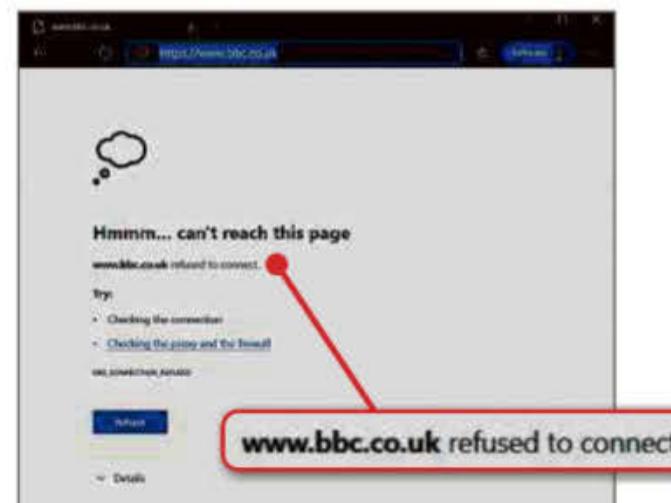
Enter 'c:\windows\system32...' in the 'File name' box, then select Open

web will immediately refer to a remote DNS for the information it needs. We now need to change that.

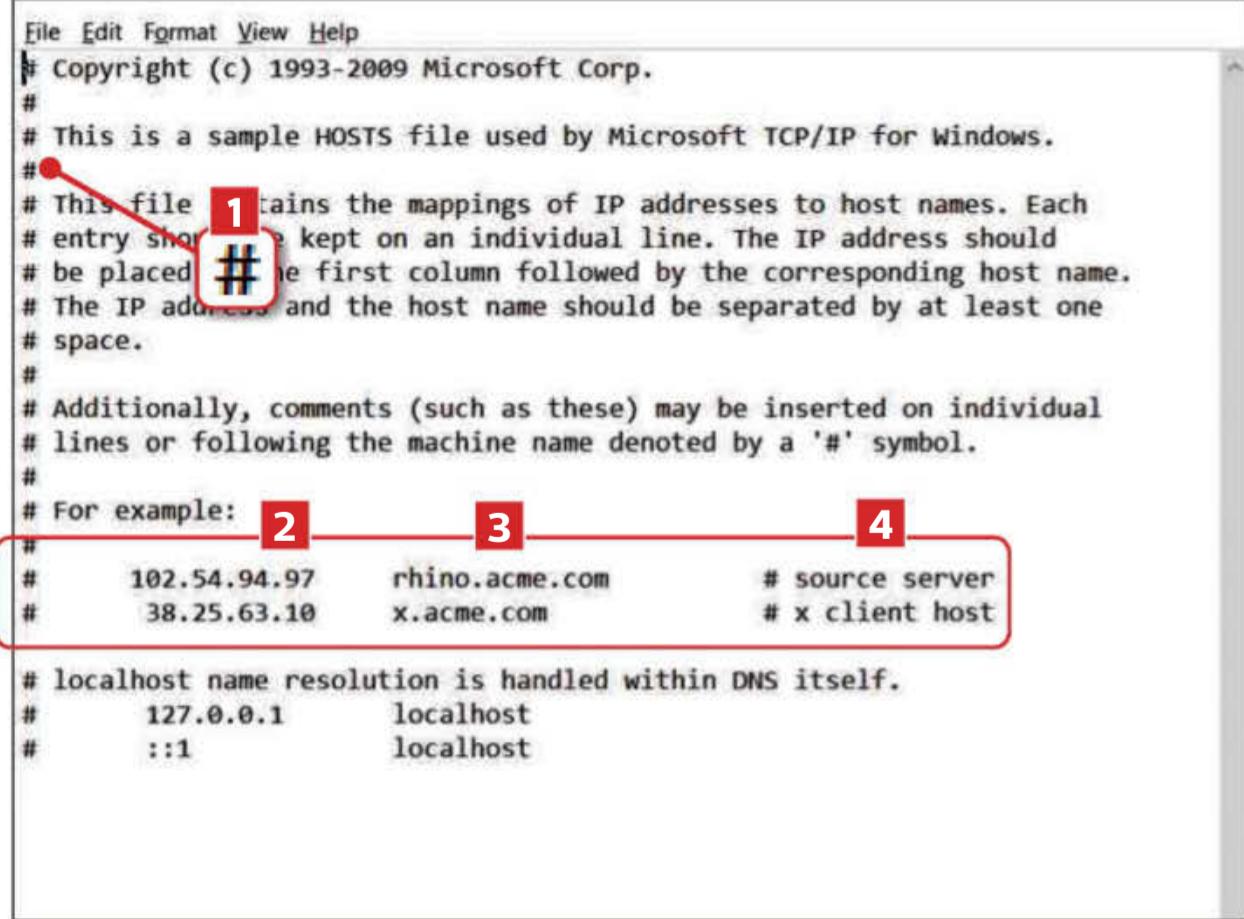
3 Block your first domain

Let's block the BBC's website for no reason other than it's a site everyone knows (don't worry, you can quickly unblock it later). Look at the Hosts file you opened and you'll see that any table of domains will consist of three columns. Column one (**2** in the screenshot below left) has the numeric address of the server on which the site is located (102.54.94.97); column two contains the site's 'friendly' name (rhino.acme.com in this example **3**); while column three **4**, which is optional, contains any comments you might want to make for future reference. We'll concern ourselves with the first two columns and ignore the third.

Move the cursor to the bottom of the file, beneath the last row, then press return one more time to make a blank line. On the next line, type **127.0.0.1 www.bbc.co.uk**. Press **Ctrl+S** to save the file, then open a browser and type **www.bbc.co.uk**. Instead of going to the site, you'll see this error message, below.



Once a site is on your Hosts file, you'll get an error message when you visit it



```
File Edit Format View Help
# Copyright (c) 1993-2009 Microsoft Corp.
#
# This is a sample HOSTS file used by Microsoft TCP/IP for Windows.
#
# 1 This file contains the mappings of IP addresses to host names. Each
# entry should be kept on an individual line. The IP address should
# be placed in the first column followed by the corresponding host name.
# The IP address and the host name should be separated by at least one
# space.
#
# Additionally, comments (such as these) may be inserted on individual
# lines or following the machine name denoted by a '#' symbol.
#
# For example: 2 3 4
#
#      102.54.94.97      rhino.acme.com      # source server
#      38.25.63.10      x.acme.com          # x client host
#
# localhost name resolution is handled within DNS itself.
#      127.0.0.1      localhost
#      ::1             localhost
```

The Windows Hosts file is a list of numeric and written addresses in plain text

EIGHT DOMAINS YOU SHOULD BLOCK

To stop being bombarded by adverts, the first domains you should consider blocking are the biggest ad services on the web. Among them is the Google-owned Doubleclick – with domains at **doubleclick.net** and **ad.doubleclick.net**. Check the list at www.snipca.com/35696 for other Google domains you might like to add to the list for wider coverage. As with all the domains here, you must type them after 127.0.0.1 – just like in our BBC example.

Be careful not to add services you use, like Google Drive and search. As shown

above, if you include entries that interrupt your web use, you can remove them. Just delete all the Google entries, then add them back one at a time, testing after each one.

To block Facebook adverts, also add **ads.ak.facebook.com** and **creative.ak.facebook.com**. If you want to go further and block as much of Facebook as possible, you'll find an extensive list of its domains at www.snipca.com/35697 – just copy and paste it. If you're a regular Twitter user and you want to filter ads on that network, add **ads.twitter.com** and **ads-twitter.com**.

The domains at **advertising.amazon.com** and **amazon-adsystem.com** would be apt starting points for Amazon ads but, as with many other global firms, the company's list of web properties is far longer than that, and you'll find a very comprehensive list of its domains at www.snipca.com/35698. Bear in mind, though, that these include Amazon Web Services, on which many third-party sites rely, so blocking everything without due care could stop some sites working as you'd expect them to.

```

File Edit Format View Help
# Copyright (c) 1993-2009 Microsoft Corp.

# This is a sample HOSTS file used by Microsoft TCP/IP for Windows.

# This file contains the mappings of IP addresses to host names. Each
# entry should be kept on an individual line. The IP address should
# be placed in the first column followed by the corresponding host name.
# The IP address and the host name should be separated by at least one
# space.

# Additionally, comments (such as these) may be inserted on individual
# lines or following the machine name denoted by a '#' symbol.

# For example:
#      102.54.94.97    rhino.acme.com        # source server
#      38.25.63.18     x.acme.com            # x client host

# localhost name resolution is handled within DNS itself.
# 127.0.0.1       localhost
# ::1             localhost

127.0.0.1 www.bbc.co.uk
127.0.0.1 bbc.co.uk
  
```

When blocking a website type its URL both with and without 'www'

But lop off the 'www.' so you just have `bbc.co.uk`, and the page should load fine. That's because, while the result is being downloaded from the same server, the plain-English addresses – with and without the 'www.' – are treated as separate locations. So, to cover all bases, add another new line to the Notepad file and type `127.0.0.1 bbc.co.uk` (keeping the gap between the number and URL – see screenshot above). Press Ctrl+S to save, then try to visit `bbc.co.uk`. It shouldn't work.

However, it may still appear to be working if your browser is simply reloading the page from its **cache** to fix what it sees as a problem accessing the real thing. To get around this, visit `bbc.co.uk` in a new private-browsing window to force it to try to load the content straight from the server. To open a new private window in Edge or Chrome, press Ctrl-Shift-N; in Firefox, press Ctrl-Shift-P.

If you're wondering about the significance of 127.0.0.1, that's your computer's internal address. So, what you're doing when you add the lines we specified to the file is telling Windows that whenever someone asks for the BBC,

```

winhelp2002.mvps.org/hosts.txt - Not secure | winhelp... Not syncing ...
  
```

This MVPS HOSTS file is a free download from:
http://winhelp2002.mvps.org/hosts.htm

Notes: The Operating System does not read the "#" symbol
or anything after the # symbol on the same line

This *must* be the first line: 127.0.0.1 localhost
#----- Updated: July-30-2020 -----

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127.0.0.1 localhost
::1 localhost #[IPv6]
[Start of entries generated by MVPS HOSTS]

[Misc A - Z]
0.0.0.0 fr.a2dfp.net
0.0.0.0 mfr.a2dfp.net
0.0.0.0 ad.a8.net
0.0.0.0 asy.a8ww.net
0.0.0.0 static.a-ads.com
0.0.0.0 abcstats.com

The MVPS HOSTS file of domains to block has been running for 22 years, and is still regularly updated

Updated: July-30-2020

it should refer back to itself rather than going to the BBC's server. As the BBC's resources aren't stored on your local machine, the result is what we were after: missing content. Assuming you don't want to keep the BBC blocked, delete the two lines you just added to the file and save it again. They were only an example.

4 Use publicly available block lists

Knowing what you need to do is only the first part of the solution. Next, you have to know which domains to block. One option is to trust lists compiled by others, containing not only ad domains but also adult websites.

One of the most trusted lists is MVPS HOSTS, which was begun in 1998 by

developers who are previous recipients of Microsoft's Most Valuable Professional award. It's regularly updated (July 2020 was the latest – see screenshot above).

Visit www.snipca.com/35694, then copy the contents of the page, paste the file into Notepad, save it and carry on browsing. If you find that using this or any other publicly available list has blocked a site you need to use, delete its entry in the file. To do this, run Notepad as an administrator as you did earlier, press Ctrl+F to open the search box, then search for the domain name that won't load. When you find it, delete the whole line on which it appears, including the numeric address that precedes it. Save the file and try visiting the page again.

Workshop 1

Create keyboard shortcuts for any Windows task

What you need: LeoMoon HotKeyz

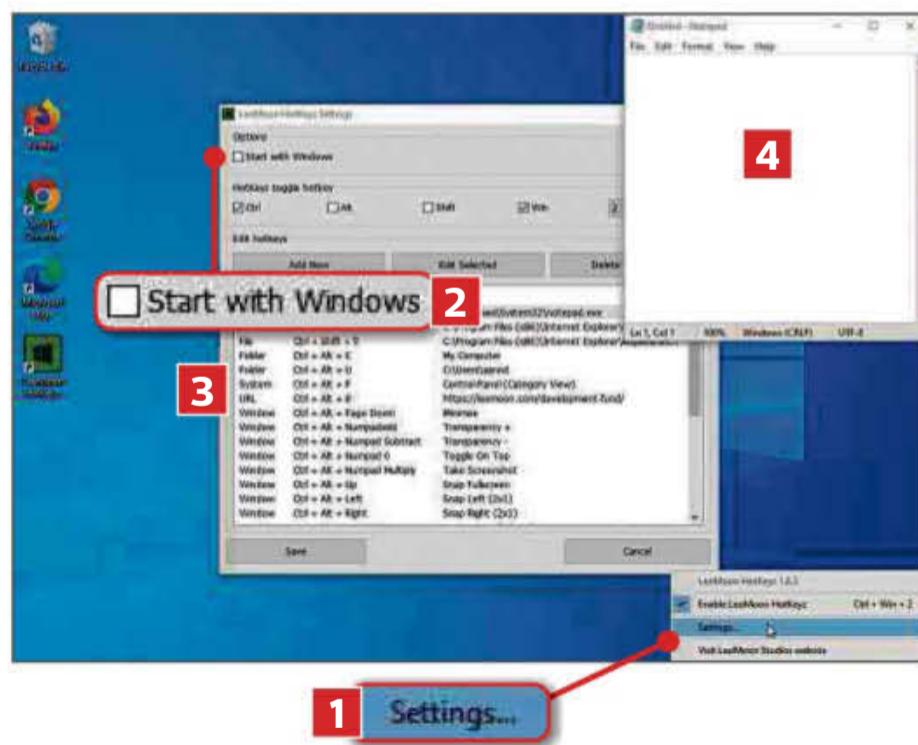
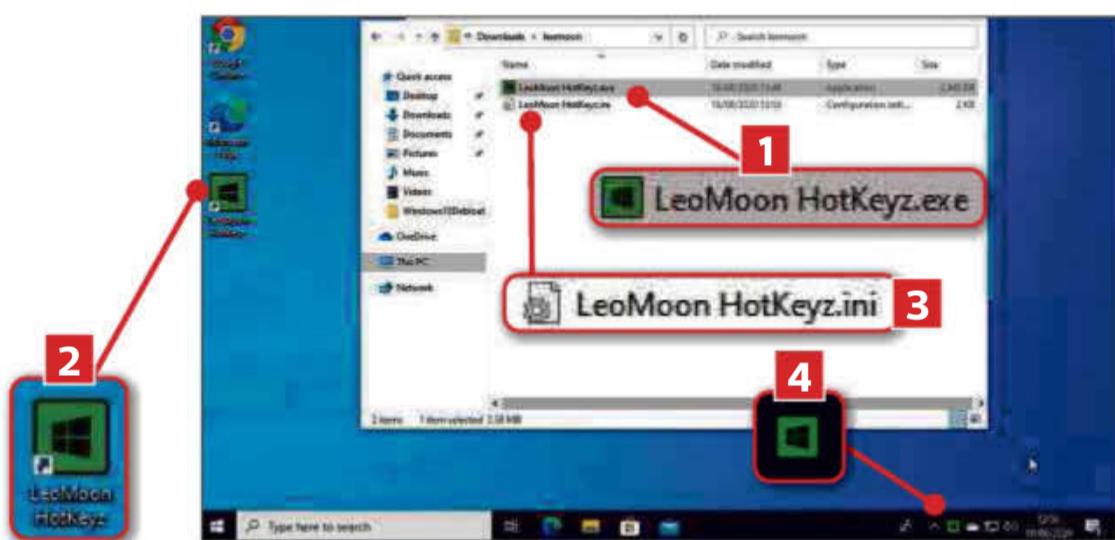
Time required: 10 minutes

Keyboard shortcuts can help you power through Windows tasks without taking your hands from your keyboard. Most people use a few, even if it's only Ctrl+C and Ctrl+V to copy and paste, but we'd probably all use a lot more if we could choose our own. This is

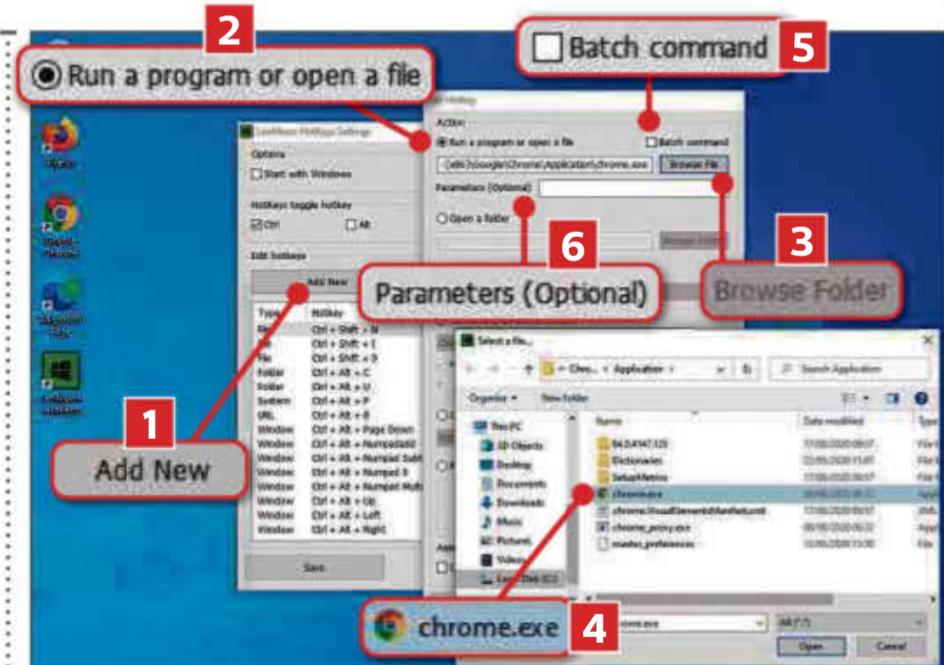
where LeoMoon's free HotKeyz tool comes in. As we'll show you in this Workshop, this handy software can be used to create all sorts of shortcuts, to do anything from opening folders, software and links, to rearranging your desktop.



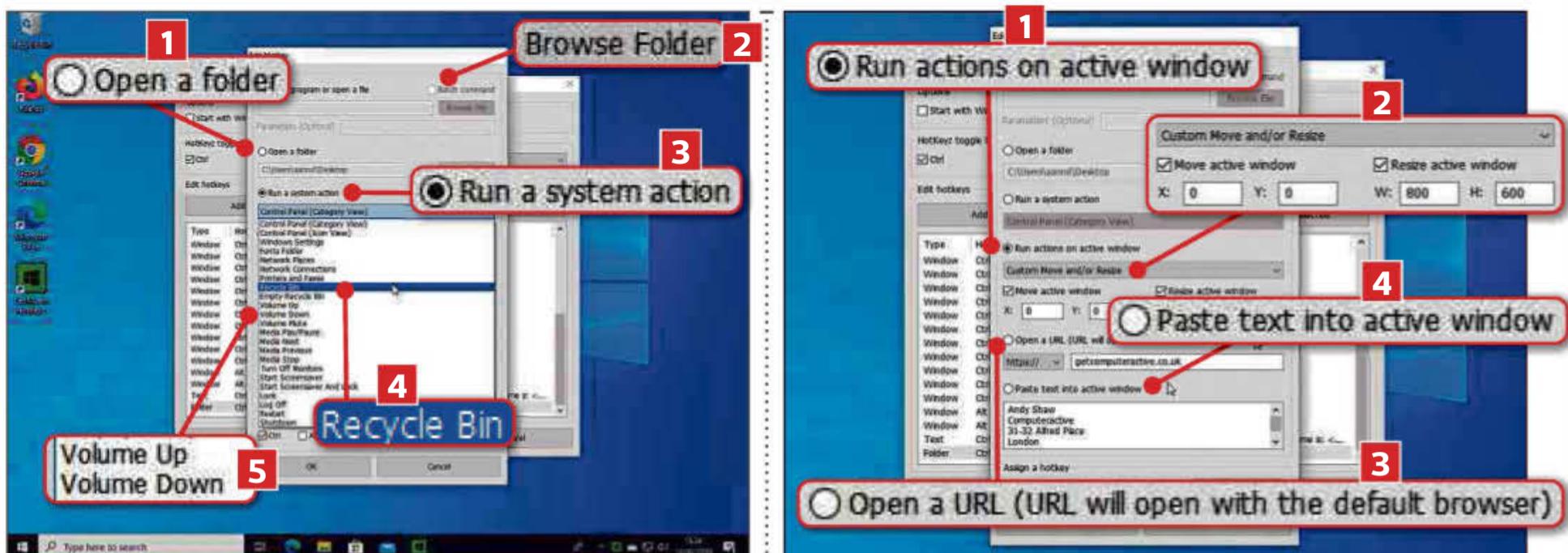
STEP 1 Download HotKeyz from www.snipca.com/35778. It's portable so you don't need to install it – just create a folder on your hard drive, open the ZIP file you've just downloaded and copy the EXE file 1 into the new folder. Next, right-click the file and chose to make a shortcut, which you need to copy to the desktop for easy access 2). When the software runs, it creates an INI file 3) to store any new keyboard shortcuts you make, but that's the only change it makes to your PC. Once it's running, the program sits in your system tray 4).



STEP 2 Right-click its icon and choose Settings 1). This opens the main HotKeyz interface. If you want the software to run as soon as Windows starts, tick the 'Start with Windows' box 2). Note that you can't summon the software by double-clicking the icon, as that disables the software (handy if you find you've got a shortcut clash that's stopped something else from working). In the main window is a list of pre-configured shortcuts 3). Try a few out, such as Ctrl+Shift+N to open Notepad, then Ctrl+Alt+9 (on the numberpad) to snap it to the top right 4).



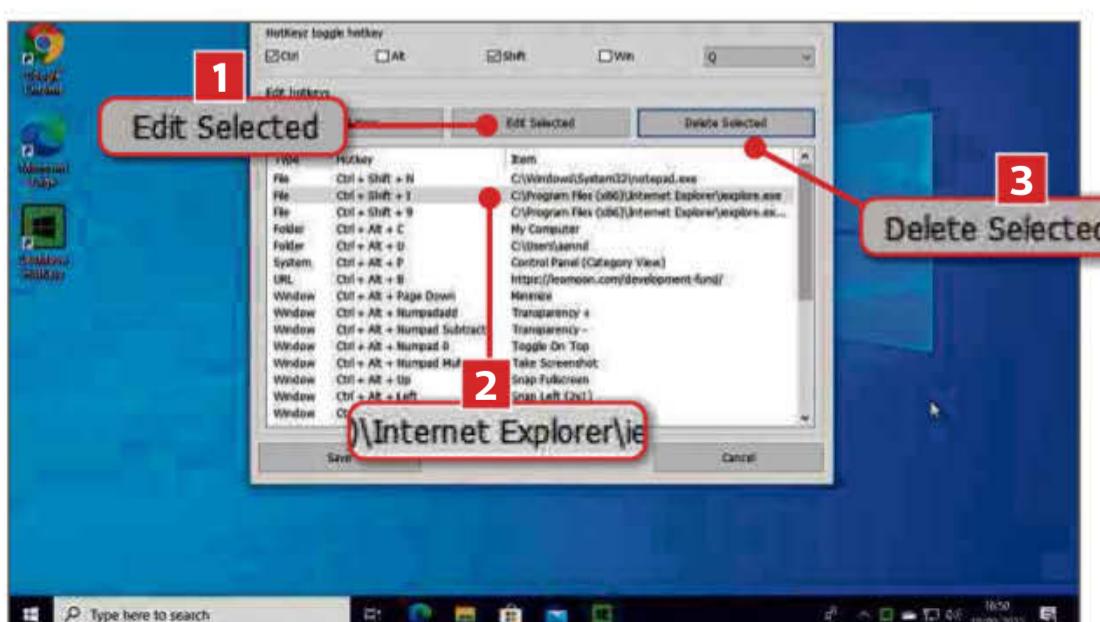
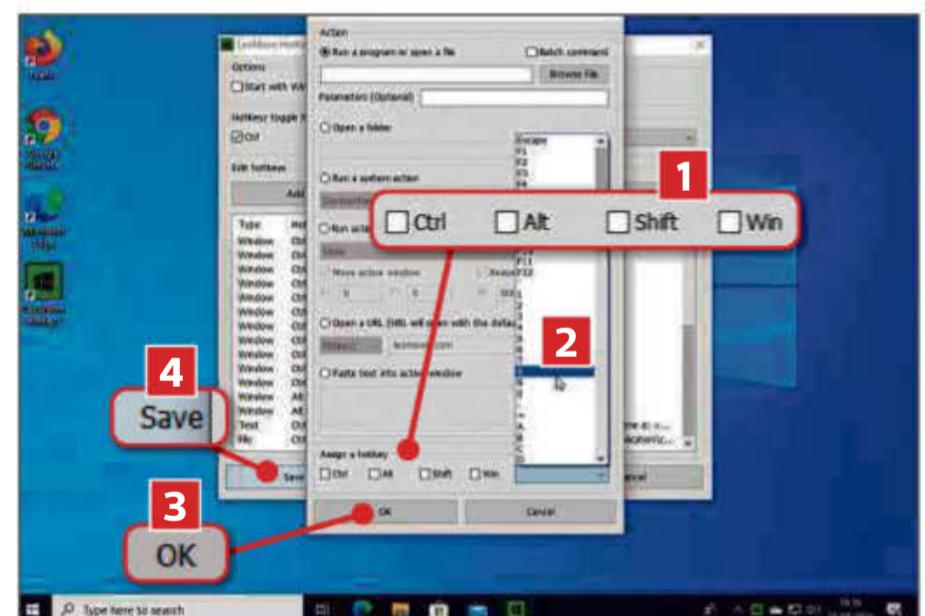
STEP 3 The real power comes from creating your own shortcuts. Click 'Add New' 1 to open the Add Hotkey box. It looks a bit complicated but it's relatively straightforward when you break it down. In the Action section, you can choose from five options, which let you create shortcuts that perform different tasks. We'll go through these in the next few steps. The first option 2 lets you run a program or open any other kind of file. Click the Browse Folder button 3 and select the file or program you want to run (we've selected Chrome) 4). If you're feeling brave you can run a batch command 5, which is a series of commands that run one after the other, or add optional parameters 6 to change the way a program runs.



STEP 4 ‘Open a folder’ 1 works in exactly the same way. Click the Browse Folder button 2, choose the folder you’d like the shortcut to open and, when you press the shortcut, it will open automatically in File Explorer. Choose ‘Run a system action’ 3 if you want to create a shortcut to something you would normally find in Windows’ built-in tools. For example, you could create a shortcut that empties the Recycle Bin 4, or adjusts your PC’s volume 5. There are lots of options here – just browse through the list in the dropdown menu and choose one.

STEP 6 Getting the right keyboard shortcut is a matter of trial and error. Under ‘Assign a hotkey’ choose the combination you want of the Ctrl, Alt, Shift and Windows keys by ticking the box next to each option 1. Choose the key to press in addition to this from the dropdown menu 2. Click OK 3 and Save 4, then try using the hotkey combination to perform the command. If something else happens instead, you’ve probably selected a combination that’s reserved for something else.

STEP 5 ‘Run actions on active window’ 1 is another dropdown menu, with a range of options from closing a window to moving it around the screen. Beneath it is the ‘Custom Move and/or Resize’ option 2. Choose this to enable the options that let you move and resize a window exactly as you like it. ‘Open a URL’ 3 opens any web address you type into the box in your default browser. Lastly, if you have text readily available that you use often in lots of different places, such as an address or signature, type it into the ‘Paste text into active window’ box 4.



STEP 7 To choose a different combination of keys or to make some other change to one of your shortcuts, highlight it in the list and click the Edit Selected button 1. This opens the usual configuration window with the shortcut’s information already listed, so you can make any changes. Some of the pre-configured shortcuts are outdated, such as the ones that open Internet Explorer 2, so you can either reconfigure the keys to do something else or just remove them with the Delete Selected button 3.

Workshop 2

Try new-look Start menu and Alt+Tab tools for Edge

What you need: Windows 10 May 2020 Update (version 2004)

Time required: 20 minutes

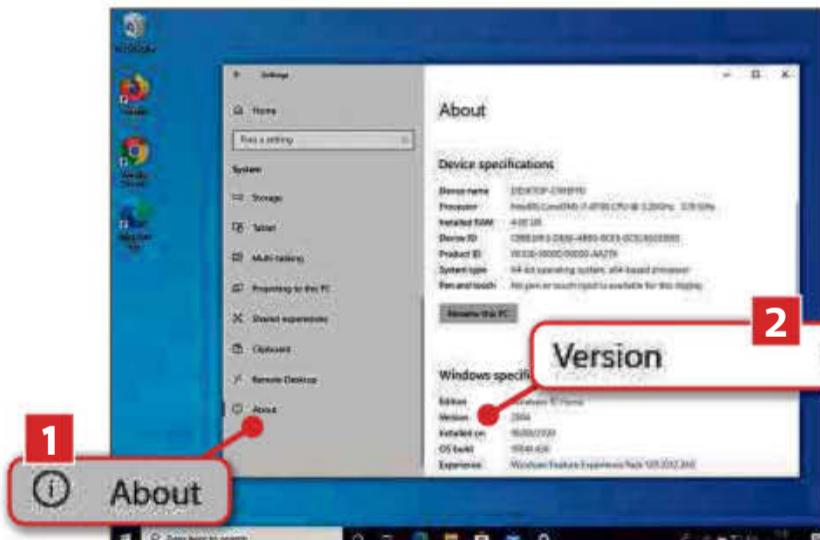
Microsoft has hidden features from its next big update (due this autumn) inside the current version of Windows (May 2020 Update, Build 2004): a new-look Start menu and the option in Microsoft Edge that adds extra tools to the Alt+Tab shortcut.

It also adds any tab that's open in

the Edge browser to the list of programs in your Start menu, but you can limit the number of tabs shown by tweaking new options in the Settings menu. To try these you'll need to make changes to the registry and install the **beta** version of Edge, but we'll show you how to do this safely below.

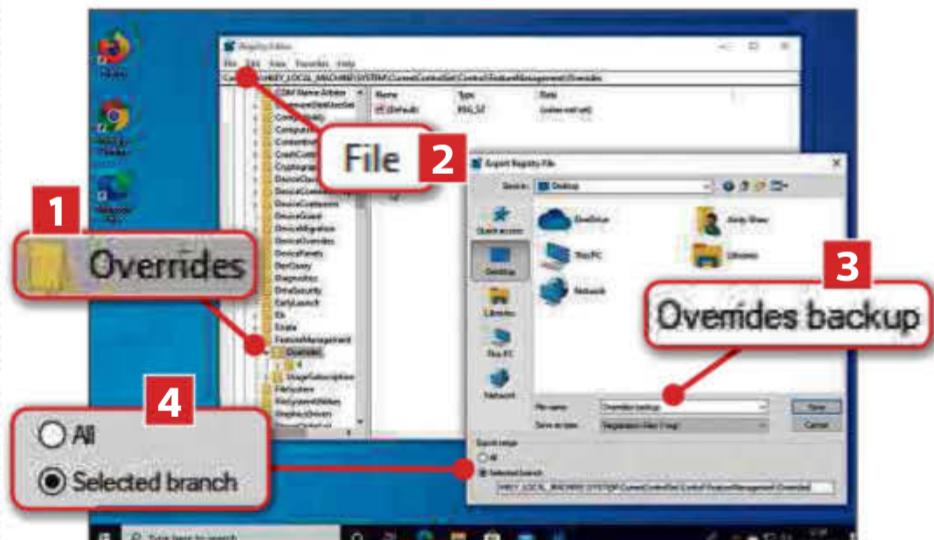


STEP 1 This trick only works in Windows version 2004, so make sure you have the latest version. You can check this by opening the Settings app and choosing System, then About **1**. Scroll down to the 'Windows specifications' section, where you'll see the current version listed **2**. You also need the beta version of Microsoft's Edge browser installed. You can download this from the Beta Channel at www.snipca.com/35791. This version of the browser is very stable, and runs alongside any other browsers, without changing anything in your standard version of Edge.

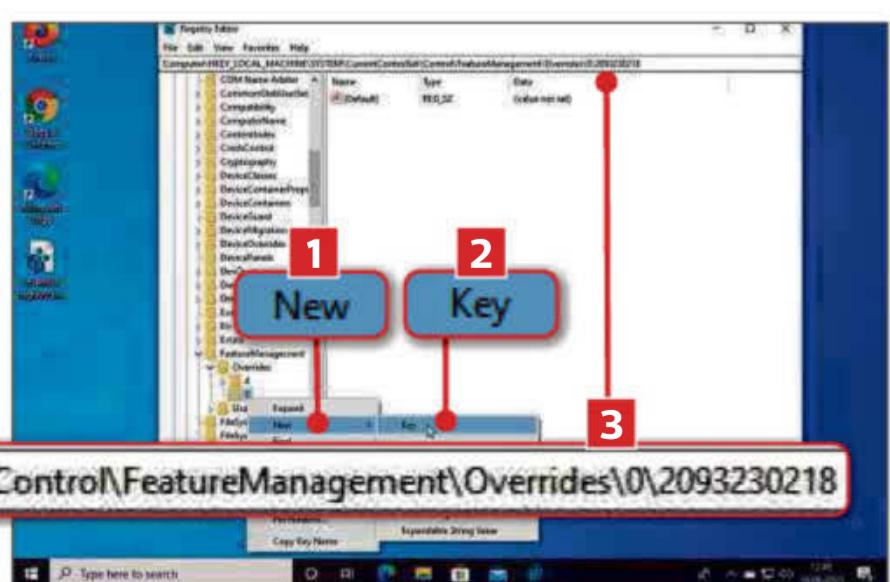


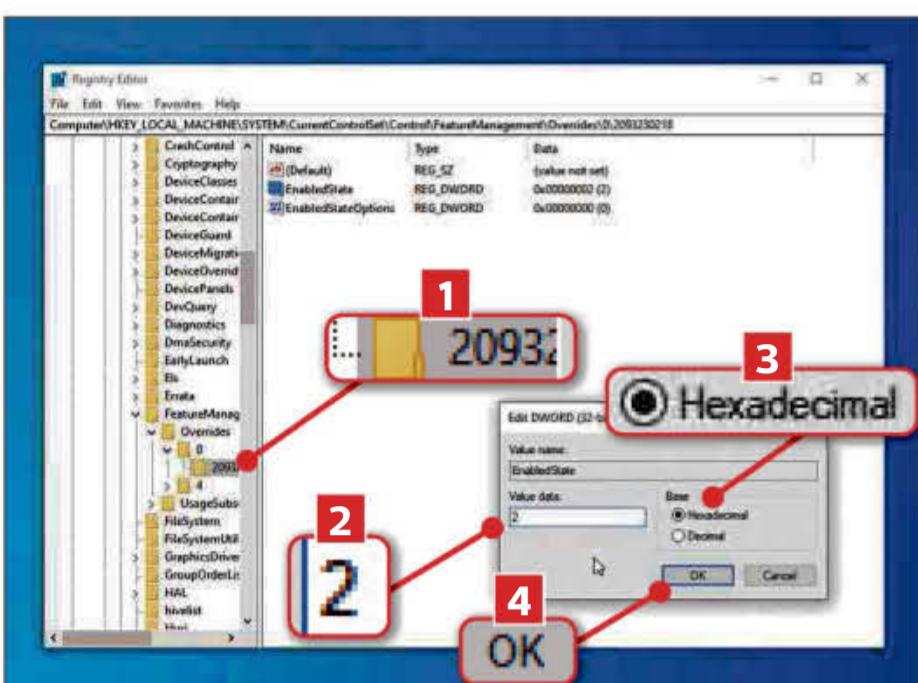
STEP 2 Launch Registry Editor by typing **regedit** into the Windows search bar and pressing Enter to open it. Navigate to the following folder: **HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SYSTEM\CurrentControlSet\Control\FeatureManagement\Overrides\0\2093230218**

We could only get as far as 'Overrides' **1**, which is fine – go as far as you can. Now is a good time to back up, before you start making any changes. Open the File menu **2** and choose Export. Give the backup a name **3** and choose the 'Export range', which can be All or 'Selected branch' **4**, as long as the Override key is selected. Save the file somewhere safe.

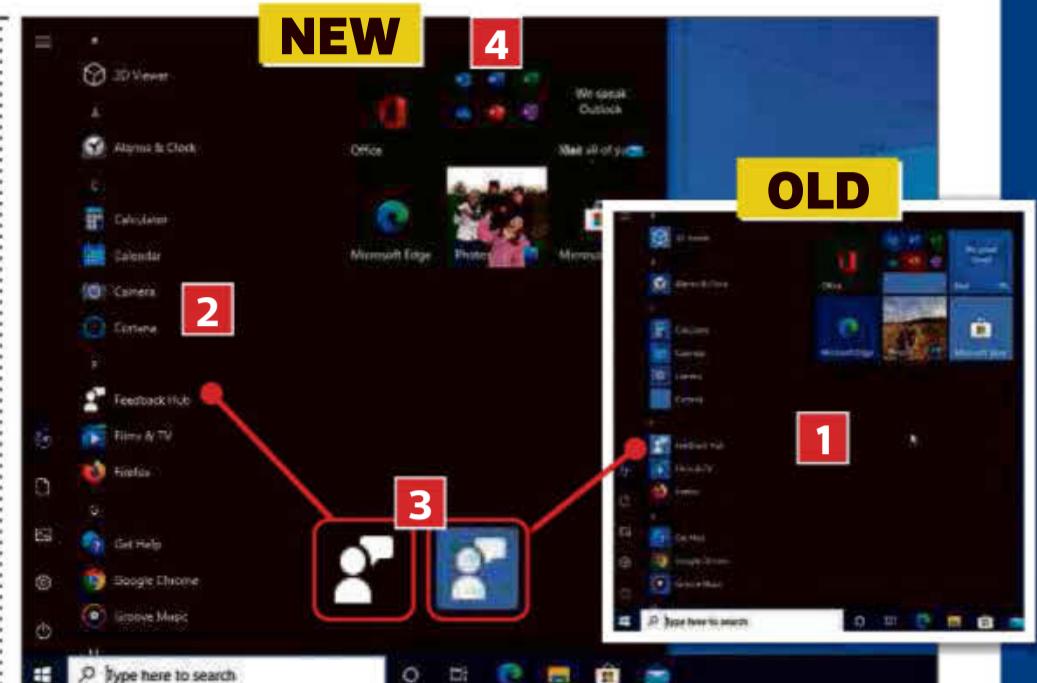


STEP 3 If, like us, your PC didn't have the right folders (known as 'keys' in registry lingo), you need to create them. Our PC didn't have the folder called '0' so we had to make our own. To do this, right-click the Overrides folder and choose New **1**, then Key **2**. Give it the name **0** (that's a zero, not a capital letter). Now right-click on the '0' key and make another key, called **2093230218**. Check that your folder structure looks like ours by comparing your address **3** to the folder path in Step 2.





NEW



OLD

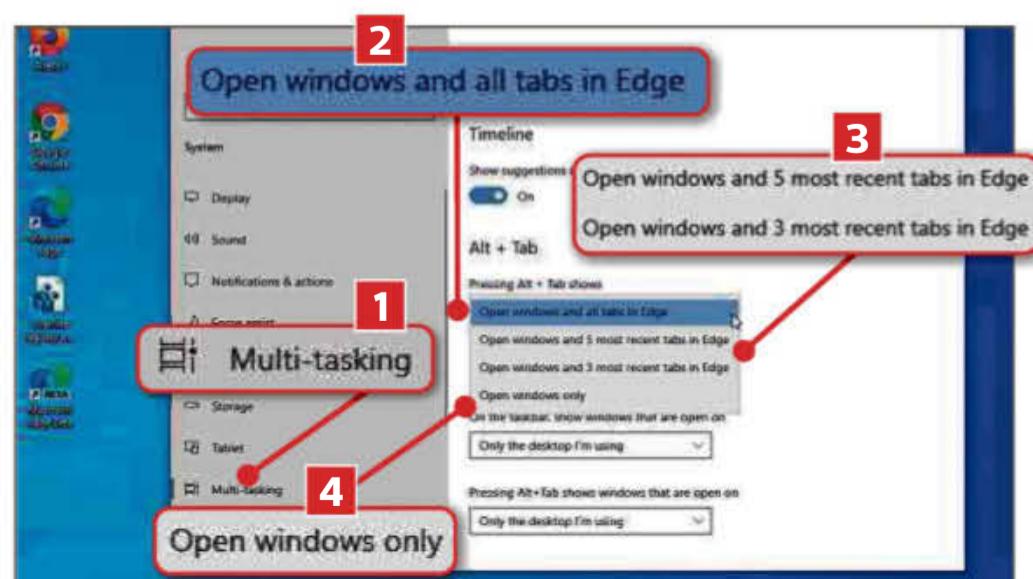
STEP 4 Right-click the 2093230218 folder 1 and choose New, then 'DWORD (32-bit) Value'. A new key is created and the name 'New Value #1' is highlighted so you can rename it. Call this first one EnabledState. Right-click EnabledState and choose Modify. Change the 'Value data' to 2 2 and ensure Hexadecimal 3 is selected in the Base section. Click OK 4. Repeat the process to make a second DWORD called EnabledStateOptions. This one needs a value of zero, which should be its default value, but it's worth double-checking by right-clicking it and choosing Modify. When both have been set up, restart your computer.

STEP 5 A good way to check that the change has taken place is to look at your Start menu. The next version of Windows is changing the way icons and tiles look. In our screenshot you'll see the difference between the old menu 1 and the new 2. The signature colour has been removed 3 from the background of the icons in the alphabetic list. The pinned items in the Start menu have also become more subtly coloured, blending better with your current theme 4. If you switch between light and dark modes, you'll find the background of your icons and tiles changes accordingly.



STEP 6 You've always been able to press Alt+Tab to switch between any programs you have open in Windows 10. By holding down the Alt key while tapping the Tab key, you can cycle through the thumbnails 1. Once you make the registry change described earlier, every tab you have open in Edge Beta will appear in this Alt-Tab menu. Just release Alt to go to a tab.

STEP 7 Microsoft has added an option to Settings to make this Alt+Tab tool easier to control Open Settings, choose System, then Multi-tasking 1. Under 'Alt+Tab', use the dropdown menu to choose whether you want to see all Edge's tabs 2, the most recent five or three tabs used 3, or revert to just showing a single thumbnail 4 (this opens Edge as a single thumbnail, so you don't see multiple thumbnails for each tab). If you decide you've had enough of all these changes, simply import your backed-up registry settings from the Registry Editor's File menu, or go back to Regedit, right-click the '0' folder (or wherever you had to start making changes), select Delete and confirm the changes.



Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Change Outlook password in Credential Manager

Some time ago I received a notification from Microsoft that I needed to change the password for my Outlook 2010 email account, which I did via the Microsoft website. However, afterwards it didn't recognise my new password and I had to enter it manually each time.

According to the Microsoft Community forums (<https://answers.microsoft.com>), I needed to update the password in Outlook's settings. But this feature was in a different location. I have since updated to Outlook 2019 and had the same problem, together with my account not loading at all. The

latter was solved by deleting the account from Outlook 2019 and reinstalling it.

The issue with the password was finally resolved by visiting Credential Manager in Windows, then clicking Windows Credentials (see screenshot right). You get there by typing **credential manager** into Windows Search, then clicking Open. In Windows Credentials you'll find every Microsoft-associated email address you're using. Click one and you'll be shown details of the account and be able to edit it – the password can be updated here.

I originally set up my Outlook accounts in Outlook.com before installing Outlook



from Office 2003. It would therefore appear that while you can change a password via Outlook.com, that change is not always reflected in Outlook in Office.

Martin Wilkins



Martin wins a copy of our 2019 Back Issue CD

Buy it on Amazon www.snipca.com/33711

WINDOWS

Change more folder colours faster

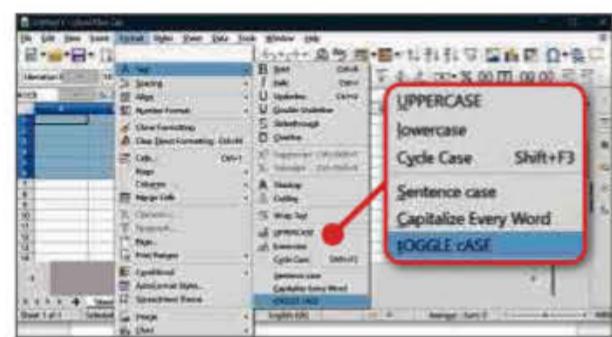
Recently I used Folder Painter (www.snipca.com/34927), as you recommended in Issue 582 (page 40), to change the colours of folders in my large photo collection. The maximum number that you can change at one time made it slow going.

I found a workaround using Winaero Tweaker (<https://winaero.com>). Under its sub-heading Context Menu (on the left)

you'll find 'Context Menu for More Than 15 Files' for when you use File Explorer's right-click menu. The number of files can be adjusted with a slider up to 200.

I increased my computer's setting to 100 files (see screenshot below left) and went back to Folder Painter. This time, right-clicking the selected folders brought up the Change Folder Icon menu, which didn't happen earlier when too many folders had been highlighted. Apart from taking a few seconds longer, everything worked as before.

Keith McQuin-Roberts



cells in Excel and Calc.

I can't speak for Excel, but in Calc if you highlight the cells you wish to change, then click Format along the ribbon at the top, then click Text and scroll down the menu that appears, you'll see a number of options for changing the case (see screenshot above). I find it simple to use, particularly if I want to change a whole column of names.

Robert J Newman



account and nine reminders.

Brian Windsor

Why I no longer use...

Microsoft Money and Excel

I used Microsoft Money and the Sunset version for many years, but reverted to an old-fashioned Excel spreadsheet when they closed. But I refuse to pay Microsoft to subscribe to Office 365 just to get 'Money in Excel'.

And what I use instead...

I recently switched to **Moneyspire 2020** (www.moneyspire.com), which has the

same (if not more) functionality as Microsoft Money.

It has a similar transaction view as Money, allowing a full view or a week, month, year or custom date range.

It lets you enter reminders, such as direct debits and standing orders (see screenshot right), and can even import QIF files (which can be created from Money or Quicken).

It costs \$29.99 (about £22), though there's a free version that's limited to one

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

Handy hints and tips from your fellow readers

Email us your tips: letters@computeractive.co.uk



VIDEO CHAT

Change your name for calls in Zoom

After a few months of using Zoom (<https://zoom.us>), I've just realised that you can change your name for each call you're on. This can be useful for all the different personas you adopt for video calls. For example, I'm Gramps to my grandchildren, Dad to my children, and 'John at work' to my colleagues.

To do this, start a meeting in Zoom, then click Participants at the bottom. This opens the side panel on the right. Next, move your cursor over yourself, then click More, followed by Rename. You'll see a box where you can change your name (see screenshot above). You can prevent people renaming themselves in the Security settings.

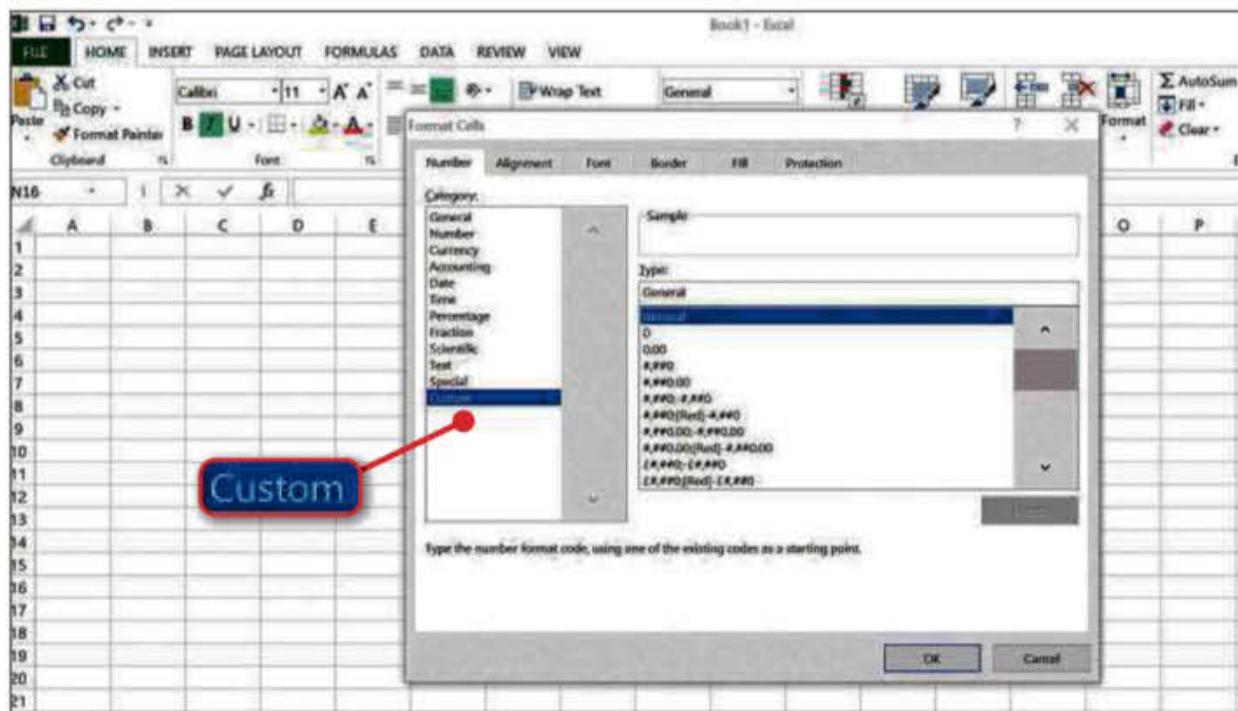
John Faith

OFFICE

Format sort codes in Microsoft Excel

I read your answer to Harry Smith's question about formatting sort codes in LibreOffice Calc (Issue 586, page 64), and that made me remember that you can do the same as you describe in Microsoft Excel. The steps are only slightly different.

First, select the range of cells you want to apply the format to, then either click



Reader recommends...

iBoost Pro D8 Directional Wi-Fi System

£159.99 from www.motorhomewifi.com

I was interested in Issue 585's article 'Take your Wi-Fi on holiday' (pages 62-63) because we've been doing that for years. As we normally spend a number of months each year touring Europe in a campervan, we've always been keen to get Wi-Fi whenever possible, and many campsites provide it (even in Albania).

Undoubtedly, the best Wi-Fi extender we've used was from Motorhome Wifi (www.motorhomewifi.com). I'm currently using their directional iBoost system, which when connected provides a password-protected hotspot



in and around your van. The entire kit can be provided in a small box that's easy to stow – an important consideration in a campervan, especially when you consider how much wine we normally bring back!

When Wi-Fi isn't available, I use a mobile 4G hotspot from my phone. I've found Tesco Mobile (www.tescomobile.com) especially useful abroad because buying extra data bundles is easy and largely inexpensive.

Andy Newton

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

the Format dropdown arrow in the Cells box or press Ctrl+1. Now click Custom at the bottom of the Category list (see screenshot below).

Scroll down to see if your format already exists. If not, click any entry in the list and then type the format as you described into the Type: field (ie, 00"-00"-00), then click OK.

Your new format will be applied to the cells you have highlighted previously. But what I don't know is how to make Excel remember this change when you open a new file – does anyone else know?

Fraser Drummond



SOFTWARE

Use ScanSpeeder to digitise photos quickly

I had hundreds of photos that I wanted to digitise. One problem was that when I laid them on my flatbed scanner they curled up, balancing on two corners, making it very difficult for me to align them. ScanSpeeder ([https://scansspeeder.com](https://scanspeeder.com), see screenshot above) saved me a lot of time.

The program, which costs \$29.95 (about £22) for up to five computers, makes it very easy to crop photos on a scanner. These are reproduced on the left of the screen, whatever angle they're at. With one click you can transfer them to the right side, where you can rotate them easily to the correct alignment. They are then enhanced and can be saved in a variety of formats up to 600dpi.

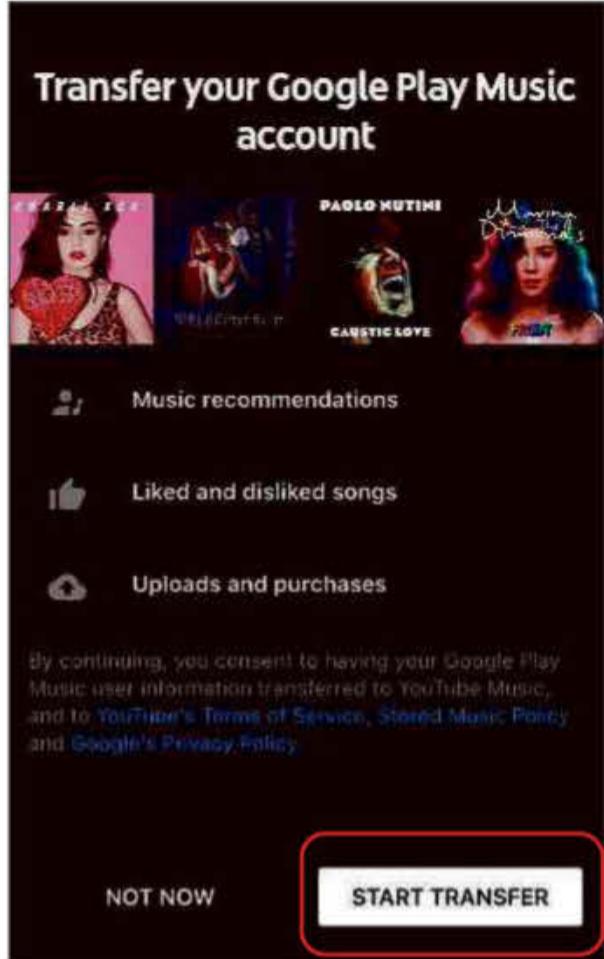
Alan Douglas

Phone and Tablet Tips

ANDROID & iOS

Export your Google Play Music tracks before it closes

 Google is shutting down its Play Music service at the end of the year. Streaming functions will stop working in New Zealand and South Africa in September, and the rest of the world in October. By the end of the year, all users' collections will be deleted. So, if you've bought music through the service, or uploaded any of your own tracks, you need to take action today to move them



to YouTube Music.

Thankfully, Google has made this process easy by adding the necessary transfer tools to the YouTube Music app (Android www.snipca.com/35674; iOS www.snipca.com/35673), which replaces Play Music.

Launch the YouTube Music app and sign in using the Google account you use for Play Music. It will suggest that you try YouTube Music Premium, starting with a one-month free trial (£11.99 a month thereafter). If you don't want this, tap the 'x' at the top of the screen. On the following screen, tap your account icon at the top right, followed by Settings, then 'Transfer from Google Play Music'. Tap 'Transfer from Google Play Music' again, followed by Start Transfer (see screenshot left) and Google will start the process, which can take up a few hours to complete. Once it's done that, your purchased and uploaded tracks and albums, playlists and listening tastes will all be available to you in the YouTube Music app.

ANDROID & iOS

Carry out a Google search by uploading an image

 Google's Reverse Image Search tool lets you upload an image, which the search engine then compares against images in its database, looking for a match. It's a great way to find out more about books by uploading images of their covers, or an artist, courtesy of a quick



snapshot of their work taken in a museum or from a magazine.

Doing this on a PC browser is fairly easy, but it's much harder on your phone – unless you use a dedicated app. We prefer the Google app for iOS (www.snipca.com/35689) or Google Lens for Android (www.snipca.com/35690). Open either and tap the lens icon (a square, broken into four, with a dot at the centre) and point your camera at the object you want to search for. Take a picture, and the app will upload it to the server.

As with a regular search, tap the results (see screenshot above) that best match your query to explore them further.

BEST NEW APPS

What you should install this fortnight

RainViewer*

Free

Android www.snipca.com/35692

If a picture really is worth a thousand words, this could be the app that proves it. Rather than listening to a forecast, watch



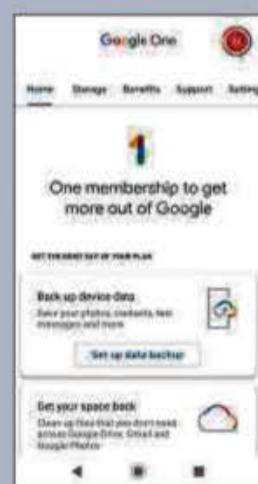
the weather coming your way and you can see a rain front approaching. The free edition lets you save 10 favourite locations and updates its data every 10 minutes, which should be enough to save you from a soaking.

Google One

Free

Android www.snipca.com/35691

Google has updated its Google One online-storage service to include free phone backup for all Android users and will



soon be releasing an updated version for iPhone users that offers backups for contacts, calendars and media. Previously, these features required a paid-for One account to work, but they're now available with free Google Accounts.

DontKillMyApp

Free

Android www.snipca.com/35693

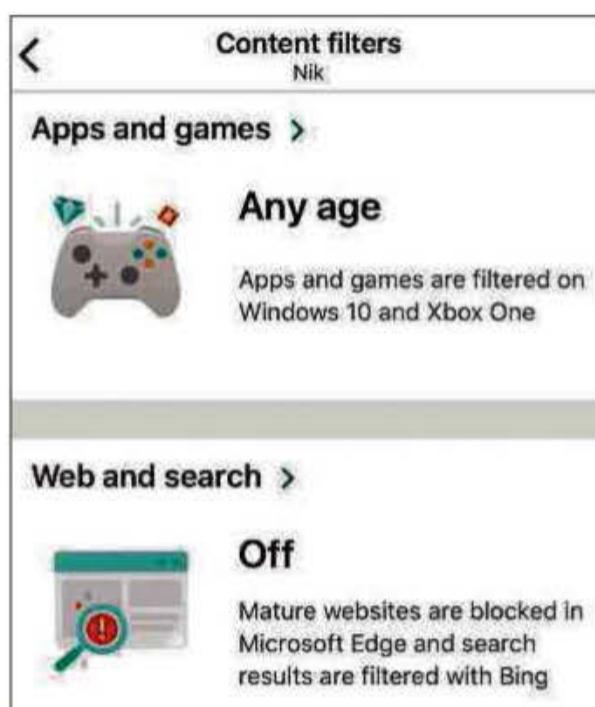
DontKillMyApp tests your Android phone to try and work out which processes the phone manufacturer has used to help



maximise your battery life. These processes can stop apps working to their full capacity or at all. DontKillMyApp will provide you with the info you need to minimise the effect of these processes, helping new apps work properly.

*Contains in-app purchases

Brilliant things to do on your device



ANDROID & iOS

Use Windows 10's Family Safety features on your phone

 Microsoft's Family Safety tool lets older family members monitor what younger ones are doing on their Windows 10 PCs. The same tool has now been rolled out to iOS (www.snipca.com/35681) and Android (www.snipca.com/35679), allowing parents and grandparents to block websites and impose curfews on children's phones.

Setting it up is simple: sign in with an existing Microsoft account, then create new accounts for other family members (or, if they already have a Microsoft account, add them). Make sure activity monitoring is enabled in the children's accounts by logging into their account through a regular browser at www.snipca.com/35678 and clicking the switch to the right of 'Activity reporting and history'.

Now return to the app on your phone and tap 'Turn on activity reporting' to control which apps and games they have access to (rated by age), to filter their web searches and to receive updates on their online activity (see screenshot above).

iOS

Save battery by shutting down background processes

 If your battery is draining quicker than it used to, and you'd rather not pay for a replacement (or you're putting off upgrading your phone until the next generation is released), shutting down background processes can help. Apps on your iPhone frequently check in with the servers to which they're connected for updates to their data. For example, weather apps will download

updated forecasts, calendars will refresh your appointments, and games will check whether it's your turn to take a move.

All of this background activity keeps your phone ticking over when you may assume it's sleeping, but it does reduce your battery life. Turning these off – or reducing the number that are authorised to refresh their data in the background – is therefore a good idea.

Open 'Settings' and tap General followed by Background App Refresh. Use



the sliders beside each app (see screenshot left) to turn them off and on individually or, if you prefer to disable background updates entirely, tap Background App Refresh again, followed by Off.

Naturally, disabling background processes for an app means that the next time you launch it, the app may take a few seconds to update. But, if it puts off your next upgrade or repair, it could be a genuine money saver.

BEST APPS FOR...

Torch apps

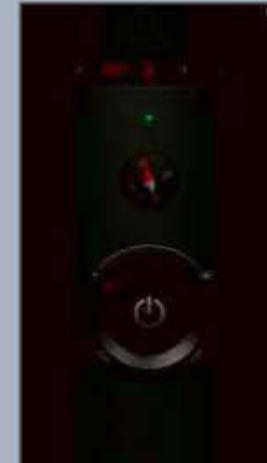
Torch O

Free

iOS www.snipca.com/35685

This is more than just a torch. It's also a strobe on which you can change the speed of the flashing. It also has variable brightness control and a compass that helps you find your way in the dark when using the torch. You can even type in a message and it will flash it out using Morse code.

Best For Morse code messages



Best Flash Light*

Free

iOS www.snipca.com/35688

Best Flash Light overcomes one of the most common problems with any phone-based torch: ie, you can't find your phone in the dark. This app gets around that problem by turning on the light when it hears you clap your hand. Ingenious and effective as long as it's running.

Best For Touch-free light generation



High-Powered Torch

Free

Android www.snipca.com/35686

Similar to Torch O above, this app has a built-in strobe with variable timing, SOS signalling and a map (rather than a compass) for navigation in the dark. The interface is simple: just tap for on and off, and use the on-screen rotation dial, like the zoom on a pro camera, to speed up or slow down the strobe.

Best For Strobe lighting



*Contains in-app purchases

WINDOWS 10

See when Windows last rebooted



With the Windows 10 Fall Creators Update, released in 2017, Microsoft changed how the operating system behaves after a reboot. So you can just pick up where you left off, Windows 10 remembers all the programs you were using, and reopens them when it restarts. This is great, but it's not always obvious when your PC has rebooted as the result of a forced update, crash or malware infection. You can check when the last reboot occurred using the Command Prompt. Type **CMD** into the Windows search box, and hit enter. In the Command Prompt window type **wmic os get lastbootuptime** (see screenshot below) and enter it. This will return a number – such as 20200831094118 – which breaks down into the year, month, date and time – 2020-08-31 (date) 09-41-18 (time) – of the last reboot.

```
Administrator: Command Prompt
C:\WINDOWS\system32>wmic os get lastbootuptime
LastBootUpTime
20200831094118.873317+000
C:\>wmic os get lastbootuptime
```

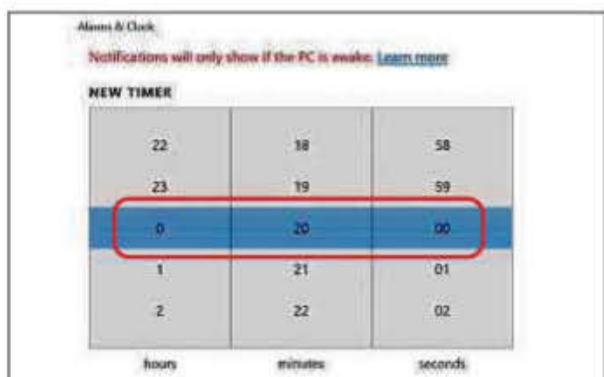
WINDOWS 10

Create timers for different uses



It's easy to lose track of time on your computer. Windows comes with a clock in the bottom corner, but if you're engrossed in reading or watching something on the web, or responding to emails, you probably never glance at this. Windows 10's Alarms & Clock app lets you set useful timers, and name them, so you know what they are when they go off. This can be helpful for when you need a countdown, like 20 minutes for a meal in the oven.

To create a new timer, type **alarm** into the Windows search box and hit enter. Click the Timer tab, then click the plus sign at the bottom. Set the timer duration (see screenshot below), and click the



WINDOWS 10

See text easier with the Magnifier



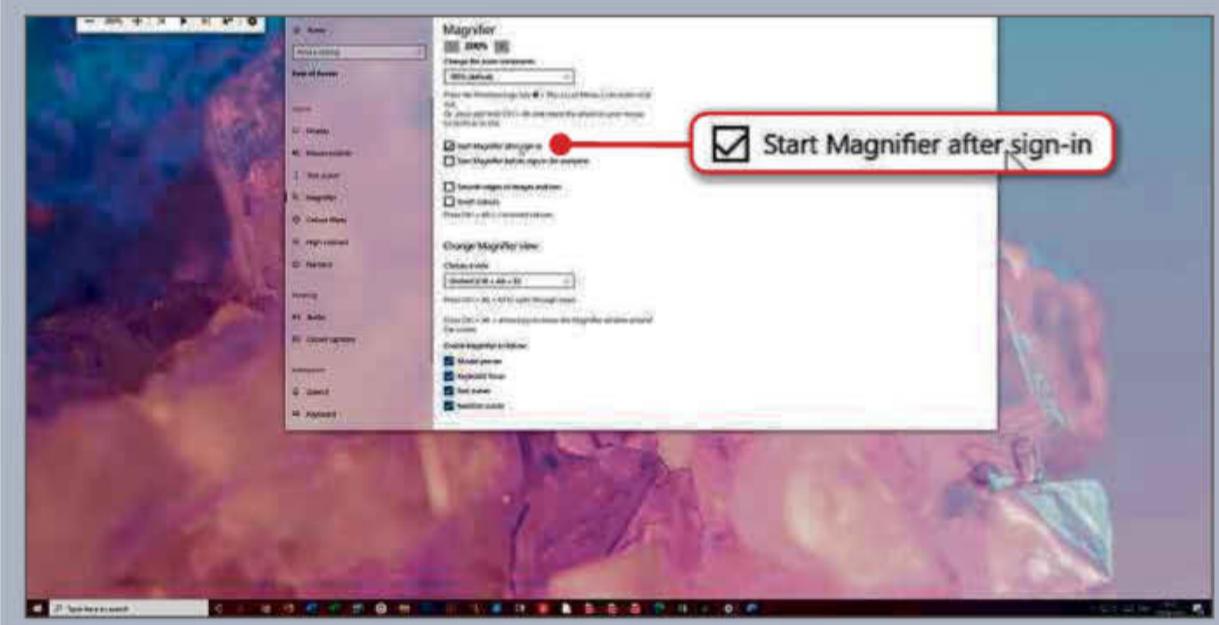
You can adjust the size of any text in your browser or word processor by holding down Ctrl and spinning your mouse wheel, but if you want to only enlarge a certain area of text – like tiny terms and conditions, or error messages – then you need the Magnifier app. The quickest way to launch this is to type **Magnifier** into the Windows search box and hit enter.

The app offers a choice of settings. Go to Settings, Ease of Access and click Magnifier on the left. If the feature isn't already enabled, you can switch it on here and adjust the zoom level to suit your eyesight. The Win+Plus (+) and

Win+Esc shortcuts switch the feature on and off respectively.

The settings screen also lets you have Magnifier start automatically after sign-in (see screenshot below) and offers a choice of three views that you can cycle between with shortcuts – 'Full screen', Lens (acts like a real-world magnifying glass and enlarges what's below the cursor) and Docked. This last option places a fixed bar at the top of the screen and shows you what's below your mouse pointer.

You can also make use of a modifier key (Ctrl+Alt by default) to have Magnifier read out text on the screen.



name field below and give it a name. Click the Play button at the very bottom to start the timer. You can pause and restart the countdown from the Timer screen.

WINDOWS 7, 8.1 & 10

Lock your system after automatically signing in



Windows 10 requires a password or PIN when it starts up, but you can skip this. Doing so is a bit of a security risk, but what you can do is have the operating system sign you in automatically as it would normally and then lock the PC immediately afterwards, requiring you to enter a password to start using it. The benefit to this approach is Windows 10 (and any programs that start when it boots) will load before asking you for the password, so when you enter it you'll be straight in and won't need to wait while other components load in the



background. To do this, press Win+R and in the Run box enter **shell:startup**. The Startup folder will open. Right-click inside this and select New, Shortcut. In the Create Shortcut location box, enter **rundll32.exe user32.dll, LockWorkStation** and click Next (see screenshot above). Give the shortcut a name, like 'Lock PC', and click Finish. If you change your mind, opening the Startup folder and deleting the shortcut will stop your PC locking automatically. Although we've used this trick on Windows 10, it will work fine on older versions of the OS.

MICROSOFT WORD

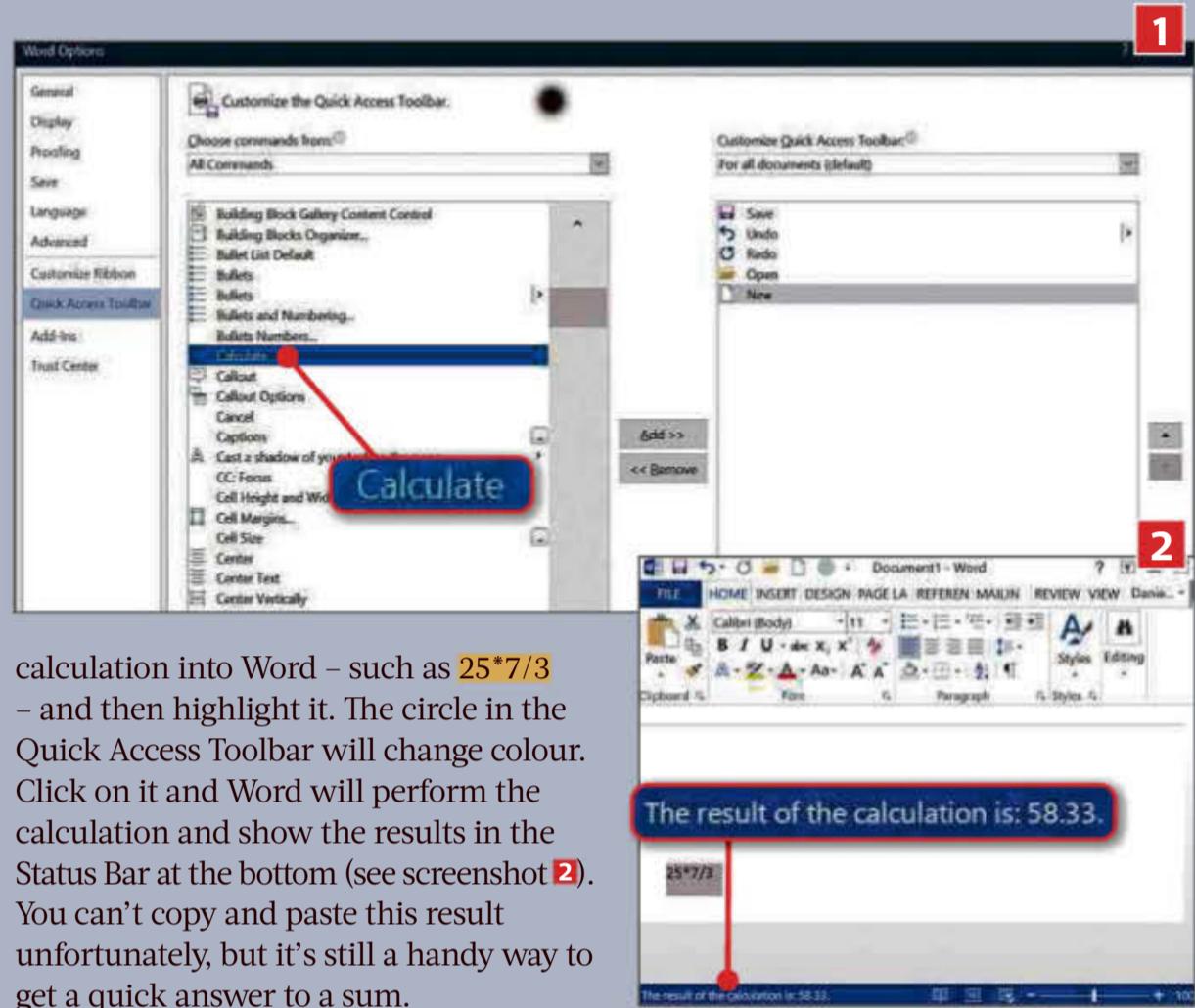
Add a calculator to Word

 When you need to work out some figures to add to a Microsoft Word document, you probably fire up the Calculator app or maybe use Excel. You don't need to do either, however, as Word has a built-in calculator that you can add to the Quick Access bar at the top of the screen.

Click File and select Options at the bottom left. The 'Word Options' box will open. Click on 'Quick Access Toolbar' on the left and select All Commands in the 'Choose commands from' dropdown menu. Scroll down the list of commands until you get to Calculate (you can save some time here by clicking in the box and hitting C on the keyboard).

Select 'Calculate' (see screenshot 1) and click the Add button, then click OK. A small light grey circle will be added to the Quick Access Toolbar and you'll be returned to your document.

Now, all you have to do is type a

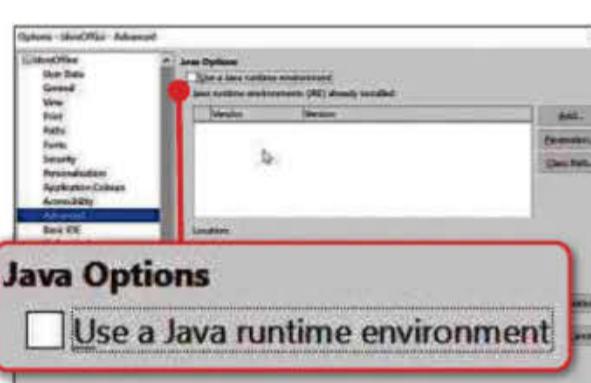
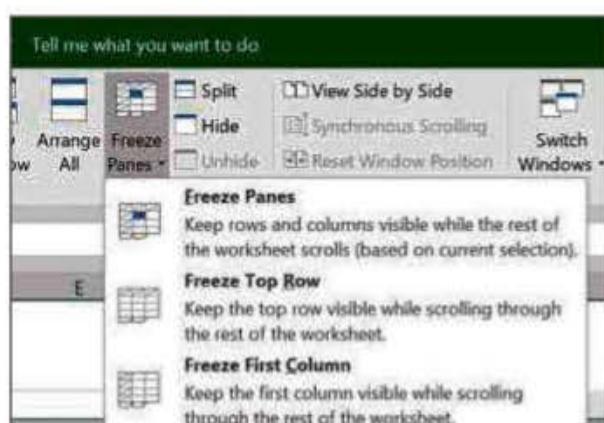


MICROSOFT EXCEL

Freeze panes and columns

 If you have a long spreadsheet with various headings, it can be easy to forget what each column is for as you scroll down. Excel gives you the option to 'freeze' elements of your spreadsheet, keeping them visible at all times. Activate the cell where you want to freeze the window, and then click the View tab.

On the ribbon you'll see a Freeze Panes button in the Window group. Click this and you'll see three options. You can freeze the rows/columns above your current selection, freeze the top row, or freeze the first column (see screenshot below). Clicking the button again will let you unfreeze your selection.



LIBREOFFICE

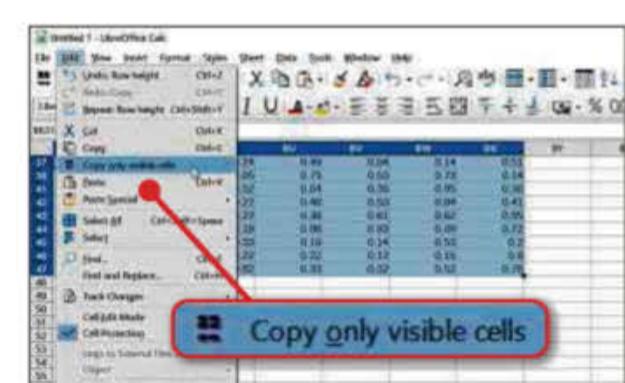
Make documents load faster by disabling Java

 In order to work, Base, LibreOffice's database, requires the Java Runtime Environment (JRE for short), a set of software tools used to run applications created using the Java programming language.

If you don't use Base, then disabling JRE can free up resources and deliver a welcome performance boost across the suite, making opening documents and spreadsheets that little bit quicker.

To disable this, go to Tools, select Options and click on Advanced on the left.

Untick 'Use a Java runtime environment' (see screenshot above), then click Apply followed by OK.



LIBREOFFICE CALC

Copy only visible cells

 LibreOffice's spreadsheet allows you to hide rows or columns by right-clicking on them and selecting that option from the context menu.

If you copy and paste the contents of a sheet, then Calc will show everything, including figures you've hidden.

To get around this, install the 'Copy only visible cells' add-on from www.snipca.com/35780 and then restart Calc.

Select the range you want to copy, then go to Edit and select 'Copy only visible cells' (see screenshot above).

You can paste this copied content as usual, and when you do you will see it omits the hidden items.

In The Club



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

Set up automatic email responses

If you're responsible for replying to emails sent to your club, there might be times when your inbox fills up, making responding to messages in a timely manner a full-time job in itself.

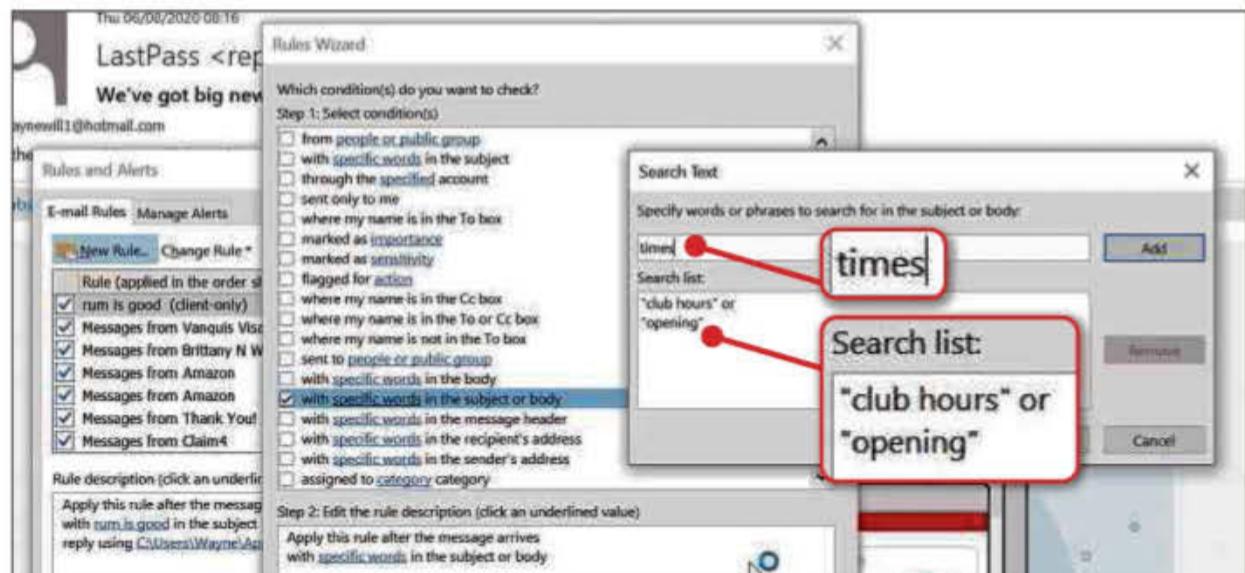
You can buy yourself some time by setting up an auto-response to let people know you've received their message. In Gmail, for example, click the top-right cog button followed by 'See all settings'. In the General tab, scroll down, then select the 'Out of Office AutoReply' feature. Next, set the start and end dates, enter a subject line and the text you want to reply with, then save the changes.

Once the auto-reply is active, whenever someone sends you a message they'll receive your response immediately. If they email you a second time, the system is smart enough to not send the same reply again.

Combine templates and filters

You can go much further than a basic auto-reply by using templates and filters, creating different responses for different queries. For example, if someone emails you wanting to know when a club event is on, you can set Gmail to respond with the date and time. If they email you about something else, like club payment details, they'll receive a different message.

To set this up in Gmail, go to Settings (cog icon) and click the Advanced tab at the top. Enable 'Templates' (see screenshot



Enter keywords that Outlook should look for to trigger an automatic reply

below), then scroll down and click Save Changes. Gmail will reload. Next, click the Compose button to create your first response. Choose a subject heading that thanks them for their message, and then write the body text, answering any questions that people are likely to ask.

When you've finished, click the three dots at the bottom right and go to Templates. Next, select 'Save draft as template' and choose 'Save as new template' then give it a name. Finally, click 'Save'. You can send this manually to anyone. To load it into a new message, or a reply, click the three dots, go to Templates, and select it there.

To set this up as an auto-reply, open Settings, then click 'Filters and blocked addresses' at the top. Scroll down and look for the small, blue 'Create a new

filter' link. Click this, then fill in what Gmail should look for in a message, such as a specific subject line, or some keywords in the body text.

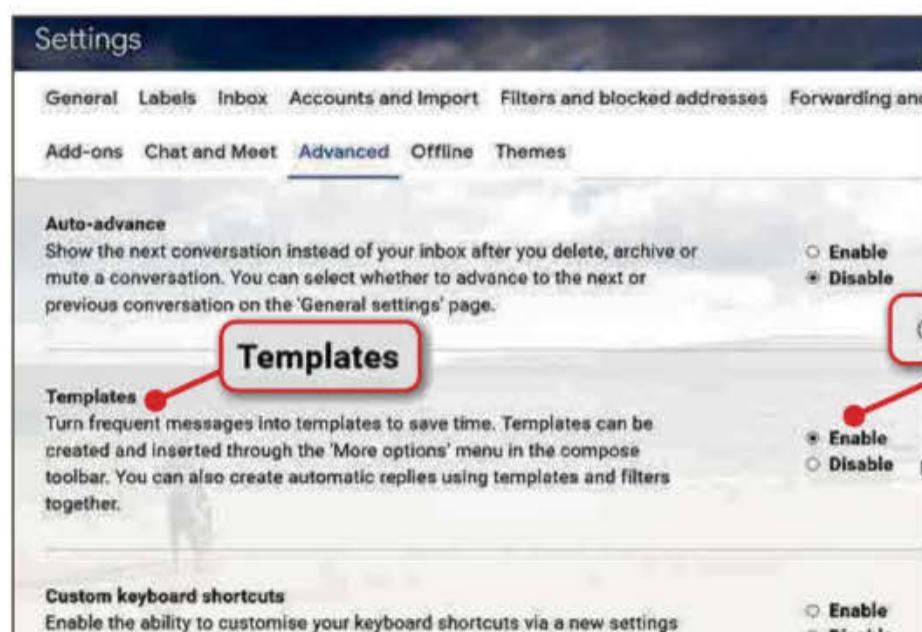
Click 'Create filter'. In the next window, tick 'Send template' and use the dropdown menu to choose the template you want. Finally click the blue 'Create filter' button at the bottom right. The auto-reply is now enabled. Test it by sending a message to yourself.

Use Outlook's Rules Wizard

You can do the same thing in Outlook. Click 'New Email' at the top, and create your response. Next, go to File, Save As, then click the dropdown menu and save it as a template. Under 'Home' on the ribbon, click the Rules button and select 'Rules and Alerts'. Click 'New Rule' and the Rules Wizard will run.

Click 'Apply rule on messages I receive' under 'Start from a blank rule'. Click 'Next' then tick 'With specific words in the subject or body'. This rule will be added to the Rule Description box below. Click the 'specific words' link there. Here, type the words in the subject line or body text that will trigger the response - you can choose as many as you like. We used 'opening times' and 'club hours' in our example (see screenshot above).

Click 'Next', then choose to reply with a specific template (or message if you prefer). Click the link to select the template you want to use, then click Finish.



Make sure 'Enable' is selected in Gmail to use templates

What's All the Fuss About...

700MHz

Oi, TV signals, make way for 5G...



What is it?

It's part of the radio spectrum that until very recently was used by digital terrestrial TV channels (Freeview).

Where have those channels gone?

Most have been shifted into the 600MHz band, to make way for the technology that everyone seems convinced will create the kind of hi-tech future we crave.

Let me guess. 5G?

Correct. 700MHz frequencies are low enough to cover large areas and penetrate buildings effectively, making them ideal for mobile signals. Telecoms regulator Ofcom says it had to make the switch because the amount of mobile data we use is set to soar over the next decade. In 2010, we consumed on average 500MB of data every month, enough to browse the web for about six hours. Some experts predict that'll rise to 98GB by 2025, which will keep you online for 1,200 hours (50 days!).

So what did Ofcom have to do?

Fiddle with a lot of TV masts.

Is 'fiddle with' a technical term?

Yes, it's the sort of sophisticated jargon only highly skilled engineers would understand. To be more specific, Ofcom had to change frequencies transmitted by TV masts so they wouldn't interfere with those in neighbouring areas, and also negotiate with other countries to make sure it didn't affect their spectrum. To illustrate the completion of its work, Ofcom used this rather gloomy photo of

The biggest Ofcom project you've probably never heard of



Saddleworth Tower (right), near Oldham, which serves the north-west of England. More exciting is the video it posted online of a helicopter lifting a new antenna in place (visit www.snipca.com/35789 then scroll to the bottom).

Will the changes affect my TV signal?

They should already have done. Every time a mast changed frequency, thousands of Freeview viewers living within range had to retune their TV, being notified with a message appearing on their set. Ofcom says this should have been a "simple and quick" process using your remote control, though we're not sure any task on modern remotes deserves to be called simple and quick.

Did it all go as planned?

There were inevitably some problems, with many viewers complaining on social media that they had lost dozens of channels. Clearly, the message about retuning didn't reach everyone. This



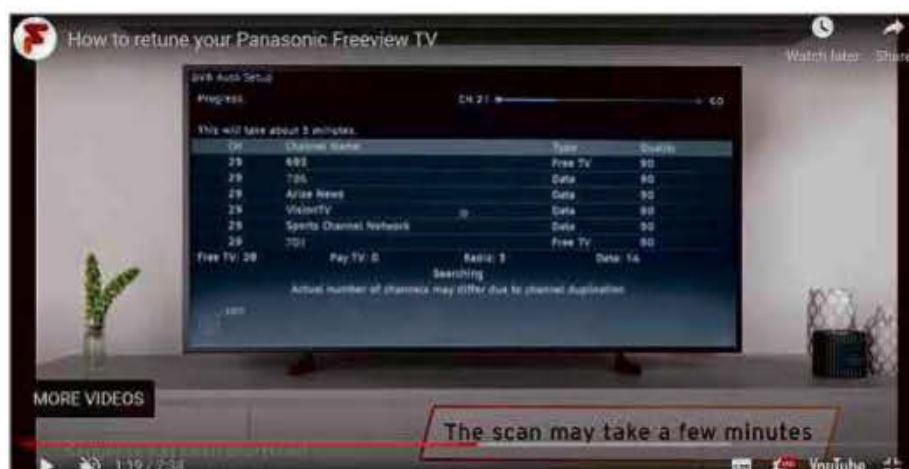
would've irked Ofcom, which was keen to carry out the work with the minimum of fuss: "The fewer people who noticed that the project ever happened, the happier we are". Indeed, the regulator describes it as "the biggest Ofcom project you've probably never heard of".

Was there help for viewers?

Yes, Freeview provided both a helpline (0808 100 0288), and retune videos for different makes of TV (LG, Panasonic etc): www.freeview.co.uk/help/retune. Ofcom says that in "a very small number of cases" viewers had to replace their aerials. Overall though the switchover went smoothly, helped by Ofcom staggering the work to avoid events like sporting fixtures. This is partly why it took so long – about three years. But there's still another important step before we can all enjoy 5G.

What's that?

Auctioning the 700MHz spectrum to interested networks. It's already been delayed due to legal action and the coronavirus pandemic, but bidding should start in January. EE, O2, Three and Vodafone will be dusting off their cheque books as we speak.



Freeview provided 'how to retune' videos during the 700MHz switchover

What You Must Change In Your WINDOWS FOLDERS

You access them every day, but are you using your folders to their full potential? **Will Stapley** delves deep into File Explorer and other Windows tools to reveal how experts customise their folders to make them easier and more powerful. It'll transform how you use your computer



Whether to organise photos, store documents or install programs, we use folders all the time. But often we

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Reveal hidden columns in File Explorer
- Share folders and map them as virtual drives
- Create your own folder icons from your photos
- Add a tagging feature to File Explorer

just carelessly stuff them with files, much like we cram paper into real folders and leave them to gather dust on shelves. There must be a better way to do things.

The good news is Windows 10 has some very clever tools to manage folders. What's not so good is that, in true Microsoft fashion, they're spread over different menus. And even when you do find them, awkward terminology means it's often difficult to understand what they do.

As always, we're here to simplify things. Over the next few pages, we'll show you the hidden tools buried deep within Windows that will really make a difference to how you view folders. Along

with making your folders easier to find and use, you'll also discover how to share specific folders with other users and computers on your home network – then revoke access if needed.

Although Microsoft has added new features and given it a fresh look, File Explorer is still missing some key features, such as tabs to let you view multiple folders within the same window. If you're fed up waiting for Microsoft to add these tools, it's time to do something about it. In the last section of the feature, we recommend amazing free alternatives to File Explorer, along with clever tools to personalise your folders and more.

MASTER WINDOWS' HIDDEN FOLDER SETTINGS

Take control of folder layouts

How often have you opened File Explorer, only to find the icons are either too small, too big or just don't have all the additional information you need? It's time to do something about it. Over the next few tips, we'll show you how to finally take control of File Explorer, starting with the icon size and layout.

When you're browsing a folder that's home to lots of files and sub-folders, you'll probably want to view as many icons as possible without having to scroll. Conversely, in folders with few items, you can afford to view them as large icons, making it easier to see what each one is. File Explorer (which you can open using the Windows key+E shortcut) offers six layouts – see screenshot below – and you can switch between them by clicking the View tab, then selecting from the options in the Layout section.

The first four layouts ('Extra large icons' through to 'Small icons') simply show the folder icon, with the folder name underneath. The List layout is the same as 'Small icons', except that it scrolls horizontally instead of vertically, while Details displays extra information for each file, such as its size, type and date modified (useful when you want to order a folder's contents by their size, type or any other attribute).

The final two layouts, Tiles and Content, display the date each file was

modified and their size, along with additional information depending on the files within your folder (more on this in a moment). The Tiles view uses small icons, while those for Content are slightly larger and separated by a horizontal line.

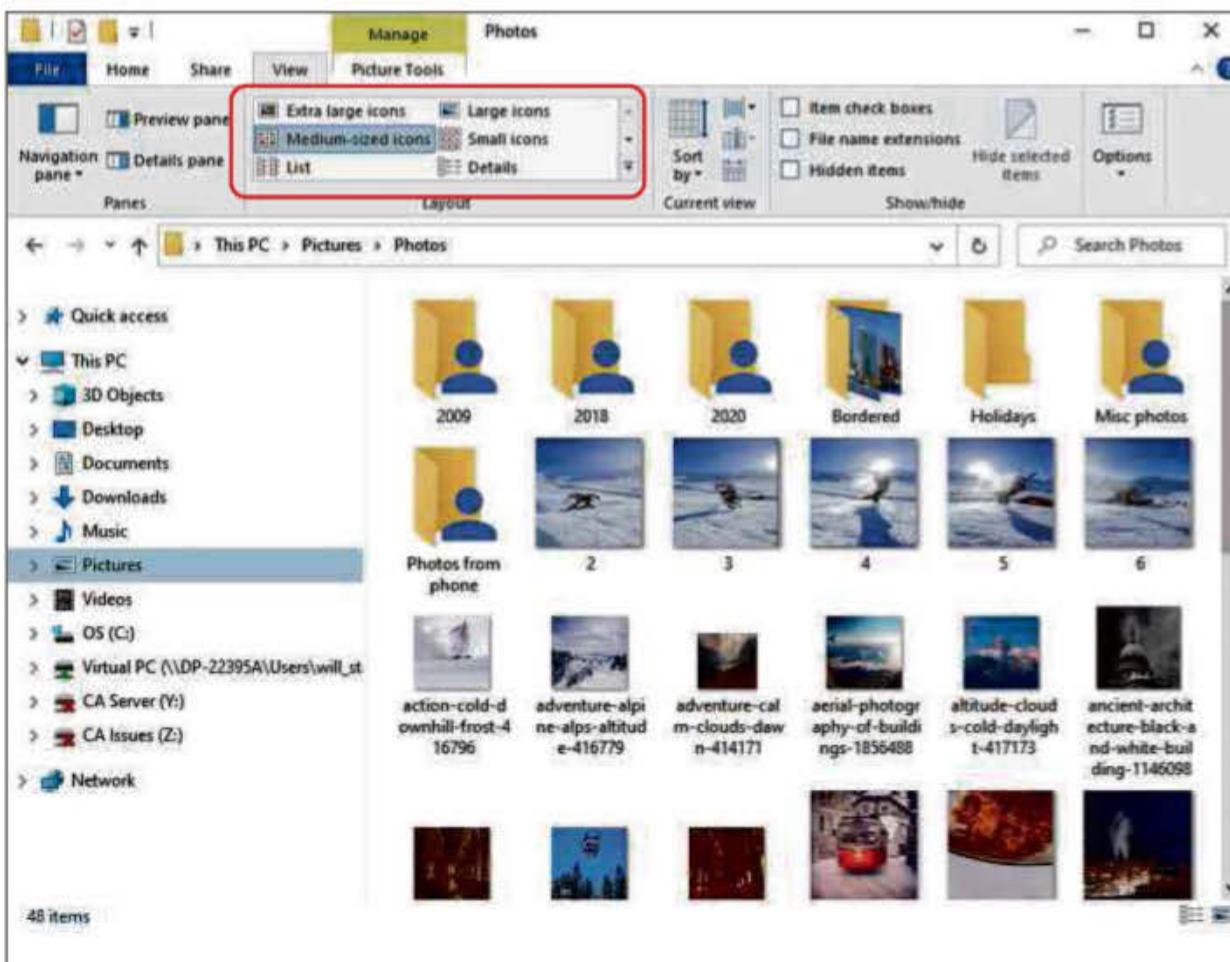
For more precise control, hold the Ctrl key while scrolling with your mouse wheel. As you do this, the size of the icons will gradually increase or decrease, depending which way you scroll the wheel. You can also use keyboard shortcuts to switch between layouts (see box on page 53 for more).

File Explorer will remember the view you set for each folder, even if you restart your PC.

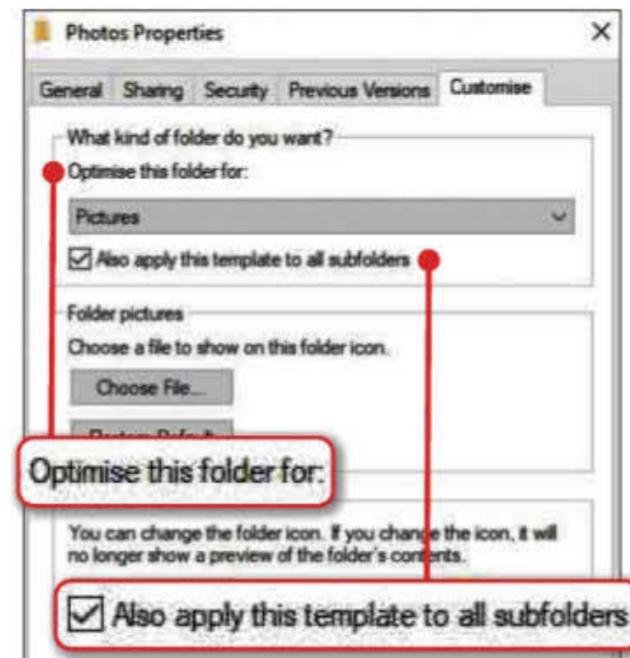
Choose (and change) folder types

File Explorer sets each of your folders to one of six types: Documents, Pictures, Music, Videos, Photos and 'General items'. Among other things, this determines the columns that appear when you view the folder in the Details layout. Those with music files will have Album and Track columns, while folders with videos will display a Length column, indicating how long each clip is.

Although File Explorer usually does a reasonable job of setting the most appropriate type based on the files within a folder, it doesn't always get it right – particularly in folders with a mix of files.



You can choose between six layouts in File Explorer



When setting a new folder type, you can set it to be applied to all subfolders too

If needed, you can take control and set the folder type yourself. Right-click the appropriate folder, select Properties, then select the Customise tab. You'll see the current folder type in the 'Optimise this folder for' box (see screenshot above) – click this to change the type. If your folder has subfolders and you want them to be set to the same type, tick 'Also apply this template to all subfolders' (see screenshot above), then click OK.

Add new columns to your folders

File Explorer is capable of displaying much more information than just a folder's files, size and dates.

To see more, first make sure you're using the Details view (as explained above), then right-click the column header – the bar just above the list of files with Name, 'Date modified', Type, etc. Click 'More...' and you'll see the complete list of available columns. Some are more useful than others, and they all rely on your files having the appropriate metadata (additional information stored within a file). For example, although you can add a column called Conductors, it's unlikely many of your classical MP3 files will have the name of the orchestra's conductor in their metadata, so this column will almost always be empty.

However, plenty of other details are useful. For folders containing photos, you could select columns such as 'Camera model' and 'Camera maker' to help you identify which camera was used to take each photo (see screenshot, top of page 52). Just tick the ones you want to use, then click OK and they'll be added to the

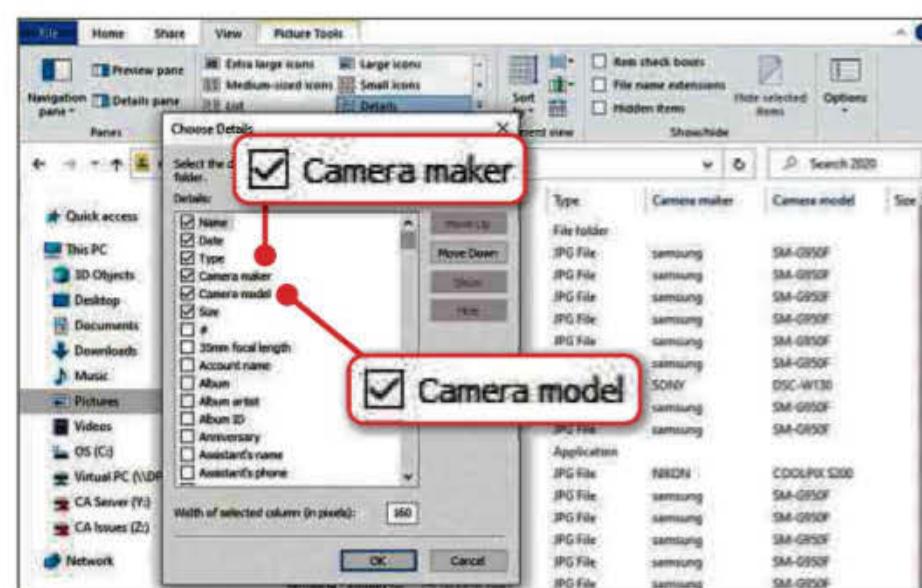
column header bar. You can then drag the columns left and right to adjust their position. If some of the columns get cut off, right-click the header bar and select ‘Size All Columns to Fit’.

As with altering a folder’s layout, any changes you make will be saved for that specific folder. However, you can also apply them to similar folders based on their folder type. To do this, select a folder that’s set to the type you want to change (such as Pictures), then adjust the layout and column headers. Next, open the Folder Options window by selecting the View menu, then clicking the Options button at the far-right of the toolbar. In the window that appears, select the View tab, then click ‘Apply to Folders’. Now, all folders set to the folder type you selected will display the same columns and layout as the folder you’ve currently got open.

If you want to get everything back to normal, just click Reset Folders.

Hide annoying pop-ups

Hover your mouse over a folder and a pop-up window will appear, displaying the date the folder was created, its total size and the names of files and folders within it. Although sometimes useful, more often than not it’s just an annoyance, particularly when it obscures other folders in the view. You can reduce the size of the pop-up window so that it just shows the date the folder was created. First, open File Explorer, then select the View tab, followed by Options at the far-right of the toolbar. Click the View tab within the Folder Options window, then scroll down and untick the ‘Display the file size information in folder tips’ box. Alternatively, if you’d rather be rid of folder pop-ups completely, scroll a



Adding extra columns to a folder lets you see detailed information about the files in it – such as which camera took a photo

little further down and untick the ‘Show pop-up description for folder and desktop items’ option (see screenshot below left). To save your changes, click OK.

Reveal hidden folders

Windows knows best, right? Well, not always. In fact, when you’ve spent hours trying to find a specific folder only to discover Windows has unhelpfully hidden it from view, it can be infuriating.

In fairness to Windows, it hides these folders because deleting them or changing their contents can cause problems with your PC (many programs store their data files in hidden folders and will stop working if you delete or move files in them). However, sometimes you do need to access these folders, such as when you want to copy an Outlook mail file from one computer to another (these are stored in the hidden AppData folder).

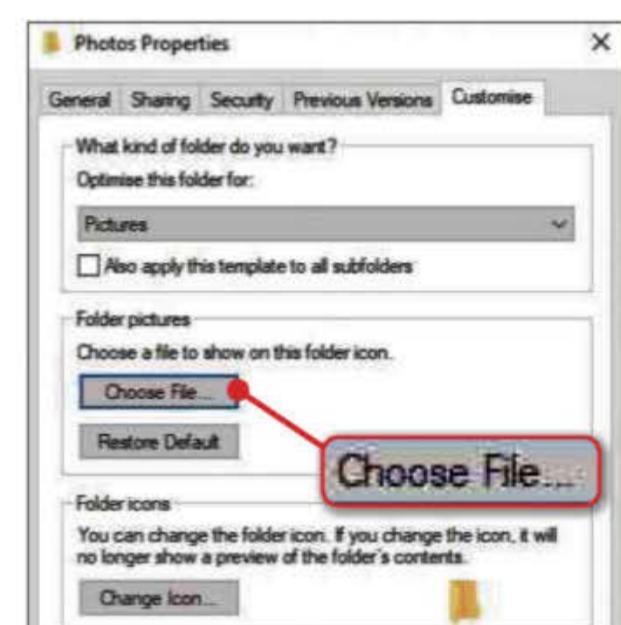
To reveal all hidden folders (and files), open File Explorer, click the View menu, then tick the ‘Hidden items’ box (see 1 below). You’ll be able to spot these hidden folders and files as their icons will be slightly faded 2. To hide them, simply remove the tick from the box.

Set your own folder previews

The majority of folders in Windows use the familiar yellow folder icon – it’s been



Tick the ‘Hidden items’ box 1 and hidden folders will be shown with faded icons 2



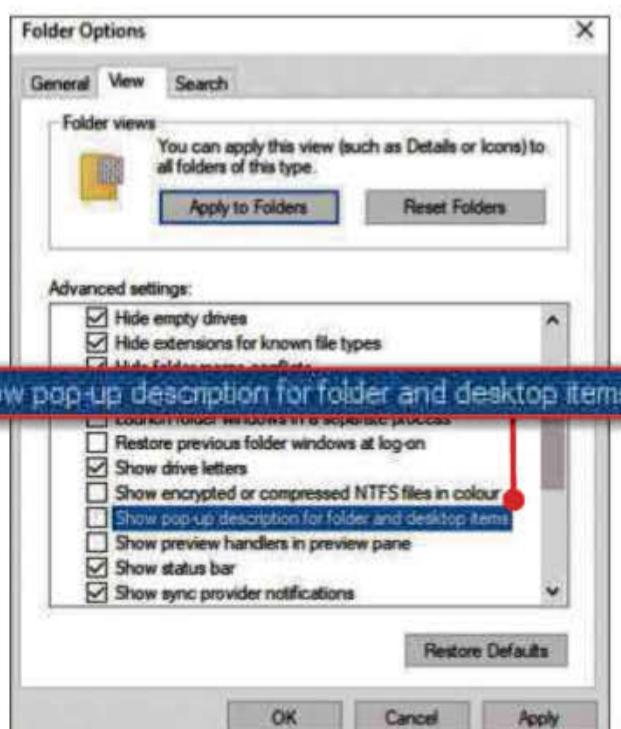
Make your folders easier to spot by choosing photos for their thumbnails

with us in various forms since Windows 95. To help differentiate these folders, Windows 10 adds small thumbnails of one or more files within the folder (such as a photo). If you’re not happy with the files Windows has chosen to use as thumbnails, you can select your own.

First, right-click the folder you want to change, select Properties, then the Customise tab. Go to the ‘Folder pictures’ section in the middle, then select ‘Choose File...’ (see screenshot above). You’ll now see all the files in your folder. Double-click one you want to use, then click OK. The folder in File Explorer will update to show a thumbnail of the file you selected. If you want to reverse your change, repeat the process but this time click Restore Default in the ‘Folder pictures’ section.

Change your folder icons

If you really want to stamp your mark on folders in Windows, you can select different icons for each folder. As before, right-click the folder you want to change, then select Properties followed by the Customise tab. In the ‘Folder icons’ section at the bottom, click ‘Change Icon...’. You’ll now see a selection of Windows folder icons. To apply a new



Untick this box to stop pop-up windows that appear when you hover over a folder



When downloading icons from sites like Icon Archive, make sure you select the ICO file

icon, double-click the one you want, then click OK. Although there are lots of icons to choose from, most are fairly dated (look carefully and you'll spot some classic icons that include old CRT monitors, floppy disks and other hardware from yesteryear).

If you want something a bit more modern, why not download some new icons? You just need to make sure they're in the ICO format (in other words, files ending '.ico'). There are plenty of free resources, such as www.iconarchive.com. Search for something like windows folders, then click the ICO link to download your chosen icon (see screenshot above).

Move your downloaded icons from your Downloads folder to elsewhere on your PC (we created a new C:\Icons folder for ours). This ensures you won't lose them if you clear out your Downloads folder. Now return to the icon selection window in File Explorer, click Browse, then go to the folder where you saved the icon and select it. Click OK, and your folder will display its shiny new icon.

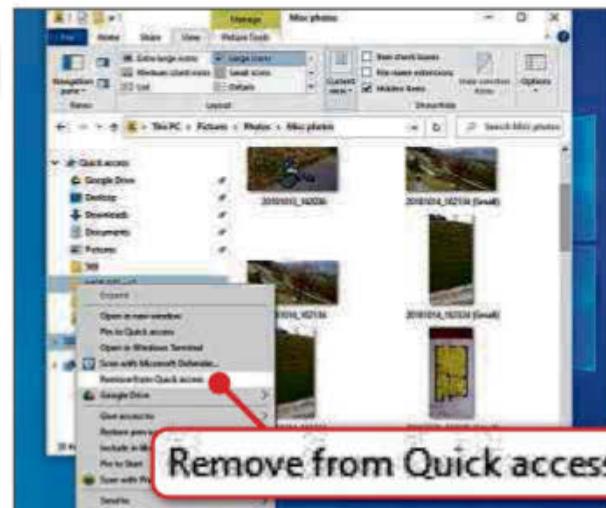
If you want to personalise your folder further, head to page 57, where we explain how to create icons from your own photos.

Customise 'Quick access' folders

Windows 10 introduced a 'Quick access' section to File Explorer, which sits at the top of the Navigation pane on the left side and provides shortcuts to your most-used folders.

If you can't see it, make sure the Navigation pane is displayed by selecting the View menu, clicking 'Navigation pane', then ticking the box next to the 'Navigation pane' option.

Open the 'Quick access' section to see what folders are currently in it. If there's one you'd rather not be displayed, right-click it, then select 'Remove from Quick access'.



You can remove an item from the 'Quick access' menu by right-clicking it

Alternatively, for those you *always* want to see, right-click and select 'Pin to Quick access' (if you later want to remove one, right-click and select 'Remove from Quick access', see screenshot above).

Although you can't disable it completely, you can clear the 'Quick access' section and stop files and folders being added to it in future.

Open the Folder Options window and, in the General tab, untick the 'Show recently used files...' and 'Show frequently used folders...' boxes. To remove all existing items from the 'Quick access' section, click Clear. Don't worry, this won't delete these folders from your hard drive – it just removes them from the 'Quick access' menu.

Control how your folders open

When you double-click a folder in File Explorer, it will open within the same window. Hold Ctrl while double-clicking, and it'll open in a new window.

Having multiple File Explorer windows open at the same time is particularly useful when you need to move or copy lots of files from one folder to another as you won't need to keep moving back and forth between them. Instead, you'll have both folders open simultaneously and can just drag and drop the files.

If you find yourself holding Ctrl more often than not, you can change the default behaviour so that double-clicking opens folders in a new window. Select the View tab in the Folder Options window then in the 'Browse folders' section select 'Open each folder in its own window' (see screenshot above right).

Once you've selected this, you can still go back to the old method of opening folders in the same window – just hold Ctrl while opening them. And if you try to open a folder that's already open in another window, File Explorer won't open it a second time – it'll just switch to the window that's already open.

10 of the best File Explorer shortcuts

Ctrl+Shift+N Create a new folder

F2: Edit folder name

Alt+Left/Right arrow keys Move back and forward between folders

Alt+Enter Open a selected folder's Properties window

Alt+D Move the cursor to the address bar (type **cmd** here to open Command Prompt at that folder)

Alt+P Open the Preview pane

Ctrl+Alt+1-6 Switch between folder views

Shift+Delete Permanently delete a file or folder (bypasses recycle bin)

F11 Open full-screen File Explorer view

Ctrl+W Close the current File Explorer window

 Have you got a handy File Explorer shortcut to share with your fellow readers? Let us know at letters@computeractive.co.uk



Select this option if you want folders to open in their own window

Reopen folders with Windows

Whether to install an important update or to finish the installation of a new program, restarting your PC is a pain – even more so because you'll need to reopen all programs and windows when Windows reloads.

Save yourself a little bit of this hassle by setting your folders to reopen for you. Head back to the Folder Options window and select the View tab. Scroll halfway down the list and tick 'Restore previous folder windows at log-on'.

Windows will now remember all open folder windows when you shut down, and will then reopen them the next time you turn your computer on.

READER OFFER!



Buy **Windows 10 Pro** for just £39.99

In this new Reader Offer, we're selling **Windows 10 Pro** for just £39.99 (1-PC, unlimited lifetime licence)!

That's just £10 more than Windows 10 Home, and is an 82% reduction on Microsoft's full price of £219.99.

To buy **Windows 10 Pro**, visit www.snipca.com/34720 and click the red Buy Now button on the right. If you have any questions about your purchase, please email Daniel Booth, Editor of Computeractive. You can reach him directly at editor@computeractive.co.uk.



ONLY 68 CODES LEFT!

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

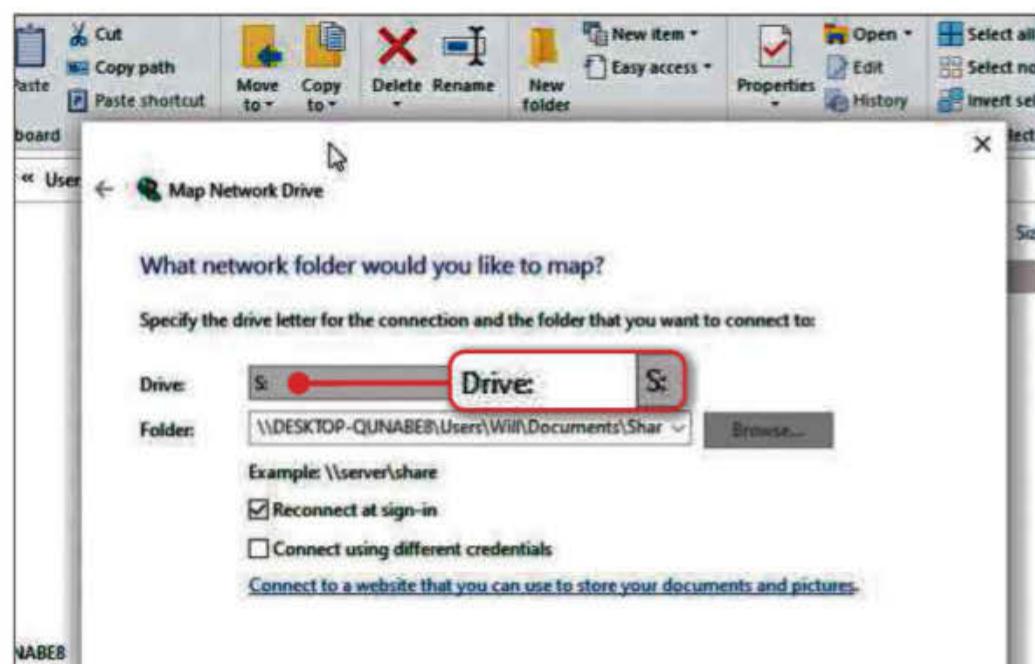
We have a limited number of **Windows 10 Pro** codes for this offer, but we should have enough to satisfy the high demand we anticipate from readers.

SHARE FOLDERS OVER YOUR NETWORK

If you've got multiple computers at home, you'll probably want to share folders across them from time to time. Save yourself the hassle of copying folders to a USB stick or emailing them to yourself and instead use Windows' built-in network-sharing tools. Even if you've only got one computer, you can share entire folders between user accounts, letting people in your house store shared documents, photos and more in the same folder. Follow our Mini Workshop below to find out how.

Map a folder as a drive letter

Once you've shared some folders, you can make them easier to access by mapping them to virtual drives. That might sound complicated, but it's actually easy. The shared folder will be given a drive letter, meaning you'll see it listed alongside your hard drive, USB stick and any other storage device attached to your PC. Double-clicking your virtual drive will open the folder in File Explorer, but you can also use its drive letter when saving documents and other files – instead of having to navigate to the shared folder, you can just type **s:** (changing the 's' to



You can map any shared folder as a virtual drive on your PC

the drive letter you've assigned your shared folder).

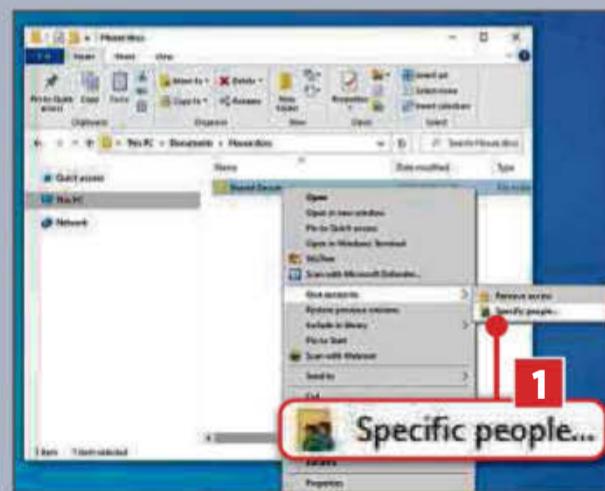
To create your virtual drive, open File Explorer, navigate to the shared folder, then select it. Next, click the Home menu at the top of the File Explorer window, then go to the New section and click 'Easy access' (if you can't see this, try making the File Explorer window bigger), followed by 'Map as drive'. The Map Network Drive window will now appear. In the Drive section, choose which drive

letter you'd like to use for your folder – we chose S: (see screenshot above). Because you had the folder selected before clicking the 'Map as drive' button, the Folder section will be pre-filled with your shared folder's address. Click Finish to create the virtual drive. Now click This PC within File Explorer, where you'll see your shared folder listed as a drive.

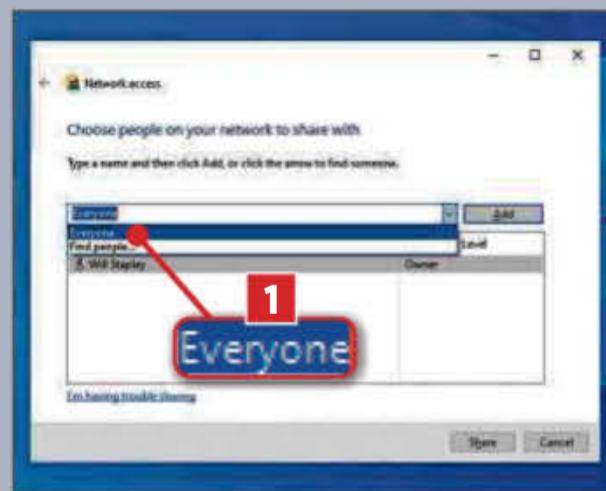
As with all shared folders, you'll need the PC on which the folder is stored to be turned on for other computers to access it.

WORKSHOP: Share a folder on your network

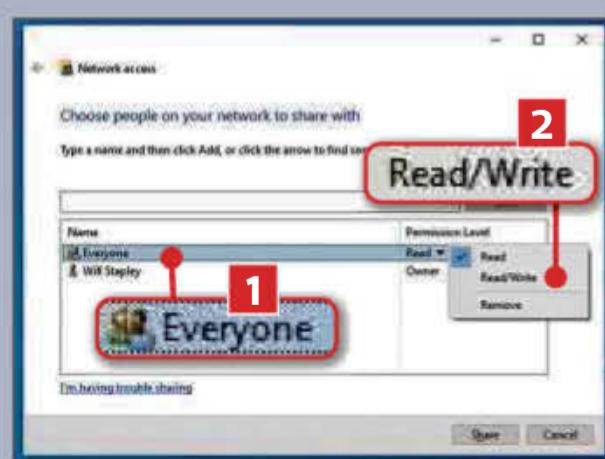
1 Open File Explorer (press **Windows+E**), then right-click the folder you want to share. Select 'Give access to', followed by 'Specific people...' **1** and the 'Network access' window will appear.



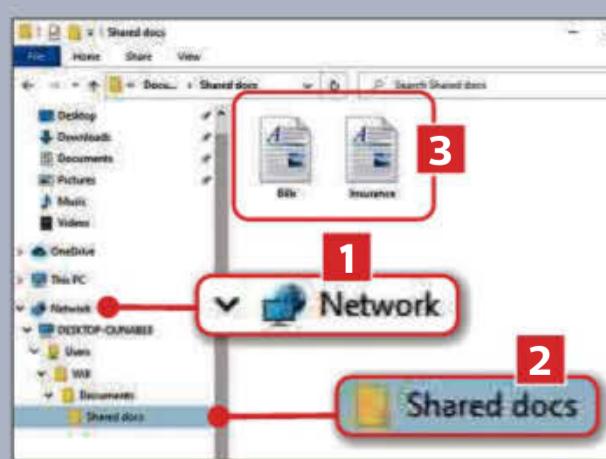
2 Click the down arrow, then choose who you want to share the folder with (other user accounts on your PC will be listed here). Since we're using a home network, we've set this to Everyone **1**. Click Add.



3 Whether you selected a specific account or Everyone, your folder will now appear in the bottom section **1**. The default permission level is Read. If you want people to edit files in your folder too, click this and change it to 'Read/Write' **2**. Click Share, then Done.



4 Return to File Explorer (either using a different user account on your PC or another computer on your network). In the Navigation pane, select Network **1**, then the name of the PC with the shared folder. You should now see the folder listed **2**. Select it, and you'll see the files in the right-hand pane **3**.



BEST SOFTWARE TO MANAGE YOUR FOLDERS

Spot space-hogging folders

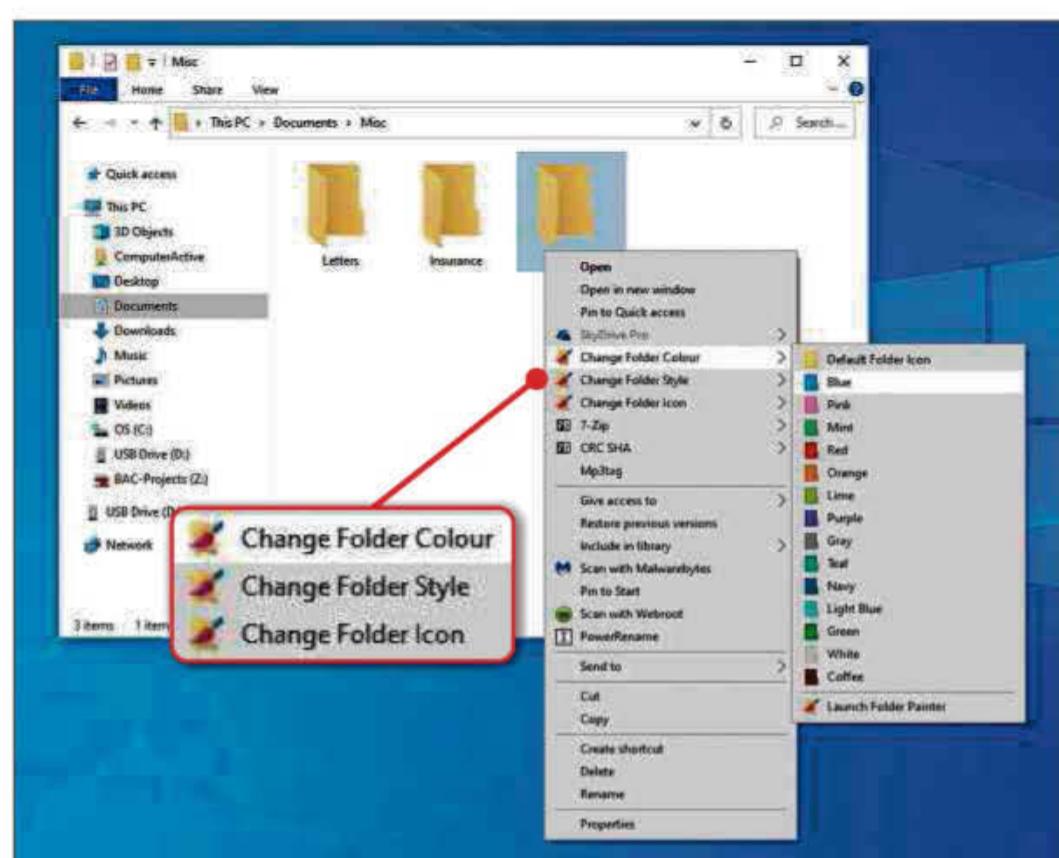
If you just want to unearth the largest files on your PC, **Everything** (www voidtools.com) is the best tool to use. Simply run the program, then order the list by size.

However, Everything won't let you identify the folders (particularly those with lots of sub-folders, all full of files) that are hogging space. This requires something more advanced, and our favourite tool for this task is **WinDirStat** (www snipca com/35758 – click the green FossHub download link at the top).

When you first run the program, WinDirStat will analyse your hard drive, which can take a few minutes (two-and-a-half on our chock-full 500GB drive!). Once complete, you'll see a list of your folders, along with the total size of all files contained within each.

You also can't fail to notice the glorious splash of colour in the bottom half of the screen. This gives a visual representation of the files in each folder. Click any of the coloured boxes and you'll see in the top-right pane what type of file it is. Select a folder in the top section of the WinDirStat window, and a white border will appear around some of the boxes in the bottom section, showing which files are stored in it.

In our example, the Users folder is by far the largest, totalling 144.3GB. Clicking this reveals the majority of space is taken up by virtual PC files, which are shown in burgundy in the bottom section (see screenshot below). Clearly, we should probably cut down on a few of these. Incidentally, if you want to find out more



about virtual PCs, and why they gobble up so much disk space, see our feature on page 62.

If you find WinDirStart takes too long to scan your drives (on an old computer with a large hard drive, you might have to wait around 10 minutes), try **WizTree** (<https://wiztreefree.com>). It's almost identical in looks and features to WinDirStat, but the disk scan takes a fraction of the time (just 15 seconds for our hard drive). However, you have to put up with a vibrating Donate button in the top-right corner.

Add more folder icons

If you've got a collection of folders whose icons you want to change, going through

each one using the method explained on page 52 will take a long time. Instead, try a tool called **Folder Painter** (www snipca com/35759 – scroll to the bottom of the page and click the grey Download button, avoiding any adverts above it).

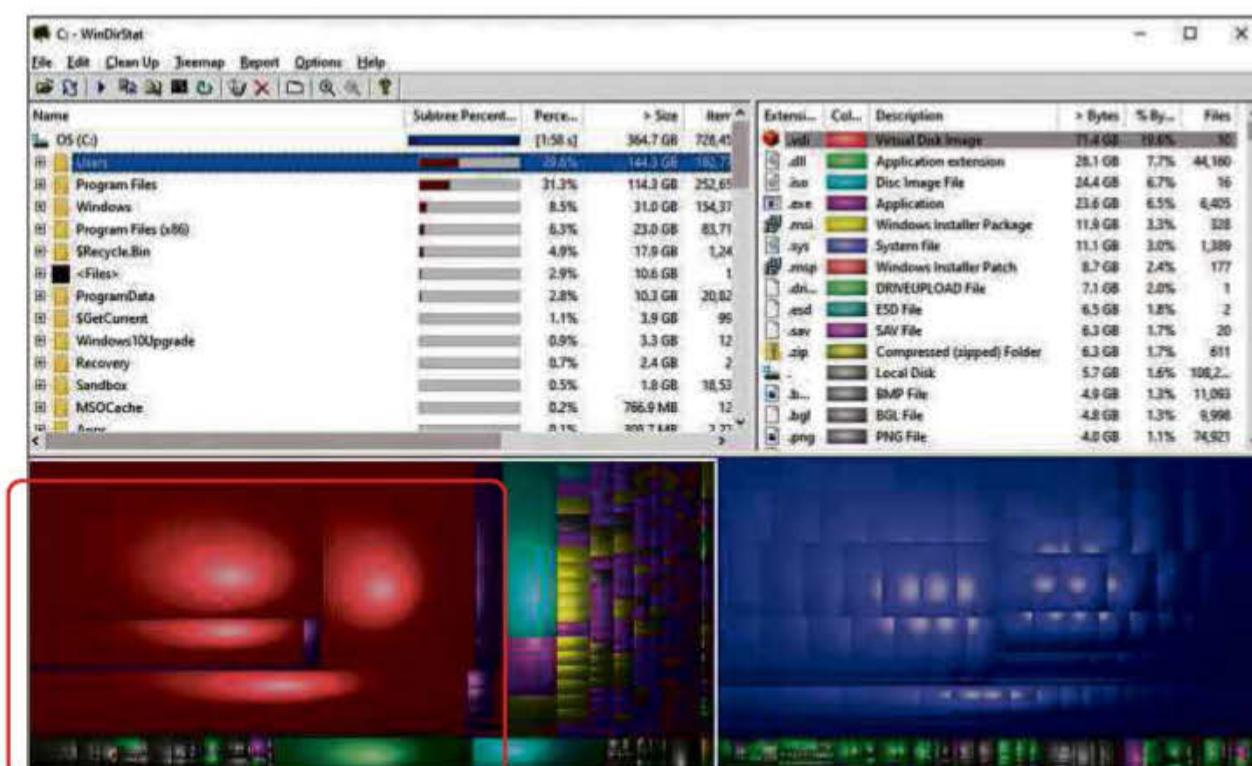
Once installed, run the program and select which icon sets you want to use. You'll see ones that just change the colour of the icon, along with others that have a range of new icons. Click 'Install' when you're done. Now open File Explorer and right-click a folder. In the menu that appears, you'll see Folder Painter options to change the icon (see screenshot above). If you want to change multiple folders to the same icon, hold Ctrl while selecting them, then right-click one.

If you want to use your photos as folder icons, you'll need to convert them to the ICO format first. The easiest way to do this is to use an online service, such as the free **ICO Convert** (www.icoconvert.com). Click 'Choose file', select the image you want to use as an icon, then click Upload. Scroll down to the icon format

Step 4. Select the icon format
 PNG
 ICO for Windows 7, Windows 8, Vista and XP
 Favicon icons for your website
 Custom sizes: Original size Multi-size in one icon
16 x 16 48 x 48 128 x 128
24 x 24 64 x 64 192 x 192
32 x 32 96 x 96 256 x 256

Step 5. Convert and download
Convert ICO PNG to ICO Resize Image Compress
Download your icon(s) Image Resizer & Optimizer Download your icon(s)

Use your own images as icons, but you'll need to convert them to the ICO format first



WinDirStat reveals that virtual PC files are the main reason our Users folder is so big

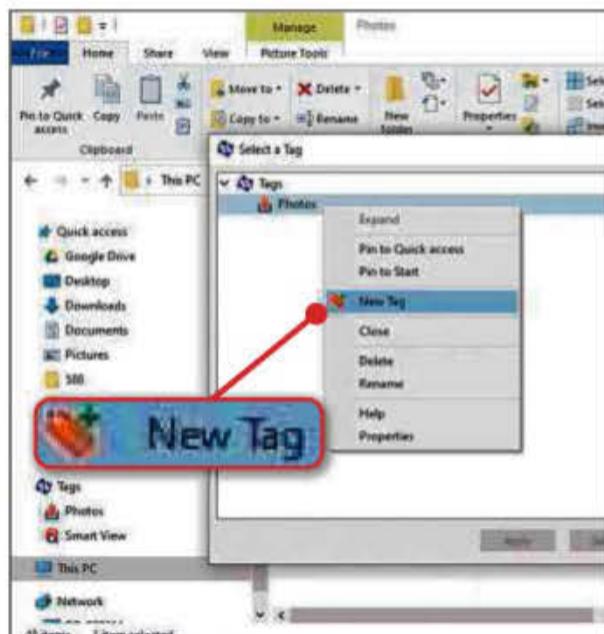
section and select the 'ICO for Windows...' option (don't worry that Windows 10 isn't mentioned – it still works fine).

Next, click Convert ICO, then 'Download your icon(s)' (see screenshot below left). Save your icon to a new folder on your PC, then apply it to the appropriate folder as explained on page 52.

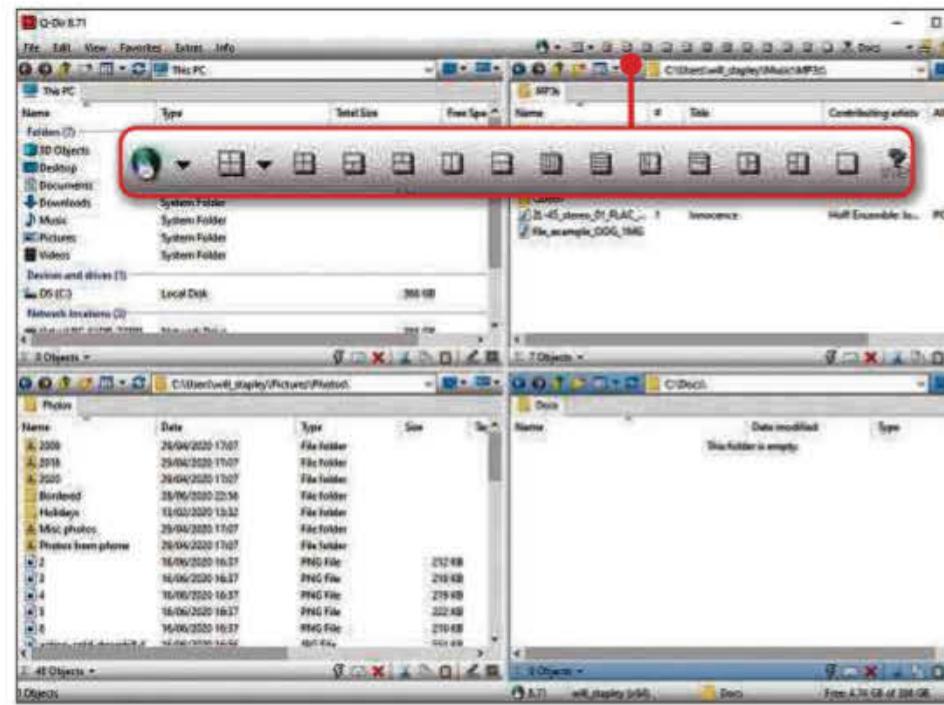
Tag your folders

File Explorer includes an option to tag files (right-click a file, select Properties, Details, then enter the tags directly into the Tags box), but it's awkward to use and you can only tag a small selection of files, such as JPEG photos.

If you want to organise your folders using tags, try **Tagging for Windows** instead (download it from www.snipca.com/35760). It's free, but you need to enter an email address shortly after installing the program, to which a **product key** will be sent. Once installed, open File Explorer and you'll see a Tags section in the Navigation pane, along with a new pane at the bottom of the window. To tag a folder, right-click it, select 'Tag with', then 'More Tags...' (or just press Ctrl+M). To create your new tag, right-click Tags. Now right-click this, select Rename and give it a suitable name (we chose to call ours Photos). Now right-click your tag group and select New



Mark similar folders with tags, using the program Tagging for Windows



Q-Dir lets you view four folder windows, but you can reduce this and change their layouts using the toolbar

Tag (see screenshot below left). We want to tag our folder as having holiday photos, so we've called our tag Holidays. Click 'Select' to tag the folder. The next time you tag a folder, you'll see your newly created tag in the 'Tag with' menu when right-clicking.

To view all folders with a specific tag, click Tags within the Navigation pane, then choose your tag – the folders will now be listed on the right-side of the File Explorer window.

Upgrade to a better File Explorer

It's easy to stick with what you know, and we're all perhaps too familiar with File Explorer. If you fancy a change, there are free alternatives that offer extra features.

Explorer++ (free from www.snipca.com/35761) might look a little dated (its last version was actually released seven years ago), but it works with Windows 10. And despite being so old, it has a feature that's still sorely lacking in File Explorer: tabbing.

This means that, just like in your browser, you can have multiple folders open in separate tabs, then switch between them using the Ctrl+Tab shortcut – perfect when you need to quickly switch between two or more folders. You can also save your tabs using the Bookmarks tool in Explorer++, letting you quickly reopen your

favourite folders.

After a long hiatus, Explorer++ development has started up once again. The **beta** version of Explorer++ 1.4 was released just a few months ago and includes improvements to the Bookmarks tool, including letting you organise them into folders (you can try out the beta from the same link as above).

Like Explorer++, **Q-Dir** (www.snipca.com/35762 – select the **32bit** or **64bit** version of the Q-Dir Installer file) offers tabbing. Along with this, it lets you view no fewer than four explorer panes in the same window (see screenshot above). This makes it much easier if you're frequently moving or copying files between folders, since you can open them alongside each other, then simply drag the files across. It's also regularly updated, with version 8.71 released just a few weeks ago. Our only complaint is that the design feels a bit haphazard, so you need to spend a fair amount of time working out what all the controls do.

Altap Salamander (<https://www.altap.cz>) has a more sedate design and lets you have two folder windows open simultaneously. Previously a paid-for tool, Salamander became free last year after it was bought by Czech firm Fine. It also has advanced file-sharing tools, including an **FTP** client, which anyone who has their own website will appreciate. 

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Don't use the **wrong** drive format

All storage devices need to be formatted before you can use them. But do you *really* know what all those settings mean? Jonathan Parkyn reveals why it's important to format correctly and explains how to do it

All storage devices (whether hard drives, SSDs, USB sticks or any other form of storage), need to be formatted before you can use them. In most cases, these devices are pre-formatted when you buy them, but sometimes you'll need to format them yourself – and choosing the correct settings is vital. You may also need to reformat your existing storage devices, either just to wipe them of all files or change their settings to allow specific devices (such as a camera, phone or NAS) to use them.

Formatting partitions

Every storage device contains one or more **partitions**, and each of these needs to be formatted separately. The partitions appear as separate drives in Windows – so your C: is actually a partition within your storage device (the PC's hard drive). To see how the storage devices attached to

your PC are split into partitions, right-click the Start menu, then select Disk Management. In the top half of the window that appears, you'll see a list of partitions from all storage devices (along with their associated drive letters, if they have one). In the bottom half, you'll see how these partitions are spread across your various storage devices.

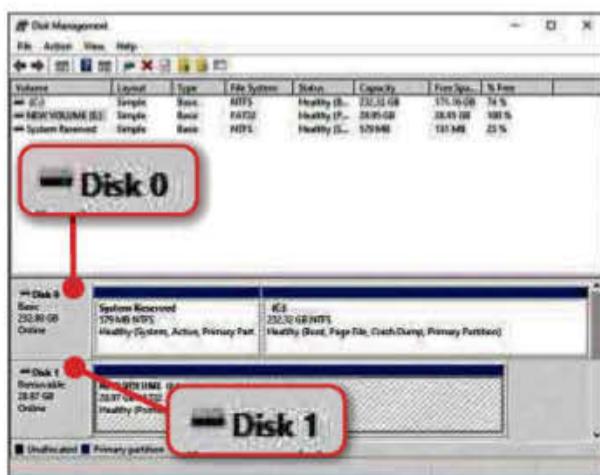
In our example (see screenshot below left), we've got two storage devices attached – our laptop's internal SSD (marked as Disk 0 in the bottom-half of the window) and a USB stick (Disk 1). The USB stick only has a single partition, while our SSD has seven. The largest of these partitions is labelled OS, which is our C:, on which Windows is installed.

Formatting using File Explorer

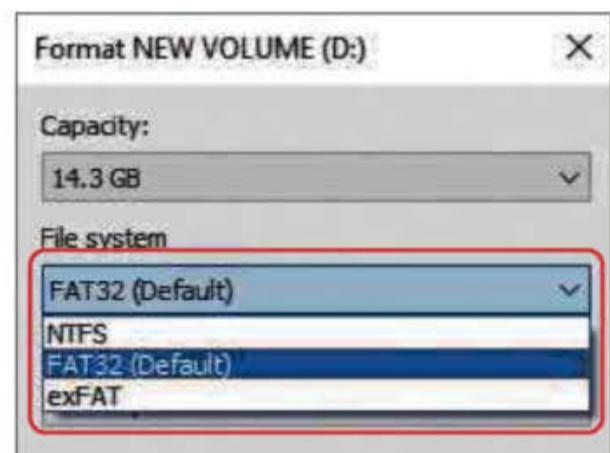
Windows offers several ways to format partitions on your storage devices. One way is to load Disk Management (as explained earlier), then right click the partition and select 'Format...'. However, it's often easiest to simply open File Explorer (Windows+E), select This PC, then right-click the appropriate drive and select 'Format...'. In the screen that opens, you'll see a range of options – we'll look at each of these separately.

Choose a file system

Click the 'File system' box in the Format window and you'll see three options: NTFS, FAT32 and exFAT (see screenshot above right). The file system controls how



The Disk Management tool lets you see how your drives are partitioned



Select the right file system for the devices you're planning to use your storage with

data on the drive is stored and accessed, so what you select here will affect the drive's compatibility with other devices.

NTFS is Microsoft's own file system and is compatible with all recent versions of Windows, but isn't widely supported by other devices. This means your drive may not be recognised if you try to plug it into a smart TV, games console or similar. And although Apple Mac computers can read NTFS disks, they can't write to them.

FAT32 is more widely supported, but it's an older file system and suffers a number of restrictions – most notably that individual file sizes are limited to 4GB, and each partition must be 2TB or less.

The exFAT file system is an updated version of FAT32. It's not hampered by its predecessor's file-size limitations and is supported in all versions of Windows, but some cameras and other devices won't recognise it. As we explain later, if you're



Check the file system of any storage device by right-clicking and selecting Properties

using an **SD card** with a camera, for example, it's best to let the camera format it instead of Windows.

If you want to find out the file system used by an existing storage device, you can do so in File Explorer. Just right-click the device, then select Properties (see screenshot above).

Set the allocation unit size

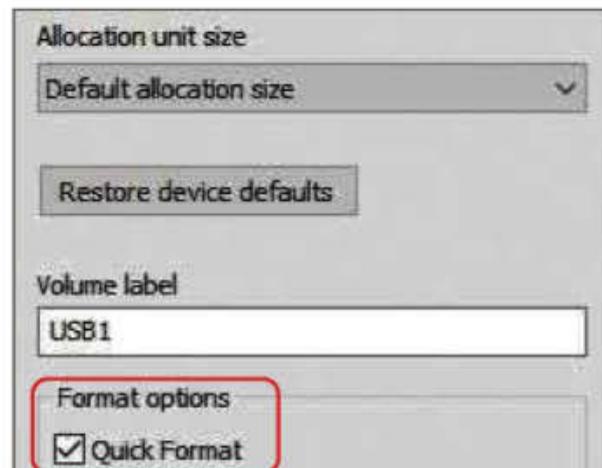
Another option in the Format box, this governs the size of each block of data stored on your drive. The theory is that if you're storing lots of smaller files, you should choose a lower setting here, and a higher setting if you're likely to be storing larger files, as this will help minimise wastage. However, allocation unit size is largely irrelevant these days, now that storage devices have much higher capacities than they once did. Changing this value won't make much difference in terms of efficiency, so we'd advise leaving it on its default setting.

Name your storage device

This is the name (called a 'volume label') you want to give your drive. It won't have any effect on the drive, but will make it easier to recognise in File Explorer. There are some limitations, depending on the file system. NTFS-formatted drives allow names of up to 32 characters, for example, while FAT32 and exFAT are limited to 11 characters. All file systems can use spaces, but FAT32 and exFAT won't let you use most punctuation characters. You can change a volume label at any time by right-clicking a drive in File Explorer and selecting Rename.

Quick formatting

In most cases, doing a quick format is fine – the Quick Format setting is ticked by default (see screenshot above right). However, if you're experiencing problems with your drive, untick this option for a full format, which checks your drive for bad sectors (parts of your hard drive that



Quick formatting only takes a few seconds, but it won't scan for bad sectors

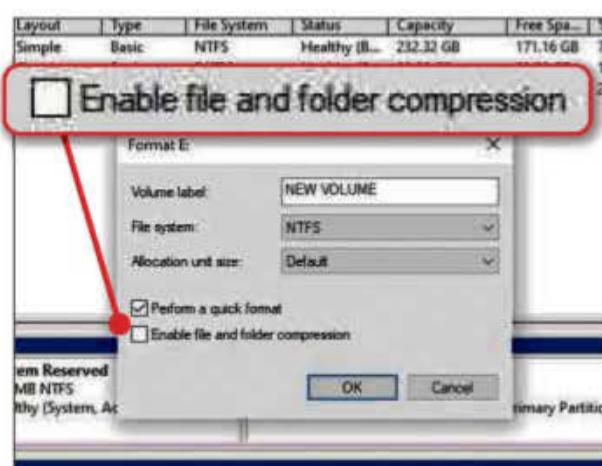
are damaged and can no longer hold data). If the formatting process finds any, it will mark them as such and prevent your PC from writing data to them, thereby avoiding data loss. However, full formatting takes much longer to complete – 20 minutes on our 32GB USB stick, compared to a two-second quick format. In general, it's best not to perform full formats on devices such as SSDs, USB sticks and memory cards. These use flash memory, which has a finite number of write cycles (how often data is written and rewritten), so writing to every sector can reduce their lifespan.

Formatting using Disk Management

If you format a device using Windows' Disk Management tool (right-click your drive and select Format), it will present you with a different box and, if you choose NTFS, you'll be offered the option to 'Enable file and folder compression' (see screenshot below). This is designed to save space, but it can harm the overall performance of your PC, so we recommend leaving this disabled.

Formatting using other devices

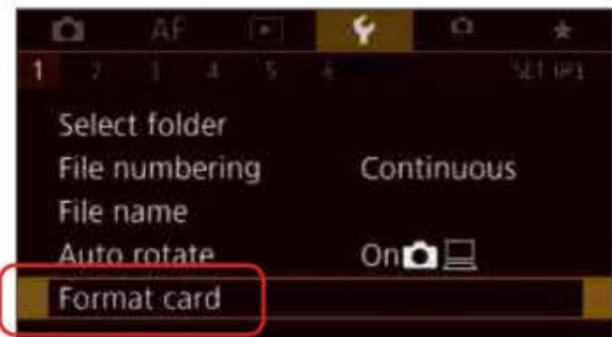
As long as you can attach your storage device to your PC, you'll be able to use Windows to format it (we'll explain how to do this in a moment). However, if you're planning to use it with something



With Disk Management you can compress files and folders, but this can affect performance

Formatting vs shredding

Formatting a drive wipes all the data stored on it and leaves it nice and empty. But, in fact, the data is still there – it's just hidden and won't be fully erased until it's overwritten with new data. This means that you can't rely on formatting a drive if you're selling it or giving it away to someone else, because they would be able to recover the data. The best thing to do is format the drive, then use a shredding tool to permanently erase all data. Our favourite tool for doing this is Eraser (free from <https://eraser.heidi.ie>). Open the program, right-click the middle of the window and click New Task. Select the 'Run manually' option, then click Add Data. Under 'Target type', select 'Unused disk space', choose the drive you want to erase under Settings and click OK twice. Right-click your new task and select Run Now.



When formatting a card for use on your camera, it's best to do so on the camera itself

other than your PC, it's often best to format your storage device on that instead. For example, if you've bought a new SD card to use with your camera, you should find an option to format it with the camera's menus (often in a Settings or Storage section – see screenshot above).

Similarly, most smart TVs will include an option to format any USB hard drives you attach to them, as well as cameras with SD cards.

Why is this important? By letting your device do the formatting, it will ensure your storage is set up correctly. If you instead format a storage device in Windows, you might find that your camera or TV doesn't recognise it.

If you can't find a format option in your device's settings, check its website or manual. If you still have no luck, you may need to format the device in Windows, trying different settings to see which works. **ca**

Why you must start using virtual PCs

Set up a virtual PC and you'll be able to test anything without harming your real PC. Will Stapley explains how to create one and the hidden tricks to make it more powerful



How would you like a second PC for free? Sounds great. There's one caveat: this would be a virtual PC. But don't let that put you off. This would be – to all intents and purposes – a fully functioning PC that happens to sit within the confines of a window on your main PC's desktop.

Instead of physical components, it uses a process called virtualisation to create a software-based processor, memory and hard drive. As we show you here, it's easy and free to create a simple virtual PC, and once it's up and running you can treat it just like any other PC.

Best of all, what goes on inside your virtual PC stays inside your virtual PC. This makes them perfect for trying out registry tweaks, testing software you're not sure of and generally tinkering without fear of damaging your physical PC.

As with a standard PC, you'll need to install an operating system. Although we'll be creating a Windows 10 virtual PC in this feature, you can install others, such as Linux or Windows 7 (see box on page 61).

Create your first virtual PC

First, make sure you have plenty of free hard-drive space. Being software-based, virtual PCs can eat up around 25GB, and that's before you've even installed any software on them.

To install Windows 10 on a virtual PC, you need to download an **ISO file** from Microsoft. Don't worry if you haven't got

a Windows 10 **product key** – although you'll be nagged to activate it, you can run Windows 10 indefinitely without one. First, download and run the Microsoft Media Creation tool (click 'Download tool now' at www.snipca.com/35732).

Next, select 'Create installation media...', then check whether the Architecture box says **32bit** or **64bit** (you'll need this information in a moment). Click Next, select 'ISO file' then wait for the ISO file to download. This can take up to an hour, but you can use this time to set up your virtual PC – and for this we'll be using a tool called VirtualBox (download free from www.virtualbox.org)

Run VirtualBox, then select Tools and click New (or press Ctrl+N). Give your virtual PC a name (we chose 'Windows 10'), then make sure the Type box is set to Microsoft Windows and the Version to 'Windows 10 (64-bit)' or 'Windows 10 (32-bit)', depending on what you noted down earlier. For now, we'll leave the other virtual PC settings at their defaults,

so click Next through the remaining screens.

Your Windows 10 virtual PC will now be listed on the left. Before running it, though, you need to tell it where to find the Windows installation file, which by now has hopefully downloaded.

As soon as it has, select your virtual PC, then click Settings on the right. Click 'Storage' and select the disc icon in the middle (it will be labelled Empty, see screenshot below left). Next, click the disc icon on the far right, select 'Choose a disk file...', then locate the Windows ISO file (this will be in your Downloads folder). Click 'OK', then Start to launch your virtual PC.

The Windows installation process will now run in the same way as on a physical PC. Work through this and, once it's completed, you'll have your virtual PC running in a window on your desktop. As long as your main PC has internet access, so will your virtual PC, which means you can browse the web, download software and more.

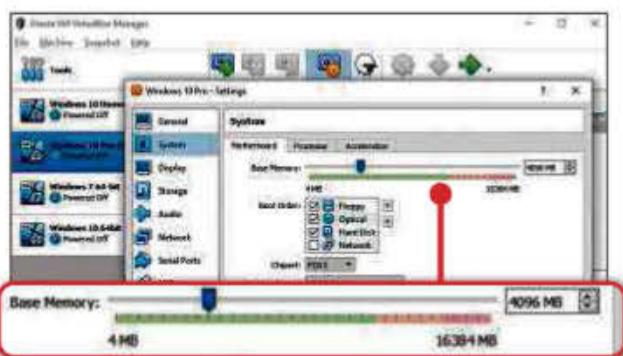
Make your virtual PC more powerful

Because it doesn't have its own hardware, your virtual PC will always run a little slower than your main one. However, you can make it faster by tweaking a few settings.

To do this, first shut down your virtual PC, then select it in VirtualBox and click Settings (or press Ctrl+S). Click System on the left side of the window. On the right,



To install Windows 10, you need to add its ISO file to your virtual PC's optical drive



If your virtual PC is running slow, try allocating it more memory

select the Motherboard tab and you'll see a slider for adjusting how much memory your virtual PC has. Bear in mind any memory assigned to your virtual PC will no longer be available to your main PC, so you must achieve the right balance. Try a few different settings to see what impact they have. We find allocating 4GB (or 4096MB) of our PC's 16GB works well (see screenshot above).

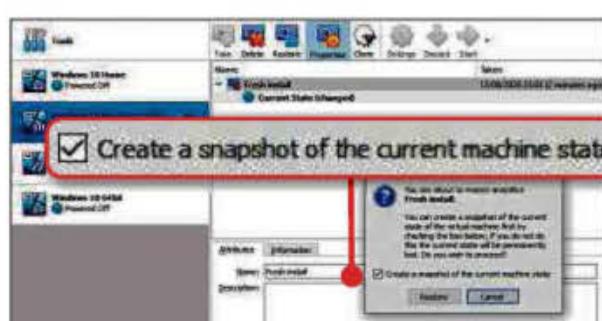
In the Processor tab, you can decide how many processor **cores** your virtual PC can use. Again, it's a balancing act, but the default setting of '1' is probably too low. If your processor has eight cores, as ours does, try allocating two or three to the virtual PC.

Create backups of your virtual system

VirtualBox lets you create a 'snapshot' of your virtual PC. Think of this as a complete system backup, but unlike on your main PC it only takes a few seconds to create and it's easy to switch between different backups.

To create one, run your virtual PC, then open the Take menu and select 'Take Snapshot...'. In the window that appears, give your snapshot a name and (optional) a description, then click OK. Now close your virtual PC and return to the VirtualBox window. Click the menu button to the right of your virtual PC, select Snapshots and you'll see your recently created snapshot. The 'Current State' entry below this represents your virtual PC since that snapshot was created.

To revert to your earlier snapshot, select it, then click Restore. To create a new snapshot of your virtual PC's current



When you revert to an earlier snapshot, VirtualBox will offer to save your virtual PC's current state first

Create a virtual Windows 7 PC

If you have old programs that won't work on Windows 10, you might want to create a virtual PC running Windows 7. If you have a Windows 7 product key, you can download the ISO file from Microsoft at www.snipca.com/35733. Alternatively, if you have the original Windows 7 installation disc, you can use that instead.

To do this, you need to grant your virtual PC access to your main PC's disc drive. Select your virtual PC in VirtualBox, then go to Settings, Storage and click the disc icon (top right). Next, select your disc drive and tick the Passthrough option, which allows your virtual PC to control the drive (see screenshot). Click OK to save your changes. With the Windows 7 installation disc inserted in your PC's drive, click Start



to launch your virtual PC. The Windows 7 installation process will now start, and you can work through it as normal.

If you don't have a valid product key (you may have previously used it to upgrade to Windows 10), Windows 7 will run for 30 days, then stop working. To get around this, create a snapshot (as described below left) shortly after installing it, then revert to that each time the 30-day period ends.

state, so you can return to it later if necessary, make sure 'Create a snapshot of the current machine state' is ticked (see screenshot below left). Next, click Restore, then run your virtual PC as normal.

Share clipboard and folders with your main PC

Using Guest Additions (an official VirtualBox **add-on**), you can add extra features to your virtual PC, letting it share its clipboard or folders with your main PC – ideal if you need to copy files from one to the other.

To install Guest Additions, run your virtual PC, then open the Devices menu and select 'Insert Guest Additions CD image...'. Open File Explorer (press Windows+E), click This PC, then double-click the Guest Additions drive (see screenshot below). Double-click the 'VBoxWindowsAdditions.exe' file and follow the installation process.

To share clipboards between your main ('host') and virtual PC ('guest'), open the Devices menu and select Shared Clipboard, then 'Bidirectional...', which means you can copy text from your virtual PC, then paste it to your main PC and vice versa.



Shared folders will appear on your virtual PC as drives, and you can choose which drive letter to assign to them

Alternatively, you can choose to only share the clipboard one way (Guest To Host or Host To Guest). You'll find similar options within the 'Drag and Drop' menu, which lets you move files between your PCs by dragging them.

If you want to continue working on documents across both PC types, select the Shared Folders option in the Devices menu, then 'Shared Folder Settings...'. Click the green folder icon (top right), then click the Folder Path box. Select 'Other' and choose the folder you want to share. Give your shared folder a name, then select whether you want it to be read-only (meaning your virtual PC will be able to access, but not change files in that folder) or auto-mount (the shared folder will be available to your virtual PC when you click OK). Enter a drive letter for the folder share (we chose 'S:' – see screenshot above), then tick 'Make permanent' to avoid having to set the shared folder up each time you restart your virtual PC.

When you next open File Explorer on your virtual PC, you'll see the shared folder listed alongside your other drives.



Install Guest Additions on your virtual PC to add extra features

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PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Will an SSD save this old laptop?

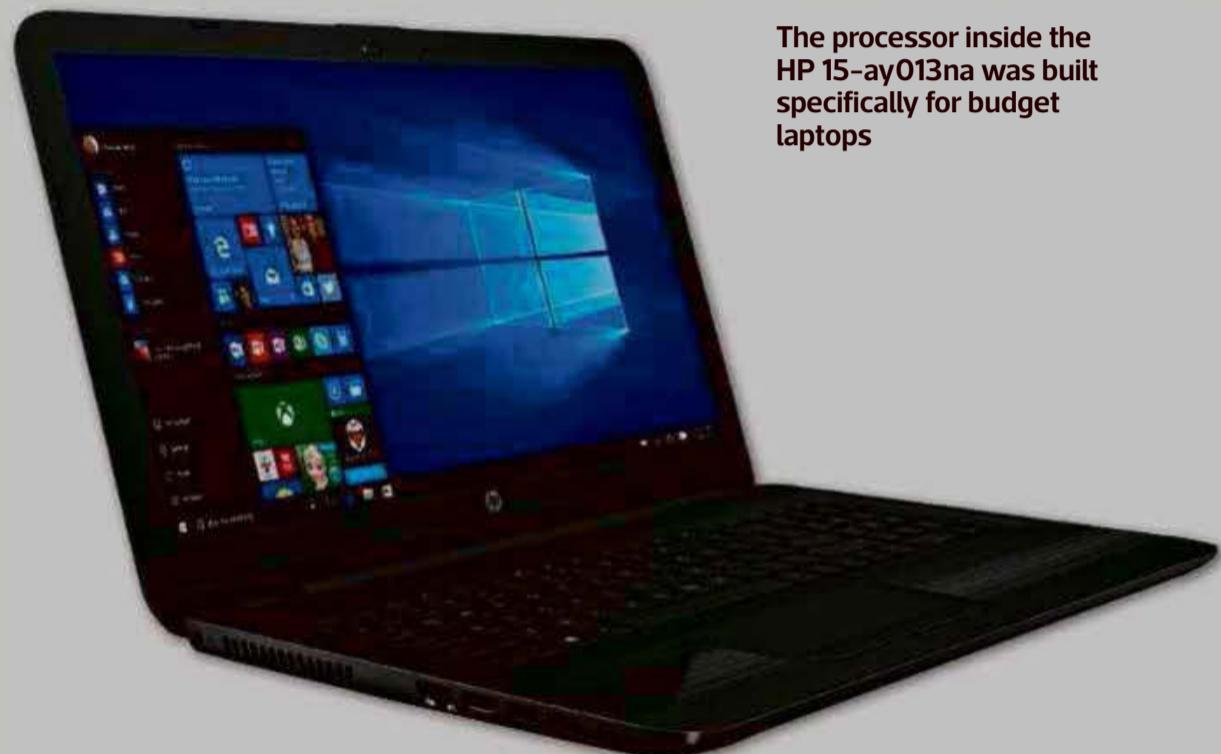
Q A friend recently died of cancer. To help him through his illness his wife bought him a HP 15-ay013na laptop. He didn't have many opportunities to use it. His wife has now generously passed it on to me. Compared to my all-in-one desktop PC it's very slow. Is it possible to fit an SSD, and would doing so improve performance? I've made numerous inquiries with local technicians but have received so many mixed messages that I'm terribly confused. One said the laptop is geared to the hard drive and will not accept the SSD, while another said that the hard drive is soldered in so it would be impossible to replace. Others have said it can be done and it would improve speed. Prices for fitting a 240GB SSD range from £65 to £143. I'm reluctant to spend money if there would be no benefit, so I would very much appreciate your advice.

David Walker

A We're sorry about the loss of your friend. We like to imagine that he would be pleased to know that his passing has in some small way provided you with a benefit.

However, there's no escaping the fact that this is a pretty basic machine. In particular, its Pentium N3710 processor is manufactured by Intel specifically for the budget market.

As such, there's only so much that



The processor inside the HP 15-ay013na was built specifically for budget laptops

can be done to improve this laptop before you reach the point of spending good money after bad.

You're right in thinking that replacing a hard drive with an SSD is a reliable way to improve the performance of almost any PC – and usually pretty significantly. As such, as long as you're not expecting to turn this laptop into a gaming powerhouse, and are merely seeking something that doesn't feel like it's wading through treacle every time a program is launched, then, yes, fitting an SSD should satisfy.

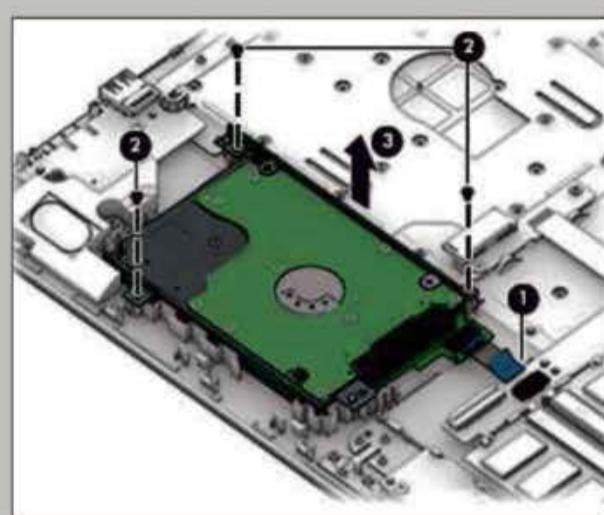
Having scoured this laptop's service manual, which you'll find at www.snipca.com/35634, we can find no reason why it

can't be done. It's true that some low-end laptops have storage that's effectively welded on to the motherboard, but that doesn't appear to be the case here. So, perhaps your local technicians were talking generally, rather than about this specific model. Your HP laptop is fitted with a standard SATA hard disk drive: swapping this out is a pretty simple task for any experienced technician.

Price-wise, doing it yourself would be cheap. You mentioned quotes for a 240GB drive. This is actually smaller than the laptop's current 1TB hard drive, but if your friend hardly used it then it's probably virtually empty – so we'd guess the contents could be wholly cloned on to a smaller SSD. You can buy a WD 240GB SATA SSD for about £28 from Amazon (www.snipca.com/35635, pictured far left).

With this in mind, and allowing for an hour or so's labour for fitting and setting up the new SSD, we'd say that the lower end of your quotes would not be an unfair price for the job and that you'd likely feel the benefit.

The top end, however, is far too expensive and simply not worth it for this particular laptop.



WD's 240GB SSD (left) could replace the HP laptop's hard drive (right)

Why does my typing disappear?

Q I'm puzzling over the fact that when I start typing and eventually look up from the keyboard, only a couple of the first characters are shown on screen – the rest of whatever I have typed is missing! Clicking the mouse restores normality, but it is annoying to be tripped up in this way. Any clues, please?

Brian Willcocks

A We're wondering if you might have enabled a feature that sees the active application window change to reflect the position of the mouse pointer? We've certainly offered this tip a few times over the years, so you might have activated it and forgotten.

If so, then it could lead to this behaviour. This is because if your mouse pointer should move after you start typing – perhaps as you inadvertently brush your laptop's touchpad, or otherwise intentionally move the pointer out of the way – whatever window is



Remove the tick from the box labelled 'Activate a window by hovering over it...'

beneath the mouse pointer will become the active one, and will therefore 'swallow' any keystrokes. If that is a window that accepts typed input, you might notice, but many windows do not.

To check, and potentially squash this annoyance, you'll need to go into the Control Panel. So, first, click Start, then type **control panel** and click Control

Panel. Next, click 'Ease of Access' and then, below 'Ease of Access Center', click 'Change how your mouse works'.

Finally, scroll down to the 'Make it easier to manage windows' heading and, beneath that, look at the tickbox labelled 'Activate a window by hovering over it with the mouse' (see screenshot left). Our suspicion is that this will be ticked. Click to clear the box and then click OK.

If that's not the cause (and solution), then we wonder if you might be using a wireless keyboard? We suppose it's possible that local interference is causing hiccups in the connection. So, consider any other nearby wireless devices that are in use, and try moving them to a different location. Also, check the support section of the manufacturer's website for updated **drivers** or, if you have a wired keyboard, try using that for a while to see if the problem recurs.

We'll also throw this one over to our readers for other ideas, and update you with any that might be offered.

How can downloads be faster than uploads?

Q I'm an old silver surfer and a reader since your first edition, and I've had lots to learn. One thing that's puzzled me for a long time is this: if one has a download speed of 100Mbps and an upload speed of 10Mbps – as I do – how is it that I can download something at 100Mbps from someone when they are sending it to me, assuming their upload speed is also only 10Mbps?

Bill Norton

A Well, you can't. If you're transferring files in real time – and let's imagine that this is something you do regularly – then your download speed will indeed be limited by the upload speed of the person sending you the file.

However, save for a few rare situations – such as when your contact pastes a file into a live-chat window, say – you'll almost always be downloading a file after its upload has



Downloading a file from Facebook Messenger may be fast, but you must wait for it to upload

been completed elsewhere. So, someone might drum their fingers for 10 minutes uploading a file but, once they're done, you'll be able to download the file in a minute or so. That could be moments or months later, but it's academic: your experience will be a one-minute download. In the meantime, the file will

live on a server somewhere on the internet, awaiting your download.

However, if they paste that same file into Facebook Messenger, for example, then it'll take 10 minutes for them to upload it – and you'll have to wait for that process to finish before you can download it.

Problems Solved

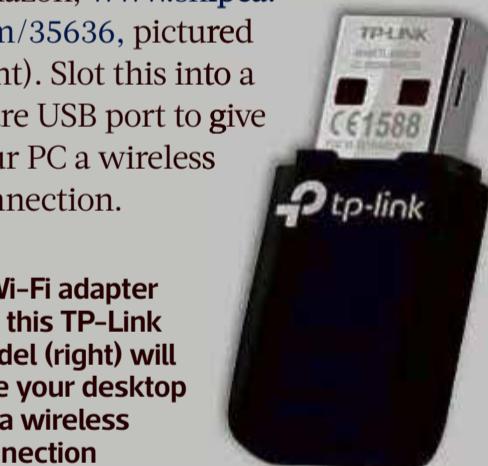
Why can't I get my PC online?

Q I recently bought an HP 8000 desktop PC with Windows 10. It seems I cannot access the internet wirelessly via my Sky router, though using an Ethernet cable works. It's not practical to have a cable trailing to this PC, so I'm wondering if you can advise me?

Sam Need

A We're not sure you've got the model name correct. As far as we can tell, HP hasn't made any desktops recently with an 8000 designation, though it has done in the past. It does make desktops in the EliteDesk series, many of which have the model number 800 (pictured below) – so we think you have one of these. The problem is that not all of these models have a Wi-Fi adapter built in, so they can't communicate wirelessly. An easy fix is to buy a cheap Wi-Fi adapter, such as the TP-Link model (around £8 from Amazon, www.snipca.com/35636, pictured right). Slot this into a spare USB port to give your PC a wireless connection.

A Wi-Fi adapter like this TP-Link model (right) will give your desktop PC a wireless connection



Can I disable iPhone screenshots?

Q In Issue 586's Problems Solved you explained to Alfred Heath how to disable the ability for others to capture still shots of you in FaceTime, via FaceTime settings. However, it occurred to me that it'd still be possible to capture a screenshot by pressing the home and power buttons at the same time. At least, that seems to work on my iPhone 8, including in FaceTime. Is there a way to disable this feature entirely? I suppose it's not a problem on newer iPhones, as they don't have the home button – but I'm not about to spend hundreds just to get this ability!

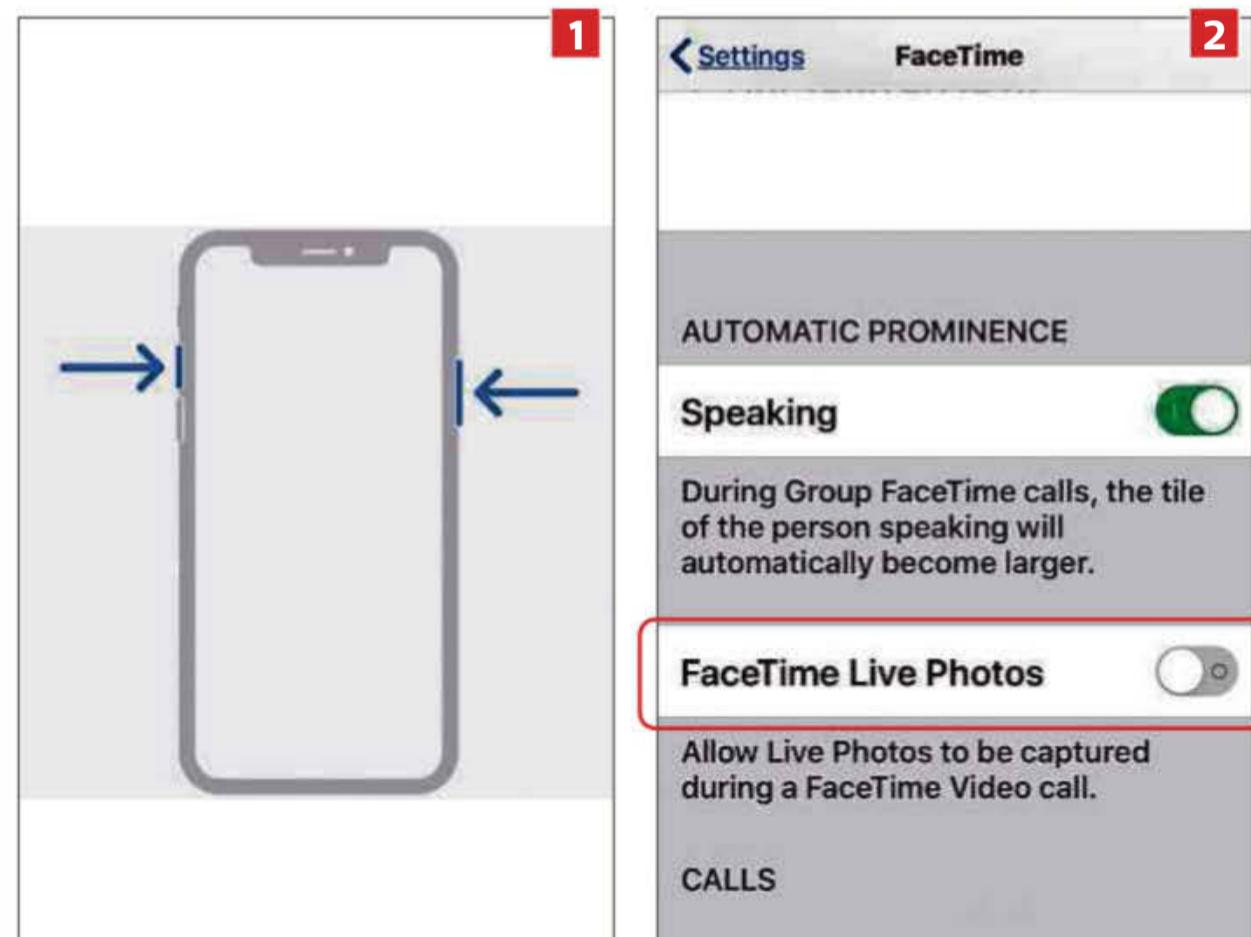
Charles Wilson

A You're right that this shortcut allows stills to be captured in FaceTime chats. Unfortunately, there's currently no way

of disabling this screenshot capability, either in iOS for iPhones or iPadOS for Apple tablets. For example, turning off FaceTime Live Photos (see screenshot below) makes no difference. You'd also be wrong to think that no home button means newer iPhones are immune from this potential risk: rather, Apple has changed the two buttons that need to be pressed – so holding down the power and volume-up buttons now does the job.

Apple tightly controls every aspect of iOS and iPadOS, so there is nothing anyone can do to remedy this.

Perhaps the company will one day create a switch to allow users to switch this ability off or on. Until then, anyone concerned about someone capturing screenshots of live video chats needs to understand that this is always a possibility – and decide accordingly whether or not to proceed.



You can take a screenshot on your iPhone by holding down the power button (right) and volume-up button (left) at the same time **1**, even if FaceTime Live Photos is switched off **2**.

Q: Can I get Office 2016 on disc?

A: Issue 559, page 68 – find it on our 2019 Back Issue CD

Buy it from
www.snipca.com/33711



What's this error on our YouView Humax box?

Q I've had a YouView Humax DTR-T1010 box for several years. We use it mostly as a TV recorder, but also to view Netflix and BBC content. For the most part it has worked brilliantly.

We've long used the YouView app to schedule TV recordings, but recently YouView withdrew support and the app has stopped working. YouView says that we can use the BT TV app instead, but when we installed the app it said it couldn't find a BT box.

Because we got the same error on my Android phone and my partner's iPhone, I assumed it might be a problem with the box.

After lots of fiddling about, I ended up using the maintenance menu to do a **factory reset**, opting to keep our recordings.

The good news is that the app can now find the box, but the bad news is we get a message saying, 'This feature is no longer supported on your current TV box'.

I'm confused. I thought our



While the DTR-T1010 is the second version of YouView's Humax box, it remains a first-generation device

DTR-T1010 was a second-generation recorder, but BT seems to think that it isn't. Is there any way to keep using an app?

Dominic Jacobs

A While the DTR-T1010 is technically the second version of the YouView box, it's still a first-generation device. Therefore the BT TV app will work with it only if BT adds support for older models.

While that's unfortunate, don't forget that you can still schedule recordings on the device itself. You may already have

discovered that it can be slow-going to do this via the Guide. It's quicker to use the search function to find the programme you want. Just press Search on the remote, start typing the name of the programme you're looking for and select it from the list.

If there's a choice of episodes and channels, select the one you want and press the red R button on the remote. As with the app, if the content is part of a series you'll get the chance to choose whether you record one episode, or all of them.

Should I stick with Outlook 2016?

Q Like many people, I use an Android phone and a Windows 10 computer in my office. I use Microsoft Outlook to organise my work, and I'm currently on Outlook 2016. It's always been something of a challenge to synchronise Outlook with my phone.

For periods I have had good results with AkrutoSync (www.akruto.com), but I've found it erratic unless I assign my computer a fixed **IP address**. I'm aware that Windows 10 now offers apps for mail, contacts and tasks, and OneNote for notes. Is there any need for Outlook 2016, except to provide the Outlook Today overview? Can everything else be done more simply and as reliably with basic Windows or Android apps?

Hamish Turner

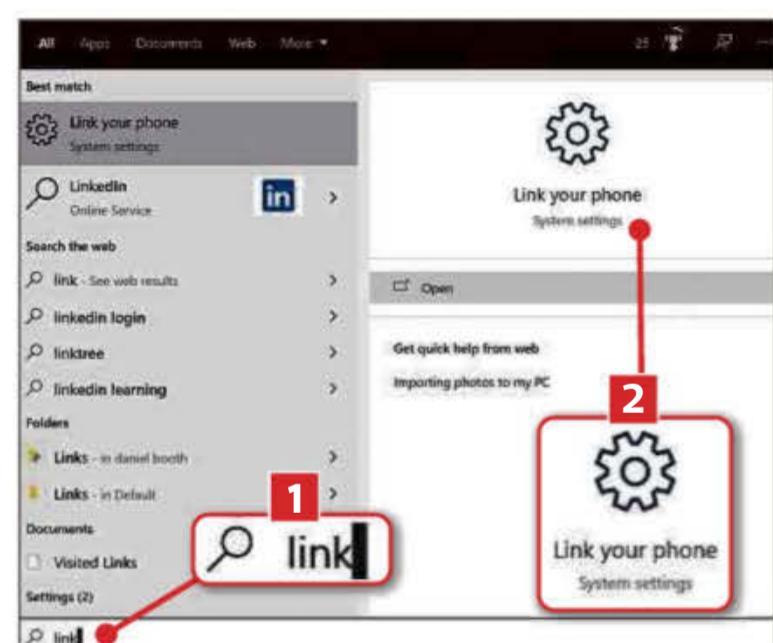
A There's certainly no definitive reason why you should be using Outlook. However, it is powerful software, and moving away from it may present multiple challenges.

The first question to consider is the

nature of your email. It sounds like you're connecting to your email account via **POP3**, downloading messages to Outlook, then needing to synchronise these with your phone.

You may find it more convenient to access your mail account via **IMAP**, if available, which will leave your messages on the server and let you access them from any email app on your computer or phone. The key problem you'll face is that from your phone you won't have access to the archive of older emails on your PC. If you subsequently decided to ditch Outlook, you wouldn't be able to see them on your PC, either.

You could sync your computer with your phone. Type **link** into Windows Search (see screenshot 1), then select 'Link your phone' 2. However, you may not be able to synchronise older emails, and have



You can sync your phone with Windows by typing 'link' into Search, then choosing 'Link your phone'

difficulty importing contacts from Outlook into the Windows People app.

An alternative is to go fully Google, using Android's Contacts, Calendar and Gmail apps, and accessing the services online on your PC. Again, however, you'd face challenges importing your existing data, and you'd need to set up Gmail to send and receive messages on your non-Google email account(s).

Problems Solved

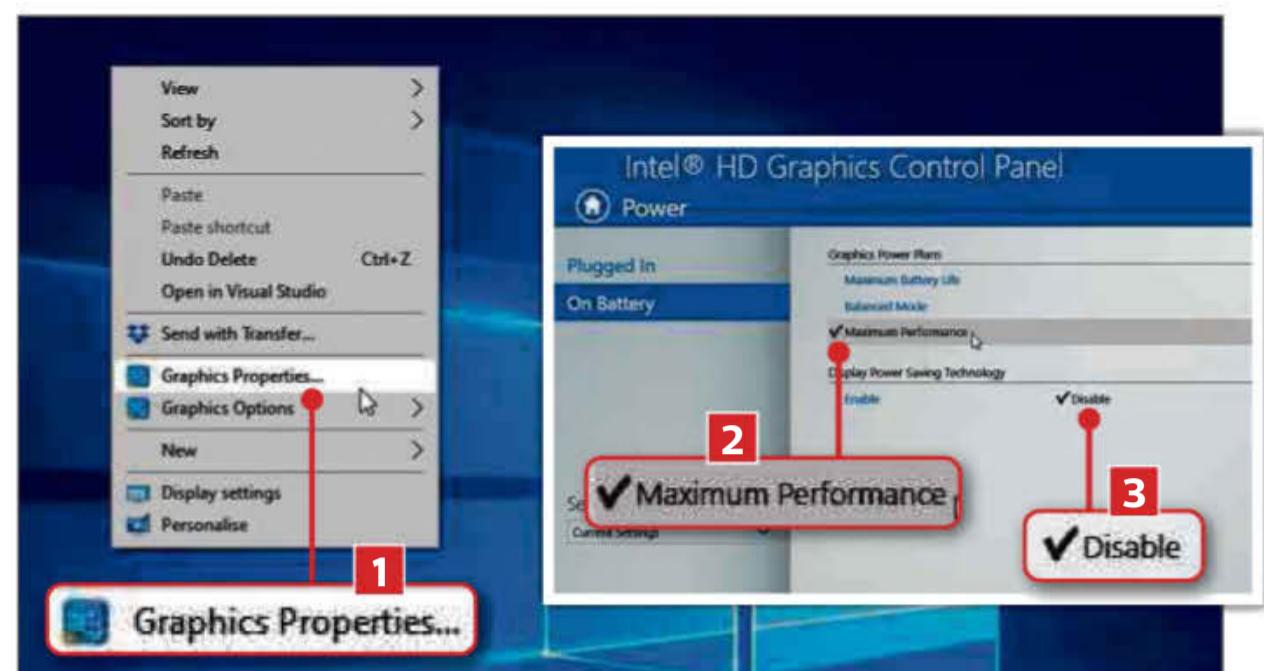
Why does my screen dim when run on battery?

Q I've purchased an HP laptop that's basic but works well enough for me. One minor quirk that I've noticed is that the screen dims a little when I remove the power cord to run on battery. I've tried using the F3 key to increase the brightness, but it seems the maximum on battery is simply less than that on mains power. I suppose this is to save battery, but I'd like the option to maximise the brightness if I want to. I've been using the laptop in the garden a lot of late and, while the screen is perhaps only 10 per cent dimmer on battery, that extra bit of brightness could make all the difference on sunny days.

Jonathan Boreham

A Yes, this is almost certainly a battery-saving measure.

Without knowing the exact



In 'Graphics Properties...' select Maximum Performance and Disable

laptop model, we'd usually struggle to give specific advice. But many low-end laptops, HP's included, rely on so-called integrated graphics that are part of their Intel processors. So, we're confident that this is down to Intel's own driver.

To fix this, first right-click on any blank part of the Windows desktop and choose 'Graphics Properties...' (1 in screenshot

above). This will summon the Intel HD Graphics Control Panel. Here, on the left, click 'On Battery' and then, on the right, there are two settings to change.

First, under the Graphics Power Plans heading, click to select Maximum Performance 2 and then, below the Display Power Saving Technology heading, click to tick Disable 3.

How do spammers get my details?

Q I recently received an email threatening court action if I did not immediately renew my TV licence. At over 80 I knew that I was entitled to a free licence until at least August, so I ignored this. However, I'm curious to know how scammers discover private email addresses? The combination of my surname and other elements are quite rare. Do they have access to a sophisticated algorithm generating thousands of possible combinations or is there another way of harvesting addresses from within private email traffic?

Dick Crockett

A Scammers and spammers have endless ways to gather personal information. Algorithms randomly generating email addresses certainly play their part, but so too do straightforward data leaks and, sometimes, legitimate or illegitimate purchases of email databases.

Anyone who's been using the internet for any period of time will



Type your email address into the Have I Been Pwned? website to check whether it has been leaked

have supplied their email address to numerous online systems and services. Some may have suffered data breaches that will have seen the personal details they hold fall into the wrong hands. Some firms may have intentionally or inadvertently passed on the information they hold to third parties. This might be for direct profit, or because the system or service went bust or was otherwise transferred to a new operator.

There's precious little you can do to

stop any of this. However, you can check if your email address is attached to a system or service that's suffered a data breach.

Visit the Have I Been Pwned? website, at <https://haveibeenpwned.com>, then tap in your email address and click the 'pwned?' button (see screenshot above). Again, it won't solve the problem, but the results might offer an insight into if and how your email address got into the hands of spammers.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

Full fibre and cable?

Q For many years I've received BT fibre broadband. I recently moved house, taking my BT service with me. At the time, the BT adviser was keen to tell me about 'full fibre', which is apparently up to 10 times faster than what I have now. I told her my broadband was fast enough, so I wasn't interested.

Since moving, I've had numerous circulars from BT about this full-fibre thing, but also leaflets from Virgin Media offering cable broadband. This got me wondering what the technological difference is between all these? Is cable better than fibre?

Warren Johnson

A Actually, in the context of the UK and Virgin Media in particular, 'cable' also means fibre – at least for the most part. Specifically, the connections from Virgin Media's servers to your local exchange and then the Virgin Media cabinet in your street are all fibre-optic cables. That's the same as BT, and many other broadband providers.



Virgin Media offers coaxial cable, while Openreach is rolling out Full Fibre

The key difference is that, traditionally, with BT the final stretch from the street cabinet to your house is carried over old-fashioned copper telephone wires, while Virgin Media's service relies on thicker, insulated coaxial (coax) cable. The latter significantly reduces signal loss, so your broadband speed isn't really affected by your home's distance from the cabinet.

We should say that BT is not alone here. With traditional ADSL broadband, and

indeed most current fibre connections, reliance on dated copper wiring means the signals degrade.

So, the further your house is from the cabinet, the more your broadband speed will drop off.

Now, Openreach – the BT spin-off division that maintains the cables and infrastructure – is currently busy rolling out true fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) connections. This means that the firm is installing fibre cables between street cabinets and homes. This will effectively eliminate signal loss, resulting in much-faster speeds – up to 900Mbps, currently. Both Openreach and BT brand this as Full Fibre.

This technology can outpace Virgin Media's coax-based connections, but understand that this is just a never-ending game of leapfrog.

Virgin is also updating its infrastructure to go 'full fibre' on its own terms, using the brand Gig1.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Why don't I have the May 2020 update?

Q I'm lucky enough to have an AMD FX 4300-based processor running a Windows 10 PC and a Surface Pro, with Windows 10 Pro. However, neither has the latest May 2020 Update (2004). The Surface Pro is still on version 1909 while the PC is stuck on 1903! Am I normal? What should I do?

John A C Beattie

Microsoft publishes details of known issues for all Windows 10 releases

A This problem is normal. At least, for the Surface Pro – Microsoft did in fact put what it calls a 'compatibility hold' on version 2004 for all Surface devices. By the time you read this we expect that restriction to have lifted, so your Surface Pro should get the update soon. We know nothing about your second PC other than its processor.



There's no compatibility hold on that chip, but other components in the machine might be the problem, stopping the PC from updating to 1909 (and then to 2004). Microsoft gives details of known issues for all Windows 10 releases. You'll find the full list for 1909 at www.snipca.com/35637 (see screenshot below left).

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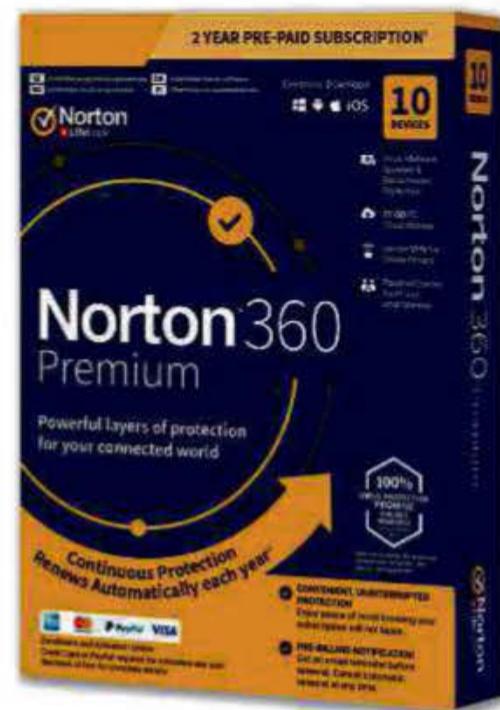
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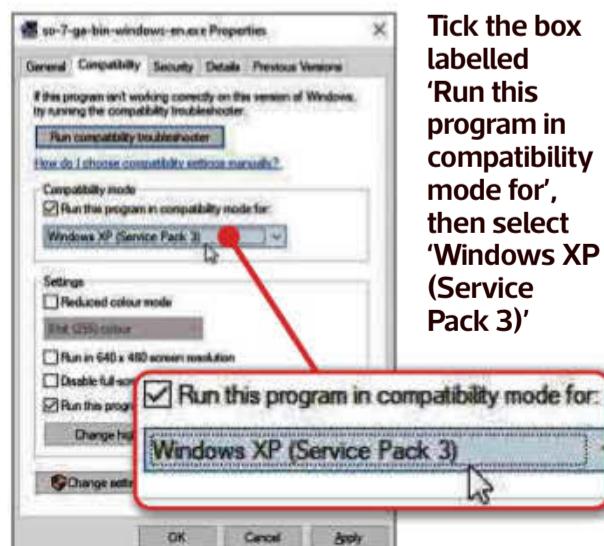
How do I convert WordStar files?

Q I was interested in your reply to Peter Brown in Issue 584's Problems Solved pages, where you told him how to convert his old Microsoft Works documents using Zamzar (www.zamzar.com). I have even older documents I wish to convert, created using WordStar 4 and with the file extension .ws4. Many years ago, Microsoft had a converter that allowed me to convert these files to Word format, but this tool seems no more. I tried Zamzar but the people there confirmed that it doesn't include WordStar 4. I've looked online for a converter. Although there are various options, the links always seem dead or missing. Any ideas?

Mike Hayes

A WordStar 4.0 was released in 1987, with the last version arriving in 1999. It wasn't even a Microsoft product, so we're not surprised the company has no further interest in supporting its users. It's a shame Microsoft killed off many old converter tools, but it would've required work and expense to update them to operate with more recent versions of Windows.

That leaves folks like you stuck. Zamzar often works, but evidently not here. Other converter tools are themselves either obsolete, or otherwise forgotten – with dead links aplenty online.



Tick the box labelled 'Run this program in compatibility mode for', then select 'Windows XP (Service Pack 3)'

However, we've found a circuitous route that should work. The .ws4 file extension is supported by the ancient StarOffice 7 suite. Development and support for that program are also long dead, but a free version remains available to download from the volunteer-run www.staroffice.com website.

It's not made for Windows 10 but we found that by using Compatibility Mode it can be forced to install. To do that, first right-click the downloaded installation file (so-7-ga-bin-windows-en.exe) and then choose Properties. Next, click the Compatibility tab and then, in the 'Compatibility mode' section, tick the box labelled 'Run this program in compatibility mode for' before opening the dropdown menu and choosing 'Windows XP (Service Pack 3)' (see screenshot below left). Click OK. Now double-click the so-7-ga-bin-windows-en.exe file to install.

We encountered numerous quirks when running StarOffice 7 in Windows 10. However, it runs well enough to let you open a .ws4 file before saving it as a 'Word 97/2000/XP (.doc)', and you can open those in any modern word processor.

Where's my 'Recovery disk' tool?

Q In Issue 566's Master Your Hard Drive & SSD Cover Feature you explained how to create a recovery disk. I've recycled my copy of that issue, and I don't have whatever Windows tool is required for creating this recovery disk. Is there a website where I can get it?

Bill Britton

A The tool in question doesn't need installing: it's an integral part of Windows. However, finding it isn't all that easy, unless you know where to look.

So, the quick way to get to the Recovery Drive tool is just to click Start, then type **recovery drive** before clicking Recovery Drive (see screenshot above right).



The quick way to the Recovery Drive tool is to click Start and then type 'recovery drive'

Why can't I download your recommendations?

Q I tried to download Quick Screen Recorder and WindowTop, both recommended in Issue 582's Best Free Software section. However, in both cases I was unable to download the files, instead receiving a message that the program could damage my computer. There didn't seem to be any way to proceed. Could you advise?

Brian Taylor

A We can assure you that neither program is damaging to your computer. This is the Windows SmartScreen system doing its job of warning you the program you're trying to run is unrecognised (by Microsoft).

There's nothing new or unusual about this but the box that appears often confuses inexperienced users or those who simply haven't seen it before, because it's not obvious that there is a way to continue. To do that, you first need to click the 'More info' link and then click the 'Run anyway' button.

Of course, we should say that it's always wise to be cautious. We're telling you that it's safe to continue here because we know that the programs we recommended are safe to use. However, if this warning appears in other situations don't impatiently proceed as above: instead, take a few moments to check what's what – Windows SmartScreen might just be stopping you from making a terrible mistake!

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Jargon Buster

32bit/64bit A measure of how much data a PC can process at once. Most older computers are 32bit, more modern ones are 64bit.

3G/4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

802.11ac A standard for wireless networks that allows for much higher transfer speeds than **802.11n**.

802.11ax Wi-Fi standard with speeds up to 10 times faster than 802.11ac. Also called Wi-Fi 6.

Add-on A program that adds extra features to your browser.

Adobe RGB A wider colour space than sRGB.

ADSL Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line. A technology that converts a standard phone line into a broadband internet connection.

Alpha channel Represents the degree of transparency (or opacity) of a colour.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel displays.

aptX A codec used to compress audio so it can be transmitted over Bluetooth with minimal loss in quality.

Backhaul The process of sending data to a wired access point to reach the wider internet.

Beta A version of software that's being tested.

Bitrate A measure of data transfer speed, or of the quality of digital video or audio files.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

Clone A feature found in backup programs that makes an exact copy of a drive on to another drive.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

DNS Domain Name System. A technology that associates computers with their addresses on the internet.

DOCX The default file format used by Word 2007 and later.

dpi Dots per inch. A measure of printed image quality, or the size an object will be shown on screen.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Dual boot To set up a PC with two operating systems, so that one must be chosen each time it starts.

EXE A program file designed to run in Windows.

Factory reset A software restore of an electronic device to its original system state.

Fps Frames per second. Used to indicate gaming performance.

FTP File Transfer Protocol. A system for transferring files between computers.

Hardware acceleration Using a graphics card to radically improve video and games performance.

HDMI High-definition media interface. A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HDR High-dynamic range. A camera that takes more than one photo with different levels of colour and contrast.

HDR10+ High-dynamic range 10. Current industry standard for TVs.

Heat dissipation Transfer of heat from hot to cold object or environment.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet.

IMAP Internet Message Access Protocol. A method for email that lets the user manage messages stored on a remote server.

INI file Standing for 'initialisation', this is a Windows file that stores data about the user's preferences.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IPS A screen technology that gives wider viewing angles and better, more accurate-looking colours.

LCD Liquid-crystal display. The technology used to create almost all flatscreen monitors.

LTPO Low-temperature polycrystalline silicon. Screen technology that lets electrons flow faster, making resolutions sharper.

M.2 A standard specification for internal PC expansion cards.

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.

NVMe Non-Volatile Memory Express. An interface that lets solid-state drives work faster.

Open source Software that can be modified by anyone.

OTF OpenType Font. A font format designed to replace TTF. Jointly created by Adobe and Microsoft.

P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

PCIe Peripheral Component Interconnect Express. A faster version of PCI - a slot on the motherboard for expansion cards.

Plug-in A small program that adds extra features to software.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression.

POP3 Post Office Protocol 3. A system for remotely accessing and retrieving email from an ISP.

Product key A unique serial number that must be typed in by the user before a program will launch for the first time.

PUP Potentially unwanted program. A program that may not be desired, despite the user consenting to it being downloaded.

QIF A file extension for a Quicken Interchange Format file used by Intuit's Quicken.

RAW A format for digital photos that stores the image exactly as the camera captured it.

Read speed How long it takes a hard drive to 'read' data, and respond to it.

Refresh rate Measured in Hertz (Hz), the number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

SATA Serial ATA. An interface for connecting hard drives and optical discs to a computer.

Source code Program instructions written in a high-level language that are readable by people but not computers.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors, printers and the internet.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts.

Tag A keyword used to describe a file or web page. Many programs use tags to organise related information quickly.

Thunderbolt A very fast port for connecting external storage to a PC.

TTF TrueType Font. A format for storing info about fonts, developed by Apple and Microsoft in the 1980s.

Tweeter A speaker designed to produce high audio frequencies.

USB-C A new connector that's reversible.

Woofer A speaker designed to produce low-frequency bass sounds.

Write speed How long it takes a hard drive to save data.

ZIP file A file that contains compressed documents or files.

Easy when you **Know How**

Worried that he's forgotten what those pointy ink-filled objects are used for, **Daniel Booth** tries to...

Turn his handwriting into a font

It's been so long since I wrote anything substantial that I've almost forgotten what my handwriting looks like. I type thousands of words every week with a speed only 25 years of practice gives you, but that fluency vanishes when I pick up a pen. How do you use one, again?

As someone who used to write 10-page stories at school, that makes me feel sad. I now watch my own six-year-old daughter begin to write stories (including one morbid tale that ended "and they died happily ever after"), and it makes me nostalgic for pen and paper.

It made me wonder if I could combine old and new by scanning my handwriting and then turning it into a digital font. Calligraphr (www.calligraphr.com) promised this task "has never been easier", so I tested its claim.

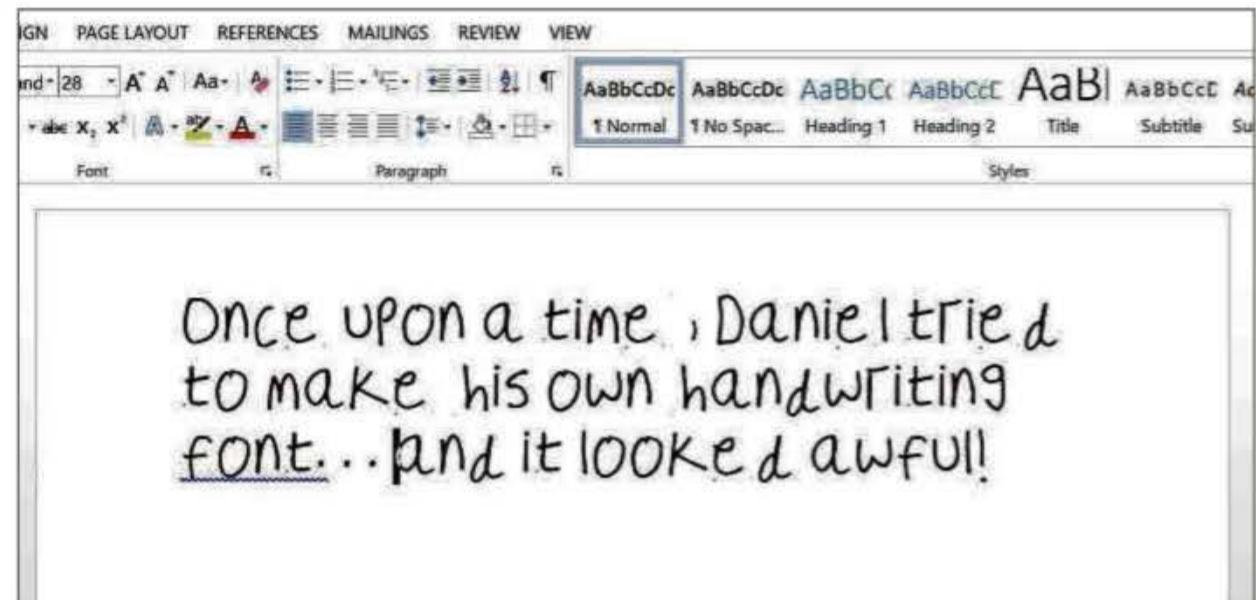


Minimal English may sound like a grumpy teenager's vocabulary, but it gives you all the letters you need



First, click Get Started For Free, create an account, then follow the instructions to log in. Now create a template with the characters you need. The free version gives you 75 characters, which should be enough – 52 letters (upper and lower case) plus numbers 0 to 9 gives you 62 characters, leaving 13 for punctuation.

Click the Basics heading on the left and you'll see a character set called Minimal English, which despite sounding like a grumpy teenager's vocabulary actually gives you A-Z and punctuation marks.



Daniel's final font – worse than a crayon-wielding toddler would manage

They'll appear in the main box on the right. Next click Minimal Numbers, and they'll be added too.

Download this template by clicking that option at the top. You'll see an options box where you can choose the file format (PDF or PNG). You can also change the size of the boxes into which you write your characters – I moved the slider two-thirds of the way across to give me plenty of space.

The download came as three sheets that I had to print. Now I had to write the characters, so I grabbed my daughter's Sharpie marker pen (black is best) and tried to make the marks bold and fluent. You can't use ligatures to join up your handwriting in the free version, but that didn't bother me because I found it hard enough just to make standalone characters that were neat enough.

You now need to scan the sheet or take a photo, then save the file to your PC. Go back to Calligraphr's site, click My Fonts at the top, then Upload Template on the bar underneath. Find your file, then click to upload it. If you like what you see, click 'Add characters to my font'.

Mine looked OK, if a little thick. Perhaps I should've swapped that Sharpie for a biro. Click a character, then select Edit Character and zoom in to see all its jagged edges. You can smooth these by dragging your cursor over them, having



Calligraphr makes it easy to create a font, even one as wobbly as Daniel's

first chosen a brush and size.

With all that done, click Build Font, name it, then click Build and you'll see a preview page. Then click either purple link to download it in TTF (TrueType) or OTF (OpenType) format. OpenType is newer and compatible with more devices, but you can download both just to be safe. Finally, open the downloaded file, click Install, then open Word. Click the dropdown menu in the Font section, then search for and select your font.

Calligraphr is one of the easiest sites I've used, but my font is less impressive. Individually, the letters looked fine (see screenshot above). Together, they produced a font that would embarrass a toddler who has only just realised crayons aren't for eating (see main screenshot). I'll start again when I can remember which way round to hold the pen.



Need help with devising your own customised font?

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