



**BOOST YOUR WI-FI
SIGNAL WITH FOIL**
Yes, this actually works! **p74**

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Better **NEW** way to recover your PC

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Computer **active**

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– but don't
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WhatsApp

STOP USING IT **WRONG!**

► Master **SECRET** tools most people ignore
– all **FREE** on your phone, tablet & PC! **p50**

- ✓ Make video calls online
- ✓ Scan documents to PDF
- ✓ Transfer large files
- ✓ Hide your private chats
- ✓ Leave voicemails
- +** Block unknown callers

PLUS

**CONVERT NEWS SITES
INTO EBOOKS** **page 35**



**WIPE PC JUNK – WE'VE
FOUND A NEW WAY** **p38**

Set a schedule to auto-remove the lot!

Save with our pre-built
DEALS

Includes **FREE** next-day shipping



 **PCSPECIALIST**

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From the Editor

In an age where adverts ruin much of the internet, it feels miraculous that WhatsApp is largely free of them. It's even more remarkable when you consider that WhatsApp is owned by Meta, which has yet to find a part of Facebook it doesn't want to stuff with ads.

It's surely a key reason why WhatsApp has grown from 450 million users when Meta bought it in 2014 to over three billion today. But I've also been impressed by how it adds new features without sacrificing its core functionality: sending messages and

making calls. Indeed, many of those features are so hidden they may have passed you by. But not Robert Irvine. He has dug deep into WhatsApp's settings to unearth the best tools you're probably not using.

They include plenty of ways to improve your chats and calls, but also tasks that make WhatsApp sound more like a traditional desktop program than the world's biggest messaging app. Keep it free of ads, Meta, and it'll stay that way.

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Computeractive
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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.

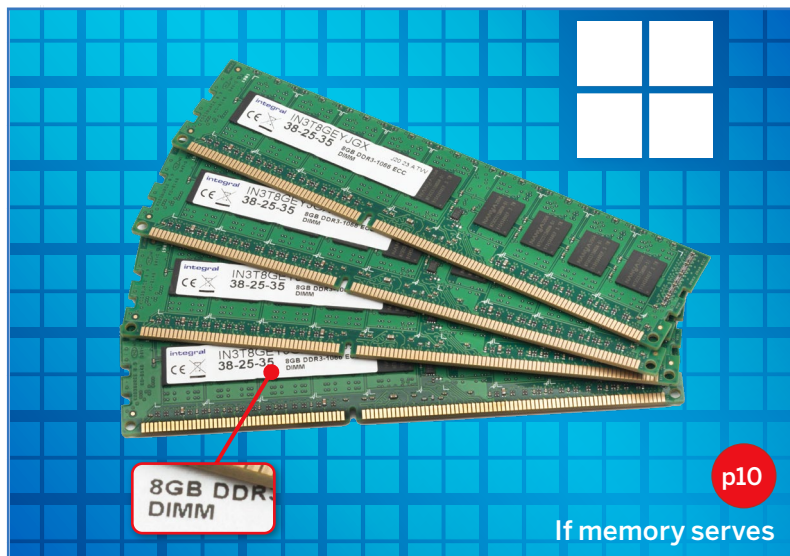
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News reader interface showing options to add custom news sources, configure feeds (e.g., TechRadar Computing Feed, Windows Central), and manage article retrieval settings.

WhatsApp

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COVER
FEATURE
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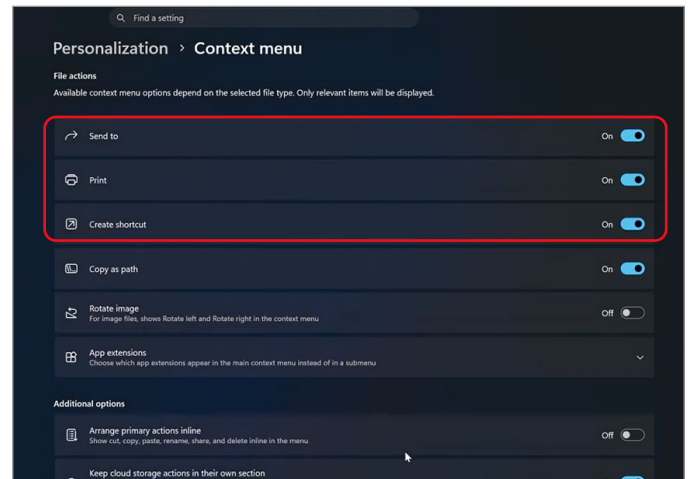
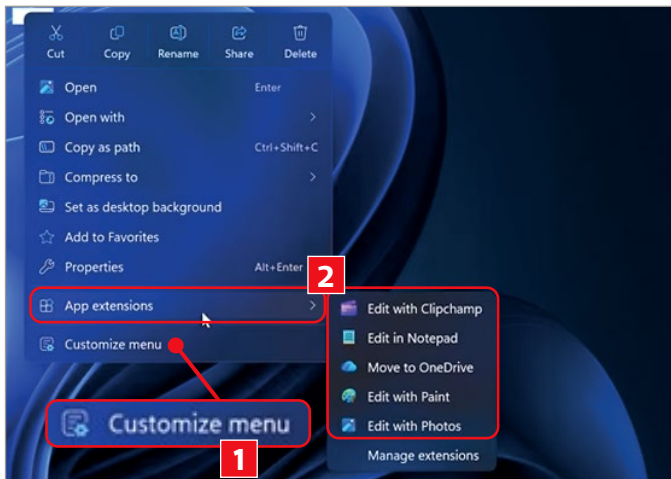
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Crash courses



Microsoft makes it easier to change right-click menu



Credit Phantomofearth

Microsoft is making it easier to add and remove options to Windows 11's right-click context menu. This follows complaints from users who were unhappy that many options have been removed

from the Windows 10 menu.

The changes are buried in the experimental version of the operating system, and could appear in the full version by the end of the year.

The new menu has a 'Customize menu' option at the bottom (1 in our screenshot above) that opens the Personalization section in Windows Settings.

This gives you options to add or remove tasks such as 'Send to', Print or 'Create shortcut' (see screenshot above right) to the right-click menu (see box below for the full list).

As well as more ways to customise the menu, Microsoft has removed options that many users thought were unnecessary. These include the 'AI actions' menu which let you perform AI-powered tasks such as remove objects from images and blur backgrounds.

It follows the company's pledge earlier this year to reduce how often AI appears in Windows.

In addition, it has ditched by default 'Show more options', which you can currently click to see more of the tasks that were in Windows 10's context

menu. You can bring back the full Windows 10 menu by holding down the Shift key while right clicking.

There's a new 'App extensions' menu for editing with apps such as Clipchamp, Notepad, OneDrive, Paint and Photos (2 in our screenshot above left).

'Refresh' File Explorer

Right-clicking in File Explorer now shows the Refresh option. This tells File Explorer to check the folder again and update what you see, which is useful when something has changed – such as a new file name – but it hasn't appeared yet.

Also, when you right-click a file you'll see that 'Open file location' has been moved closer to the top.

To see all the changes watch this YouTube video from Windows Insider Phantom of Earth: www.snipca.com/60057.

WHAT WE THINK

Without doubt the top complaint we receive from people who move to Windows 11 is the loss of the old right-click menu. Yes, it was cluttered, but users ignored what they never needed and just clicked what they did. They hated having to click Windows 11's 'Show more options', so will be pleased that Microsoft has finally given them more ways to decide what appears in the menu. The company should prioritise adding it to the next Windows update.

ADD THESE TO YOUR RIGHT-CLICK MENU

- Send to
- Print
- Create shortcut
- Copy as path
- Rotate image
- App extensions
- Arrange primary actions inline
- Keep cloud storage actions in their own section
- Show more options
- Move properties to the bottom of the context menu



You'll like this...

WhatsApp will soon alert you about scam messages (www.snipca.com/60059)



but not this...

A hacker set up an 'evil' Wi-Fi network while on a flight (www.snipca.com/60058)

PC prices to rise as Microsoft charges more for Windows

Windows computers are likely to get even more expensive after Microsoft increased the price it charges PC manufacturers to include Windows 11 on new models.

It's raising prices by between seven to 10 per cent, according to reports in Taiwanese media, significantly higher than the usual increase of below five per cent.

Manufacturers will have little choice but to pass on some of this cost in prices paid by shoppers. PC prices have already risen sharply this year due to the global shortage

of RAM driven by unprecedented demand from AI data centres.

The reports say the increases came into effect in July, so they could already be included in the price of some new PCs.

They apply specifically to Acer and Asus, though it's likely to hit other major manufacturers such as Dell and HP.

The amount that manufacturers pay to



Microsoft varies according to the processor used, with more powerful chips attracting higher Windows fees. This means the increase won't necessarily be the same for every PC.

It's also unlikely that, for example, a 10-per-cent increase in Microsoft's fee will result in exactly the same increase in the price of a computer because licensing Windows is only one part of the cost of making a PC.

Microsoft hasn't commented on the reports.

IPHONES COST 40% MORE TO MAKE

Soaring memory prices mean that it could cost Apple 40 per cent more to make the upcoming iPhone 18 Pro than its predecessor. Analysts at TrendForce say that Apple

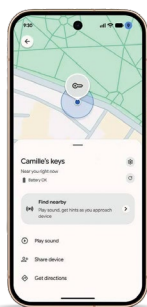
might absorb some of the cost, but the 18 Pro – due in September – is still likely to cost a lot more than last year's 17 Pro, which starts at £1,099 for 256GB.

Google launches AirTag rival Pixel Tag

Google has announced the Pixel Tag (pictured far right), its answer to Apple's AirTag, for finding lost keys, bags, wallets and other belongings.

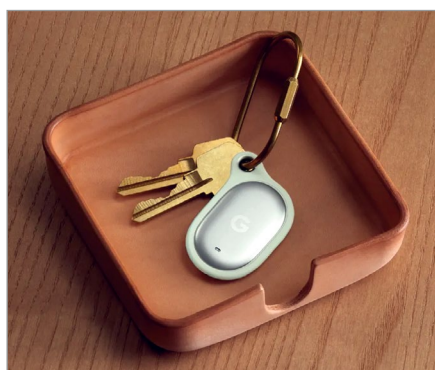
It costs £29 for one or £99 for four and will go on sale in the UK on 11 November.

The tag connects to Google's Find Hub network (pictured on phone), which uses nearby Android phones to help locate it when it's out of Bluetooth range. Google says the network includes more



than a billion Android devices. It doesn't work on iPhones.

When you're nearby, compatible phones can show



the tag's distance and direction using ultra-wideband (UWB) technology. You can share it with up to 10 other people to find items together.

The Pixel Tag is IP67-rated, so it's protected against dust and can survive being submerged in water.

Visit www.snipca.com/60025 to ask Google to email you when it's available.

FOUR NEW PIXEL PHONES

Google has also launched four new Pixel phones – the Pixel 11 (pictured), 11 Pro, 11 Pro XL and 11 Pro Fold. New features include voice typing and taking photos while recording videos. Prices start at £879, with all four on sale now from www.snipca.com/60026.



IN BRIEF



WINAMP TO OFFER MUSIC STREAMING

Winamp is teaming up with Deezer to launch a new music-streaming service in the first half of 2027. Its revamped music player will combine streaming with your own music libraries, internet radio and podcasts. Subscription prices haven't been announced. The existing Winamp desktop player will continue. For details, visit www.snipca.com/60027.

THOMAS COOK OFFERS FREE 1GB eSIM DATA

Thomas Cook is offering holidaymakers 1GB free eSIM data through French provider Kolet. When customers book a holiday, Thomas Cook will send them an email containing a link to redeem their data 72 hours before they leave. The data is available in more than 190 countries, though you need to use it within a period of 48 hours. Read more at www.snipca.com/60024.

TOMORROW'S WORLD



This is Honor's new Robot Phone, which has a camera that pops up in a gimbal and can rotate 360 degrees to follow the person or object it's filming. It can even 'nod' its head to keep time with music. It's only available in China at the moment, and will cost over £1,000 if launched in the UK. Watch it at www.snipca.com/60023.



IN BRIEF

FIIO RELEASES 2000s-STYLE MP3 PLAYER

FiiO has announced a budget MP3 player inspired by devices from the early 2000s. Priced £55, the Snowsky Echo Nano (pictured) has a 1in screen, a metal scroll wheel and seven hours' battery life. It supports **microSD** cards up to 256GB and comes in seven colours including black, white and purple (pictured). Pre-order from www.snipca.com/60016.



CHATGPT DESKTOP APP ARRIVES ON LINUX

ChatGPT's desktop app is now available to download for Linux. OpenAI has released a preview version for the **distros** Debian, Fedora and Ubuntu – download it from www.snipca.com/60013. It follows rival AI **chatbot** Claude launching on Linux (Debian and Ubuntu) in July (www.snipca.com/60014).

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!



Children are being radicalised by AI videos showing fruit and vegetables in violent acts. That's according to the Global Network on Extremism and Technology, which published images at www.snipca.com/60012. Don't they realise kids were watching *Tom and Jerry* more than 80 years ago?



Google refunds customer after wiping *Lord of the Rings* films

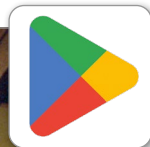
Google has refunded a customer after accidentally wiping the extended edition of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy from his Google Play library.

The case gained much attention online after the customer shared on Reddit (www.snipca.com/60015) the first chat he'd had with Google's support team.

It said that because the films were no longer in its catalogue they couldn't be restored to the customer's account. It added that because they were bought in 2022, the 120-day period for claiming a refund had passed.

This prompted an angry response from Reddit users, who said it highlights the risks of buying digital content such as films and TV shows because you never officially own them, and they can be deleted at any time by the store you bought them from.

One Reddit user pointed out the films were still available



on Google's store, while another said Google's terms state customers are entitled to a refund or replacement if purchased content disappears within five years.

The customer eventually spoke to a "senior customer support specialist" who admitted it shouldn't have deleted the films and issued a £20 refund.

It also sent him links to buy the films on YouTube, but only the first and the third movies and not the extended editions.

Google hasn't explained why the films disappeared from the customer's library in the first place.



Has Google or anyone else ever removed your films? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Fake CCleaner download steals your passwords

A fake version of the PC-cleaning software CCleaner installs a malicious browser extension that lets scammers spy on your PC.

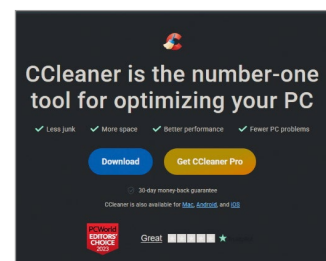
Security company Malwarebytes said that it's available at the URL `ccleanerwind[dot]top`, designed to impersonate the genuine URL, www.ccleaner.com.

The fake site (pictured) has two download buttons, just like the official site – one for the free version of CCleaner and one for the paid-for Pro edition.

Clicking either download link actually installs the Chrome extension GhostDesk, which lets the scammers take screenshots of your computer and record what you type.

It can also steal the **cookies** that keep you signed in to websites, potentially giving scammers access to your accounts without needing your passwords.

In addition, it can alter the webpages you visit by adding its own code to them, changing what appears on screen to trick



you into handing over personal information.

Malwarebytes said the extension probably disguises itself as a cleaning tool in order to avoid detection by antivirus software.

It added that it's found the same malware on fake sites offering downloads of 7-Zip and Adobe Acrobat.

Don't switch off Freeview yet, urges Countryside Alliance

Freeview shouldn't be switched off until "reliable, affordable and universal alternatives" are available, the Countryside Alliance has said.

It made the plea in response to the Government's proposal to axe the service in 2034.

A survey of over 1,000 Countryside Alliance members found that 96 per cent watch Freeview, with 84 per cent regarding it as an essential public service.

Only 35 per cent of respondents said their broadband is fast enough to stream TV over the internet.

The Alliance said that with broadband "being affected by network congestion, weather and service outages, internet television simply cannot yet replace the trusted and dependable service Freeview currently provides for everyone" (www.snipca.com/60007).

It added that written responses from members described Freeview "as a trusted and dependable way of accessing news and coverage of national events, especially for older people and those living alone".

Affordability is a major concern, the Alliance said, particularly for pensioners and households on fixed incomes that would need to pay for faster broadband to stream TV reliably.

Other campaigners are urging the Government to change course. Broadcast 2040+, which includes local Age UK charities and the channels Talking Pictures TV and Great!, has written to new Defra minister Jenny Riddell-Carpenter saying, "free, universal access to public service content is best delivered through the terrestrial TV network".



Nearly 160,000 people have signed a petition (www.snipca.com/60008) created by Dennis Reed, head of over-60s campaign group Silver Voices.

He said, "Andy Burnham would be bonkers to proceed with this premature plan", and warned that it could become the new Prime Minister's "winter fuel moment".

The Government's consultation on the plans ends on 31 August. It will then consider the responses before deciding what to do.

IN BRIEF

TalkTalk

TALKTALK MOVES 120,000 CUSTOMERS

TalkTalk has moved around 120,000 broadband customers to new provider Rise Fibre. The move took place on 1 August, and you should have been contacted by both firms if you've been affected. They claim your broadband bills and speed will stay the same. For details, visit www.snipca.com/60005.

EE LAUNCHES 8GBPS HOME BROADBAND

EE has launched an 8Gbps broadband service – its fastest ever speed. It's available for £75 a month in Guildford, Woking and surrounding areas, along with 2.3Gbps for £55 a month. EE said the services will be rolled out to more areas "in the near future". Read more on EE's site: www.snipca.com/60006.



PARAMOUNT+ RAISES UK TV PRICES

Streaming service Paramount+ is hiking the price of all its subscription tiers. The 'Basic with Ads' package increases from £4.99 a month to £5.99, or £43.99 a year to £52.99; Standard from £7.99 to £9.99 and £70.99 to £88.99; and Premium from £10.99 to £12.99 and £97.99 to £115.99. New customers already pay these prices, with existing subscribers likely to follow.

Apple to let iPhone users copy content to Windows PCs

Apple has agreed to let iPhone owners copy text and other content and paste it directly onto a Windows computer, and vice versa.

It follows a request from Microsoft in March under the European Union's Digital Markets Act, which requires major technology companies to make some of their products work better with rival services.

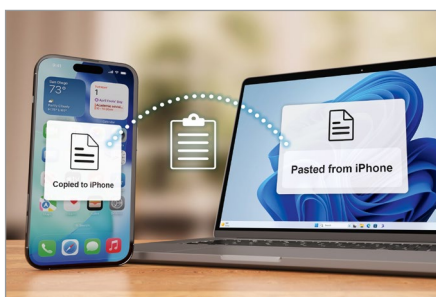
Apple said that adding the capability to iPhones requires a "significant engineering effort".

Once set up, you'll be able to copy something on your iPhone and paste it on your computer without opening a

program or manually transferring the content. The same will work in the opposite direction, with permission given once for each Windows PC.

Apple says it expects to finish building the tool by 2027, with a full release expected the following year.

It's developing the feature to comply with EU rules, so it will initially be available only in the EU. It hasn't said whether it will eventually come to other countries such as the UK, though a wider release seems likely.



Microsoft's Phone Link app (www.snipca.com/60010) already connects Windows computers to iPhones for calls, messages and contacts, but it can't copy and paste content saved to the iPhone's clipboard.

Apple's Universal Clipboard (www.snipca.com/60009) already lets users copy and paste content between iPhones, iPads and Macs.

Question of the Fortnight

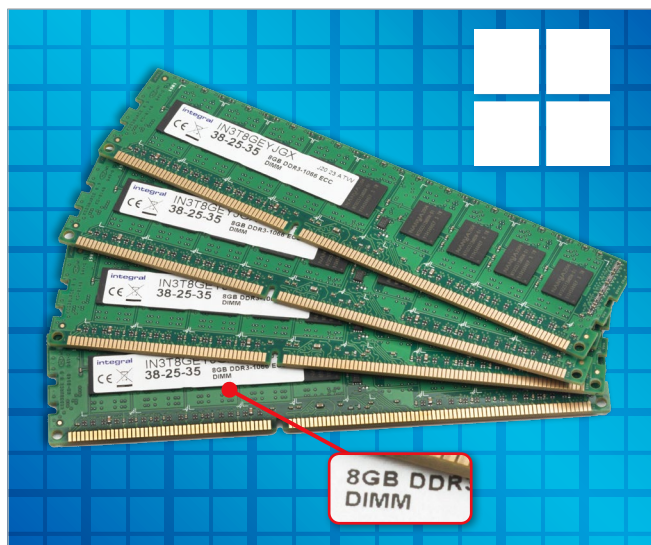
Do you now need less RAM to run Windows 11?

Microsoft wants to slash memory requirements so it runs better on 8GB RAM

Microsoft has always said the minimum **RAM** you need for Windows 11 is 4GB (www.snipca.com/60054). But at the same time it has always encouraged you to buy more powerful machines - up to 32GB for playing games and editing photos and videos.

That advice was fine when RAM was affordable. But the surging price of memory, caused by huge demand from AI data centres, has forced Microsoft to reassess its position.

In March, as part of a “commitment to Windows quality” designed to win back the trust of users, Windows chief Pavan Davuluri pledged to improve memory efficiency to free up “more capacity for



That all sounds like Microsoft has the best interests of users at heart, but in reality it's been forced into this decision. As RAM

Even Apple, which makes billions selling premium products, has been pushed into the same corner. Its MacBook Neo laptop (£699 from www.snipca.com/60056), launched in March, starts with just 8GB RAM despite Apple previously insisting that 8GB was only for light use. It's been a huge hit, with Apple reportedly doubling production to 10 million units this year.

It all means that if 8GB becomes the new norm for computers over the next few years - chiefly because that's all most people can afford - Microsoft needs to make sure Windows runs flawlessly on it. Would it have been so keen if 16GB was still the affordable choice?

Microsoft hasn't admitted that soaring RAM prices are behind its change of tack, but the timing is hard to ignore. And there's another intriguing clue. It has removed advice from its website that

THE FACTS

- Microsoft has pledged to cut Windows 11's 'memory footprint' so it runs more smoothly on 8GB computers
- It comes as rocketing RAM costs are forcing PC manufacturers to prioritise 8GB machines
- Microsoft has also dropped the advice that you need a 32GB PC for playing games with “no worries”

described 32GB as the “no worries” amount of RAM for gaming. It had previously said 16GB was enough for most gamers, with 32GB recommended for more demanding use.

None of this means you should avoid 16GB RAM machines if your budget allows. Prices have risen by around 30 per cent this year and you might struggle to find a decent new model under £1,000, but 16GB is still essential if you have dozens of browser tabs open, edit photos and videos or play demanding games.

If it works, Microsoft's memory blitz will mean that 8GB becomes sufficient for more basic tasks, such as using Office software. But it's a huge challenge. Recent tests show that Windows 11 uses 6.7GB of RAM on a 8GB machine, leaving little room for other programs. That would leave lots of unhappy users and further damage Microsoft's reputation.

“8GB computers might become the new norm because that's all most people can afford”

the apps you run” (www.snipca.com/60055).

Davuluri followed this in July by promising to cut Windows 11's “memory footprint” so it runs comfortably on PCs with 8GB RAM. He said this will “deliver a fast and responsive Windows experience across the PCs customers use every day” (www.snipca.com/60053).

A few days later Windows design chief Marcus Ash told our sister site Windows Central that Microsoft was on a “relentless” mission to ease memory requirements.

costs soar, PC manufacturers are increasingly prioritising 8GB models to keep prices reasonably affordable.

Those manufacturers include Microsoft itself. In June it added 8GB versions of its 12in Surface Pro and 13in Surface Laptop, giving shoppers a cheaper option (from £799) after the price of its 16GB models of the laptops had risen sharply. When RAM was cheap, it urged you to buy more of it. Now that RAM is expensive, it's working harder to make do with less.

Protect **your tech**

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Fake card-payment requests from banks

What's the threat?

Scammers are increasingly trying to trick people into authorising fake card payments, according to research from Which? that's backed up by the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS).

It said the scams begin with a cold call from a fraudster impersonating your bank's security team, the police or a financial regulator. They claim your account is under attack and advise you to move funds to a 'safe account' you hold with a different bank.

These transfers are called 'me-to-me' because they move money between accounts belonging to the same person. They're not covered by rules introduced in 2024 that require banks to reimburse most victims of 'authorised push payment' fraud, in which scammers trick people into sending money to accounts they control.

Once the money has been moved, the scammer will try to steal it using your

card or other payment details, which they'd have stolen in a **phishing** attack or obtained in a data breach. Another tactic is to ask you to share one-time passcodes (OTP) to add your card to their own digital wallet.

How can you stay safe?

Never approve a card payment over the phone or give someone an OTP, regardless of the reason. No bank will ever ask you to do this in order to prevent your account being hacked. Victims aren't entitled to automatic compensation, though you may be able to use chargeback or Section 75 coverage to get your money back.

Which? also found out through a Freedom of Information request that in 2025 the FOS received more complaints

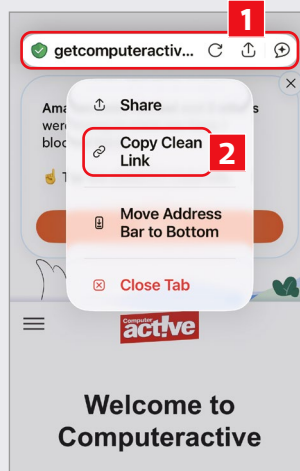


about authorised card fraud involving Revolut than any other bank. Of the 912 complaints against Revolut it upheld 274, though this doesn't necessarily mean the bank had to reimburse the victim. Barclays and Monzo were the next most-complained about banks. See the full list at www.snipca.com/59998.

New tools | Send links without trackers in DuckDuckGo

DuckDuckGo has added the option to its iOS app to remove tracking information from URLs you share with others. When the recipient opens the link, the website won't receive the tracking details that were added to the URL to record where the click came from.

For example, if you copy a product link from an advert and send it to a friend, DuckDuckGo removes the advert's tracking information. Your friend still reaches the same product page, but the URL no longer tells the retailer which advert generated the visit.



First install the DuckDuckGo iOS app (www.snipca.com/59995) then open its browser, visit the URL you want to share, then long-press it in the address bar (1 in screenshot). Now tap Copy Clean Link 2 and it will be saved to your iPhone clipboard. You can also tap the three lines bottom right, then scroll down and choose Copy Clean Link.

DuckDuckGo hasn't said whether an Android version is coming.

For more DuckDuckGo tips, read Issue 742's Cover Feature. Buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/59996.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers



'Free' GPT-6 Pro access

I use ChatGPT most days and find it helpful dealing with various enquiries, so my eye was caught by an email giving me free access to GPT-6 Pro for 30 days. I assumed this was one of OpenAI's more advanced **chatbot** models. But the sender's email looked dodgy: openai@secure-alert-system.com.

I'm just an ordinary Joe so why would I have been selected for "exclusive early access to our most advanced model yet"? I also searched for GPT-6 Pro and found no reference to it. Finally I checked with the real ChatGPT and it said the offer was a scam.

Jeff Oldham



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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

There's no protection from rogue AI

✉ Having read your 'What's all the fuss about?' on AI kill switches (Issue 742, page 49, pictured below), I feel like we're trapped between megalomaniac politicians and greedy businesses. Both want complete control over how far AI should go. I'm not sure

which I trust least.

What troubles me about AI is that its negative effects can harm anyone regardless of whether you actually use it. This is unlike other

technology. If you don't use email, for example, then you'll never be tricked by a **phishing** email. If you never download anything, then you won't download a virus to your PC. But an AI going rogue will cause chaos indiscriminately.

There will be no protection.

I don't trust any AI company. From the start they've overhyped what it can do in order to raise billions of dollars. It will come to a messy end soon in a gigantic stock-market crash in the US, leaving Chinese AI firms as the global leaders. Worried? You should be.

John Lloyd

Switching provider is easier than complaining

✉ Ofcom's claim that broadband complaints have fallen to a record low doesn't necessarily mean companies are getting better at helping customers (Issue 742, page 9). Instead, it could reflect how easy it now is to switch providers when you're fed up and can't be bothered to trudge through the complaints process. Twice I've done that, when complaining seemed a complete waste of time.

Alan Bills

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If we are unable to resolve your complaint, or if you would like more information about IPSO or the Editors' Code, contact IPSO on 0300 123 2220 or visit www.ipso.co.uk



Why TV transmitters shouldn't be switched off

✉ If and when Freeview is switched off and internet TV comes about, it will become simple for the anti-BBC interests to propose the moving of BBC TV services to a subscription model. I fear this would be extremely detrimental to public service broadcasting.

TV transmission aerials carry not only TV signals but radio for AM, FM and DAB. They're also needed for the private radio networks used by taxi drivers, plant hire operators, public utility services and presumably emergency services networks. Mobile phones have reduced the need for private radio networks but not replaced them in their entirety.

At home we use Virgin Media for our main TV and Freeview for the kitchen TV and whenever our cable service is interrupted. I'm fairly tech-savvy, but will be quite old when the switch-off happens and may not care!

Martin Powell

✉ Like many Freeview users my main issue with the proposal to close it is the inability to record to a PVR via Freely. I use this specifically for films

that are broadcast at an inconvenient time and aren't going to be available on catch-up services. This includes many films on Talking Pictures TV. This has some classics not available on other streaming services (in the UK at least) and are expensive to source on DVD/Blu-ray for what may be a single viewing.

This also casts doubt on Arqiva's plan to offer a more limited service in future. That would only be for the main channels, most of which have good catch-up services for which we do not need a PVR.

Phillip Bradshaw

CA SAYS Many readers continue to tell us they're concerned about plans to axe Freeview. They can take some comfort in knowing campaigners are fighting plans to scrap the service in 2034. These include the Countryside Alliance, which responded to the Government's consultation by insisting that "Freeview should not be switched off until reliable, affordable and universal alternatives are available" (see page 9). The deadline for responses to the proposals is 31 August. We'll cover developments in depth over the coming months.

Our road has cables, so why can't we get full fibre?

✉ In recent issues you've asked readers to write in with concerns about the looming copper switch-off. Our problem is that, despite seeing the fibre-optic cables being installed in our road in October 2022, we're now being told that full fibre isn't available for our house. Openreach's postcode-checking

What's the Issue...?

✉ I need to consider my Windows 10 options. When was your 'Survival Guide' for the operating system?

Tom Butcher

CA SAYS You'll find that in Issue 718's Cover Feature.

✉ When did you explain how to use the Linux **distro** Winux, which closely resembles Windows 11?

Paul Murray

CA SAYS In Issue 720, page 74.

✉ I've downloaded Synthing in order to sync files across my home network. When was your How To explaining it?

Les Mortimer

CA SAYS In Issue 719, page 35. Read it and the features above on our 2025 Back Issue Stick: www.snipca.com/57764.



website (www.snipca.com/59984) lists some houses for which FTTP is shown as “available to order now”, but other houses are shown as “No plans to build full fibre to this property yet”.

There appears to be no logic as to which houses fall into either category. We don't know why a significant proportion of the road should be denied full fibre when we saw the cables being installed with a cable-connection box located on the pavement in front of each house.

We only discovered this problem in May when Plusnet (our internet provider) gave us a choice of staying with them or being moved to EE if we wanted to retain our landline. We were happy to give up the landline but were then told we would remain with the existing FTTC connection with copper cables to the house. Plusnet promised that when full fibre is available we can “upgrade any time”.

Martyn Hart

CA SAYS Over the years many readers have told us that postcode-checkers give confusing, contradictory and misleading information. It's hard to know how often they're updated, so for more accurate details phone your provider. Openreach doesn't have a number for general broadband enquiries, so you might need to ask your provider to ask Openreach when full fibre will be available.

I switched from EE to Sky and lost my landline number

Further to my previous letter (Issue 737) about BT forcing me to switch to EE, I've now moved to a new provider but I've been unable to keep my old landline number.

As a Sky 'Diamond' customer, I accepted its offer of 900Mbps broadband and talk for £25, saving £40 a month. However, we were assigned a new landline number, not the number we had had for 35 years. This was despite applying to keep it, providing EE account details and our old number as part of the One Touch Switch process.

After a week and many hours talking to Sky, it said I'd have to cancel my contract and reapply for a new one where the old number could hopefully be recovered. But then Sky's emails and texts kept closing the case without resolution. All this was remarkably upsetting as the old number was essential during family illnesses and numerous hospital, hospice, nurse and GP contacts.

STAR LETTER

BT's new activation fees? Smaller firms will love them

I expect smaller internet providers will be delighted that BT and EE have reintroduced activation fees ('Question of the Fortnight', Issue 742, pictured). Companies like Community Fibre and Hyperoptic lack the big-name recognition of BT, so they have to compete on price. They already do this very effectively.

They stand to benefit in two ways. First, if other providers like Sky and TalkTalk copy BT and introduce fees, it will deter customers from switching between the big firms so they'll look to smaller rivals who - if they're clever - will add 'no activation fee' to their advertising. Second, existing customers of the smaller providers will be less inclined to switch to a big company if they have to pay an activation fee.

It's not so much the amount (£20-

£30) that puts people off, but the principle. Firms should seek your business, not punish you before you've even used the internet. If companies have to pay more to supply routers given the rising cost of memory, they should find another way to recoup this or cut costs elsewhere.

I can recommend Community Fibre (<https://communityfibre.co.uk>), which I've been using since 2024. I moved from Virgin after they increased my monthly bill from £80 to £160 (albeit with TV services). I wasn't even getting the speeds I was paying for. Community Fibre charges me only £25 for 930Mbps. Its service is available only in London, but it stretches quite far into the suburbs. I am able to get it in Bexley in south-east London.

James Norris



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



Sky said EE didn't release my number before the switch. Oddly, Sky admitted it doesn't communicate directly with other providers to resolve switching issues. I was therefore advised to contact EE myself, going against the guidelines for One Touch Switch.

EE was excellent and revealed that BT 'owns' the number and keeps it in 'quarantine' for 14 days in the hope you'll switch back. This admission astounded me - forcing switchers to wait weeks before their number could be transferred to another provider, regardless of One Touch Switch. This seems unethical, forcing families to lose contact details.

Steven Millard

Windows 11 update 'broke' our printer

When Microsoft declared Windows 10 obsolete, my wife insisted her PC be upgraded so that she didn't lose her

connection to the outside world. As we were unable to upgrade her old PC (which still works fine) to Windows 11, we had to buy a new computer.

She had been printing on a Canon Pixma TS5151 (pictured below) via the old Windows 10 PC for over three years, and via this new Windows 11 PC for more than a year. But along came an Microsoft upgrade for Windows 11 and the printer wouldn't connect.

Fearing the cartridges were empty (no warning of this) I bought new cartridges, but to no avail. So after checking all the connections I tried to reinstall the Canon software twice. This also failed. Nothing I found online solved the problem.

Hours later I decided to connect the printer to the old Windows 10 PC and - surprise, surprise - it worked perfectly.

So Microsoft has done it again!

To say that I'm peeved is an understatement. I'm looking into Linux.

Geoff Brown





We stand up for your legal rights

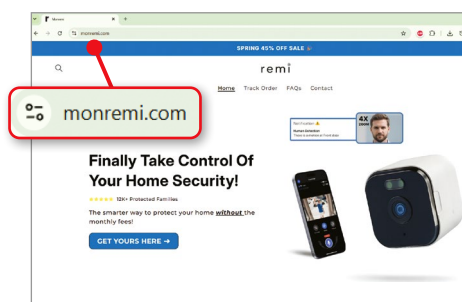
Will PayPal reopen case about security cams that didn't arrive?

Q I ordered two security cameras from Chinese company Monremi (www.monremi.com) at the end of April, paying through PayPal. When they didn't arrive after a month I contacted the company, who said they had proof from Evri that the order was delivered. Then I got multiple emails saying the shipment was still on its way. I made an initial claim with PayPal which went in my favour, but was reversed because PayPal said it had proof of delivery. I can't get a sensible answer from Evri. What can I do now?

Peter Broome

A Peter should try to get PayPal to reopen his case. However, it will generally only do this if there's fresh, compelling evidence to support his original claim.

First, he should ask the seller to provide proof from Evri that the parcel was delivered to him. He should also keep chasing Evri for proof including, if applicable, the recipient's signature. Although Evri has no contractual relationship with him, it may still agree



to do this. If the evidence shows the parcel wasn't delivered to him, he can ask PayPal to reopen the dispute.

Next, Peter should ask PayPal for the proof of delivery it claims to have received. If it refuses or still won't reopen the case, he should complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service (www.snipca.com/59990), which will consider whether PayPal handled the dispute fairly. He must do this within six months of PayPal's final response.

As for Monremi, we'd advise readers to be wary of buying anything from them. Its Trustpilot rating is a lowly 1.4 stars from over 100 reviews (www.snipca.com/59989).

CASE ONGOING

Was my camera advertised incorrectly?

Q I bought a floodlight camera in July and, although it works well on my internet connection, I can't get it to work remotely using my phone. Other people have reported the same problem online. Not being able to access the camera away from home makes it useless to me. What can I do?

Tony Jones

A Tony should contact the seller or manufacturer and ask for help. Perhaps he needs to change a setting to get it working, or allow a specific permission.

However, if the camera was advertised as allowing remote viewing over a mobile connection but fails to do so, this could amount to a misleading commercial practice under the Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024. Tony should warn the retailer about this when asking for help.

If it doesn't get back to him, Tony should seek help under the Consumer Rights Act. More than 30 days have now passed since purchase so the retailer is allowed to replace the camera or attempt a repair. If it fails to do so, it must refund him.

CASE ONGOING

CASE UPDATE

Tannas admits it must deal with faulty Asus Blu-ray drive



Amazon Marketplace seller Tannas has admitted that it shouldn't have asked reader Edward Taylor to approach Asus about a faulty Blu-ray disc drive (see Issue 738).

Edward bought the Asus BW-16D1X-U (pictured) in November 2025, but it stopped working in May. He asked us why Tannas had referred him to Asus given that the onus is always on the retailer - not the manufacturer - to fix problems.

It was a good question, and one we put to Tannas. It agreed that it should have dealt directly with Edward's complaint, saying the confusion was caused by a mix-up over the drive's model number. It also said it should have picked up the drive to inspect it and now plans to do this. Because it stopped working within six months of purchase the onus is on Tannas to prove it wasn't inherently faulty. It said it will refund Edward if the drive turns out to be faulty.

We're glad Tannas has acted swiftly to



resolve Edward's case. The company has a four-star customer rating on Amazon (www.snipca.com/59277), though it's a mix of extremes, with 68 per cent giving five stars and 19 per cent one star.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

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

Will I have to pay tax on items sold on Vinted?

Q I was left some figurines, collectables and stamps by my late mother which I want to sell on Vinted. But I've been told this could mean I would have to pay tax and could lose benefits. Is this the case?

Eric Tyler

A Selling personal items on Vinted, Gumtree, eBay or similar sites won't normally create a tax bill. HMRC won't treat you as a trader and won't class the money as earned income. Vinted must report some buyer information to HMRC, and will contact

you if you make 30 sales or sell around €2,000 (around £1,700) worth of goods in a calendar year. For more details, visit www.snipca.com/60019.

Tax only becomes relevant if a personal item has increased in value since the probate valuation. In that case, Eric might owe capital gains tax on the gain. He should keep records of the probate valuation, the selling price and any costs, as these can reduce any taxable gain.

Benefits are separate. Selling items doesn't count as income, but if the money Eric receives pushes his savings or



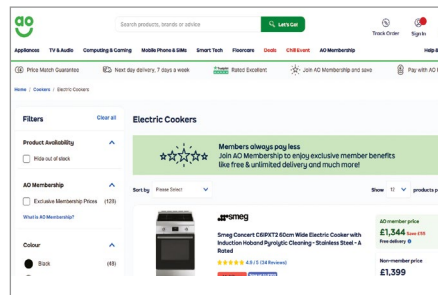
capital above the limits for means-tested benefits, his entitlement could change. If so, he must report it to the relevant benefit office.

CASE CLOSED

Can I reject faulty goods before they're inspected?

Q I bought a cooker from AO (www.ao.com) which didn't have any internal shielding. I contacted AO immediately after delivery but it said it wanted to send out an engineer to inspect it. This has been done now and I've got a refund, but did I have to wait for the company to send an engineer before rejecting the cooker?

Sharon Griffiths



A No, Sharon didn't have to wait for AO to inspect the cooker before rejecting it. Under the Consumer Rights Act, customers can reject goods within the first 30 days if

they're faulty, not as described or not fit for purpose. That right exists regardless of whether the retailer has inspected the item.

However, AO is entitled to check the cooker before issuing a refund, and sending an engineer is a practical way to do that with such a large appliance. But inspection doesn't delay or limit the customer's right to reject.

If a retailer can't inspect within a reasonable period, generally considered to be 14 days, you can still insist on rejection and collection. If they accept the fault, they must refund you within 14 days.

CASE CLOSED

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

Eufy sent me upgraded version of video doorbell

 In November 2024 I bought a Eufy video doorbell from Currys for £120. This worked fine until an upgrade to our broadband in May this year. I tried several fixes I found online but with no luck.

I went back to Currys and they suggested completely resetting the doorbell, but this also failed. I then emailed Eufy's



UK support on 24 June of this year. They were very helpful and offered me several solutions each time, but they all failed with the same error message.

Eventually on 4 July Eufy offered to replace the doorbell and, because my model was out of stock, they provided an upgraded

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

model which arrived within two days. I quickly installed it and it worked straight away. What great service.

Steve Appleby

Contact
Eufy

- **Email** uk.support@eufy.com
- **Live chat** www.snipca.com/59991
- **Phone** 01604 936 200

Grow Your Family Tree



Ever wondered if someone else is researching the same ancestors as you? Follow **Richard Holt's** advice to...

Search family trees published by others

Ancestry and Findmypast let members upload their family trees, which you can then search. They're not always accurate, but can be a great source of information that you couldn't find elsewhere. If you have a question about the tree, you can even contact the person who compiled it.

Search trees on Ancestry

On Ancestry, visit www.ancestry.co.uk then click Search at the top and select Public Member Trees. Now enter as much info as you know, including name, date of birth, and death and marriage details, as well as the names of other family members, such as father, mother, spouse and children. If you click someone shown in the Quick Fill Suggestion list (see screenshot above right) Ancestry will automatically populate the search form from the details in your own family tree.

I searched for my 3x great-grandfather Alfred Ashby who was born on 16 March 1858 in Radnage, Buckinghamshire. The search included many irrelevant results, but an Alfred Ashby matching my ancestor's details appeared in 117 trees uploaded by other users. Click 'View All' to the right of the search result to see the details contained in each of the family trees.

My results included a match in the

Click one of the names in Ancestry's Quick Fill Suggestion section to fill in search boxes from your own tree

'Anne Dalley Family Tree' (www.snipca.com/59952), which included a photo of Alfred. I had never seen any photos of my ancestor and contacting Anne put me in touch with the 92-year-old widow of a distant relative who owned the photograph.

You can also search a collection of *private* family trees on Ancestry (www.snipca.com/59954). You can look through these as above and see results, but to access the whole tree you'll have to contact the owner.

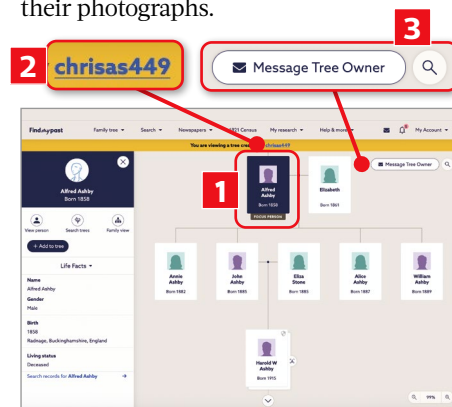
Search trees on Findmypast

Encouraged by this, I also searched for Alfred on Findmypast's public trees (www.snipca.com/59953) and got 134

results. However, there were many entries where the details didn't match. If you get similar results, click Relevance to sort them.

Once you've got results you're happy with, click 'View person' to get an individual view or 'View in Tree' to see the person in the context of the family tree (1 in our screenshot below). To contact the tree owner either click their username (2) or Message Tree Owner (3).

Viewing the family tree of the first search result showed a line of descent from my 3x great-uncle John Ashby (1884-1974). I had previously contacted the tree owner who was also able to share their photographs.



You can see your ancestor as they sit in public tree, then contact the owner for more information

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

A few months before he died suddenly, my great-great-grandfather moved from Northern Ireland to Scotland. This was in the 1880s. I'd like to find his will, but I'm not sure where to look. Is there a joint record of wills from both Northern Ireland and Scotland, because hundreds of thousands emigrated from the former to the latter.

David Amos

There isn't a single collection, so instead look for Northern Irish wills (1858-1965) at Nidirect (www.snipca.com/59924) and Scottish wills (1513-1925) from Scotland's People (www.snipca.com/59925).



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

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AFTER



2 FREE PANELS

*QUOTE CA0826

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Carol Doyle, Surrey

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Anne Bird, Bristol

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Best Free Software

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

PRIVACY TOOL

O&O ShutUp10 3.3

www.snipca.com/59973

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

It's been a busy year so far for O&O ShutUp10. The brilliant free tool for tweaking Windows settings has been updated five times, launched a paid-for Premium edition and dropped the '++' from the end of its name.

This new version introduces yet more ways to make Windows less intrusive and annoying, and to stop Microsoft foisting unwanted AI tools on your PC. These additions bring ShutUp10's total number of settings to over 300, which can be applied just for you (as 'current user') or across your whole computer ('local machine').

The most notable new options relate to **passkeys** and can be found in ShutUp10's App Privacy section. Aimed at Windows users who don't want to use passkeys or be prompted to sign in with them, they let you disable app access to passkeys and to your list of stored passkeys (if you've already created one).

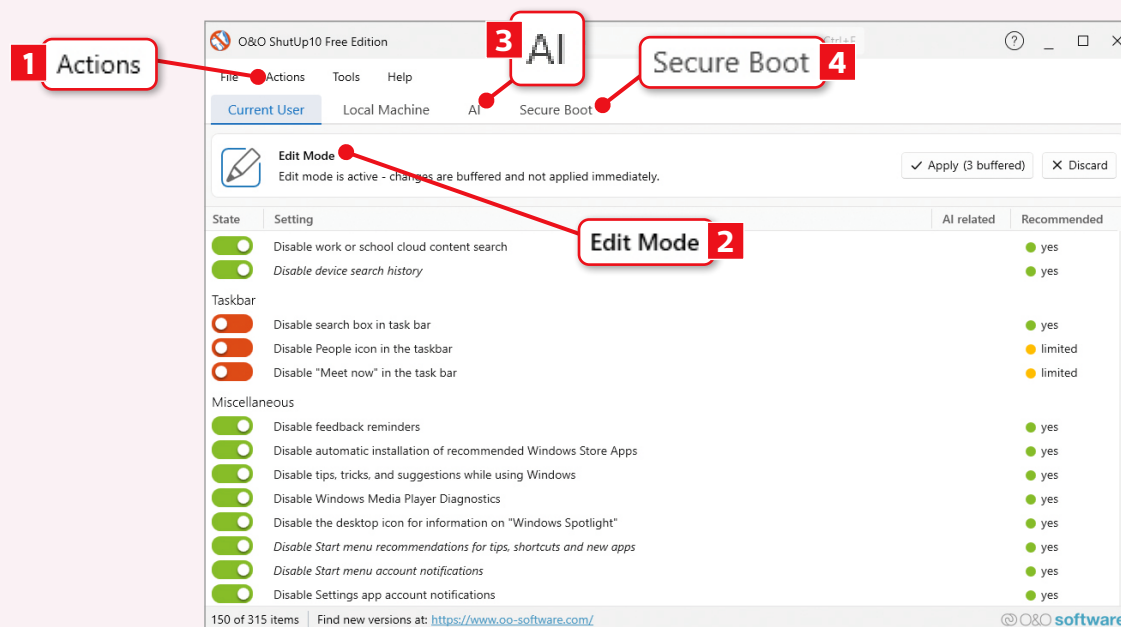
This should force websites and apps to default to standard password sign-ins instead. However, because passkeys are more secure, O&O recommends you don't disable them.

There are also new App Privacy settings for disabling app access to Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and USB devices. These are to control new permissions Microsoft has added to Windows 11, but you shouldn't need to apply them.

More useful are new options in ShutUp10's Miscellaneous section. These disable Microsoft's 'recommendations' in the Start menu for tips, shortcuts and apps, and its account notifications in the Start menu and Settings app.

Best of all, the 'Copilot & Windows AI' section on the Local Machine tab has new settings for disabling AI actions in File Explorer and Notepad. In the App Privacy section on the Current User tab, you can go further by denying all apps access to Microsoft's generative AI.

Other useful additions include withholding your PC's name when you share **diagnostic data** with Microsoft (under User Behaviour on the Current User tab), and disabling your Windows search history (under Search).

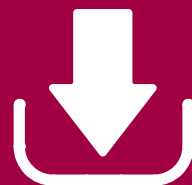


1 O&O ShutUp10 now makes it easier to undo all settings you've applied, if you have trouble using some Windows features. Click the Actions menu and choose Undo, then 'Restore initial settings'.

2 There's also a handy new Edit Mode, which 'buffers' the settings you change rather than applying them immediately. To activate it, click the Tools menu and select Edit Mode followed by Enable.

3 On ShutUp10's AI tab, you can uninstall both versions of Copilot from your PC – the Windows app and the Microsoft 365 Copilot app. Click the Remove button to get rid of the AI assistant for good.

4 Click the Secure Boot tab to check if your PC is using the latest **Secure Boot** certificates. Don't panic if it doesn't have them – Microsoft is still rolling out the updated certificates to some Windows users.



SEARCH TOOL

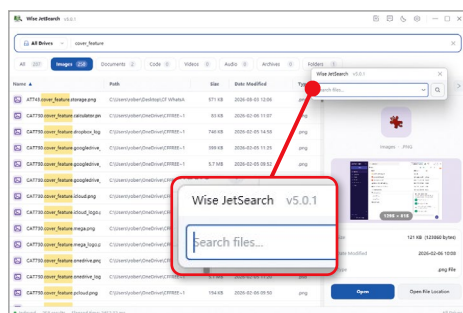
Wise JetSearch 5.01

www.snipca.com/59976

What you need: Windows 7, 8, 10 or 11

Wise JetSearch offers a faster way to search your PC than the built-in Windows search tool. It quickly indexes all your drives, then displays instant matches

when you start typing a query into its search box. Click the tabs across the top to filter matches by file type, including Images, Documents, Videos, Audio and Archives (such as ZIP files). Wise JetSearch also has a floating Quick Search box (see screenshot) you can keep open when you minimise the main program to your system tray. This new version redesigns the interface to give it a cleaner, more modern feel and introduces full support for **dark mode** so it matches your system's theme. Wise has also improved the Preview function, so you can see the contents of images without opening them.



DRIVE-SPACE ANALYSER

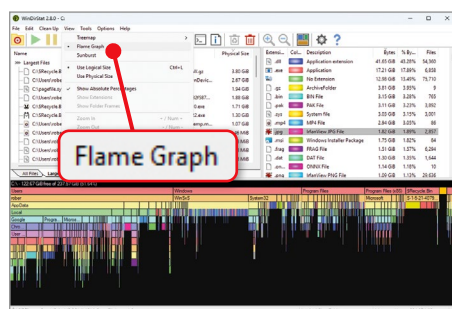
WinDirStat 2.8

www.windirstat.net

What you need: Windows 7, 8, 10 or 11

WinDirStat can seem a bit dull next to its smarter rival WizTree, and its name doesn't help. The latest update remedies this by introducing new ways to visualise

storage usage across your drives and folders. Click the View menu to choose the new Flame Graph option (see screenshot), which shows folder size in stalactite-like manner. Or select Sunburst to view drive usage as a pie chart. WizTree has also added Hilbert and Moore options to its standard Treemap, which customise how the colour-coded blocks are displayed. On a more practical note, the program's File Watcher, which tracks changes to drives and folders, has new controls on WinDirStat's toolbar. When you run the tool, by choosing Start File Watcher in the Tools menu, you can now pause or resume it with a single click.



SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

Icecream Image Resizer Pro

www.snipca.com/59977

Price: £14.95 **Free trial:** Limited free version

What you need: Windows 7, 8, 10 or 11

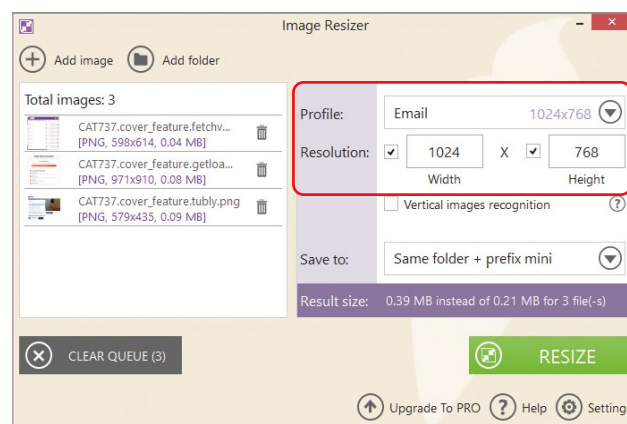
Resizing images so you can share them by email, post them on social media or use in creative projects can be a tedious chore. Icecream Image Resizer makes the task much easier but, like all of the company's software, it's **freemium**.

Its simple, compact interface lets you add images one by one, or select a whole folder. In the free version of Image Resizer, you can only resize three pictures at a time, which seems rather stingy – the Pro edition has no limit.

We like that you can choose a resizing profile, which automatically sets the resolution to a suitable width and height. Options include Email (1024x768 pixels – see screenshot), Desktop (for desktop wallpaper – 1920x1080) and Facebook post (1200x630). There's also a 'Vertical images recognition' setting that switches the dimensions for photos captured in portrait mode.

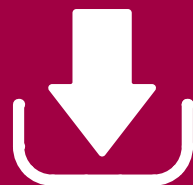
Select the folder you want to save the resized images in, then click Resize. That's really all there is to the program, and the Pro version doesn't add much more. Aside from unlimited resizing, you can add a logo to images, but that doesn't justify paying £14.95.

We prefer the completely free Converseen (www.snipca.com/59555), which resizes and converts large batches of images. It's not as slick as Icecream's tool, but it has no limits and supports more image formats.



OUR VERDICT: Don't pay for it

Icecream Image Resizer is very easy to use, but its free version is too restrictive and the Pro edition doesn't offer much for your money. If you need to resize lots of photos in one go, Converseen is a better option.



What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

What can I replace StorageCrypt with?

Q I'm looking for an alternative to StorageCrypt. I've used the paid-for version for years because of how it worked on portable drives. My favourite feature was how it added a cut-down version of the encryption software onto the encrypted drive so it could be opened on any PC, without StorageCrypt being installed. Any suggestions? I'm happy to pay.

Paul Whatmore

A VeraCrypt is the best alternative. It has the same tools as StorageCrypt, offers stronger encryption and is completely free. Visit www.snipca.com/59875 and click the 'Portable version' link under 'Latest stable release'. Save it to your hard drive, then double-click it and follow the instructions to extract it to a VeraCrypt folder on your portable drive. Open this folder and double-click 'VeraCrypt-x64.exe' to launch it from your portable drive.

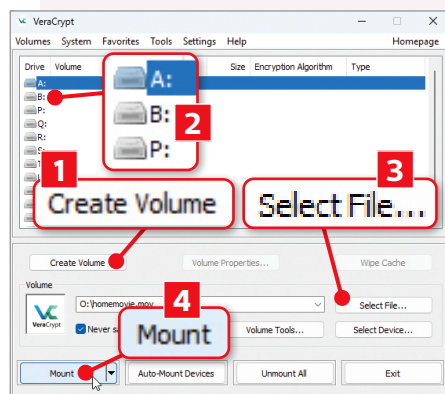
When the main window appears, click Create Volume (1 in our screenshot). Leave 'Create an encrypted file container' selected, click Next and follow the prompts in the Volume Creation Wizard to set up a file-based

container, inside which your encrypted files will be hidden. This container can be given any name – such as homemovie. mov – and stored inside a folder to further hide its true purpose.

Once it's created, click Exit. To connect to the

container, first select a drive letter from the list 2 – when you unlock your encrypted container, you'll be able to access its contents through this drive in File Explorer. Click 'Select File' 3 to select your new file-based container, followed by Mount 4. Enter your password then click OK.

Once unlocked, open File Explorer, then double-click the drive letter to open your container and use it like any other folder. When you're finished, click Unmount in the VeraCrypt window to lock it up.

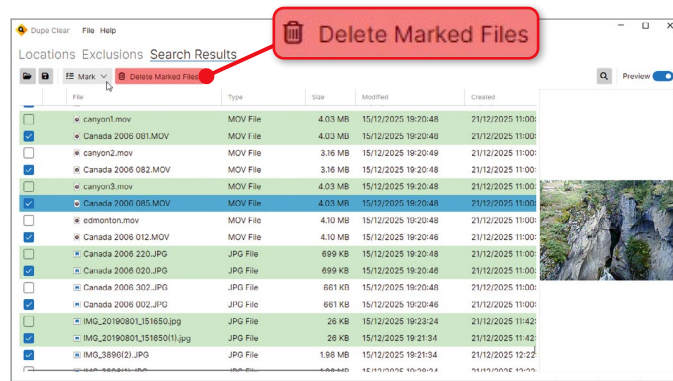


What's a simple tool for deleting duplicates?

Q I need a simple program for deleting duplicate files. I've tried AllDup (<https://alldup.de>), but it's too complicated and doesn't tell you which files are safe to delete.

Stuart Hillier

A Try the free tool Dupe Clear (www.snipca.com/59876, pictured), which we covered in greater depth in Issue 740 (page 51). Its default settings match files by content and size, and it selects the newest version of any duplicate file it finds to delete. You can change these or manually go through the list and decide which version to remove.

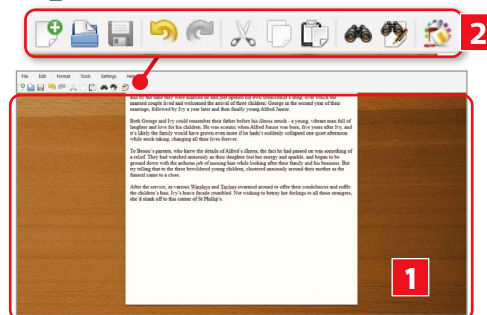


What's a simpler alternative to Word?

Q When I'm writing, I need programs with the minimum of clutter, so I can fully concentrate. I fear Microsoft will start adding pointless Copilot tools to Word. Is there a simpler alternative?

Mark Bond

A You might like Focus Writer (www.snipca.com/59878) which fills your screen with a pleasant backdrop, space for your document and nothing else (1 in our screenshot). You can then just type without any distractions. Its toolbar and menus are hidden by default. To reveal them, hover your mouse at the top of the screen 2.



Named & Shamed



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

SOFTWARE WARNING!

AntiVirus Sweep & Security's advert onslaught

Search for antivirus apps on the Google Play Store and you'll find plenty of tools from reputable companies, including AVG, Bitdefender, McAfee and Norton. How, then, did the wretched AntiVirus Sweep & Security rank as highly as third in the list of free apps when I checked in early August?



Its official page (www.snipca.com/59987) shows its developer as Jammer Education (1 in screenshot), which seems to have no other internet presence beyond a near-empty YouTube channel (www.snipca.com/59986). Its reviews aren't great - you'd want more than a 3.5 average (2 for any security app - but it has been downloaded more than five million times (3). Worth a go, I thought.

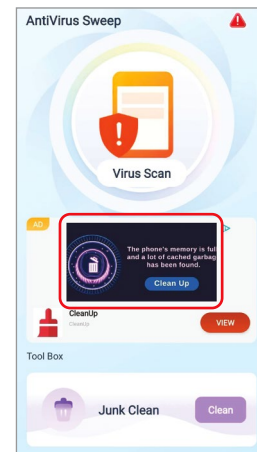
Turns out, it wasn't. Adverts appear here, there and everywhere - even in the middle of the interface (see screenshot above right). Flick between menus and you're pummelled with unskippable, full-screen videos. After completing a



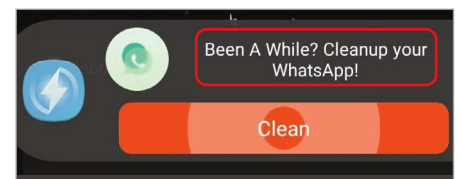
Five million downloads but AntiVirus Sweep & Security is total garbage

virus scan, it blasted me with an alarming message in red writing warning that my memory was full and needed urgent cleaning. Tapping this opened yet another advert.

The app is obviously garbage so I closed it, but it immediately nagged me to clean up my WhatsApp - claiming it had "been a while" (see screenshot above right). It had actually been mere seconds.



This ad is disguised as part of the app's interface



Been a *while*? This nag actually appeared within seconds of closing the app

It's scandalous that Google allows such brazen junk in its store.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?



WHAT THEY SAY

OpenAI on Hugging Face 'hack'
www.snipca.com/59950

"This incident occurred during an internal evaluation which prompts models to pursue advanced exploitation using complex attack paths, in an effort to quantify their cyber capabilities. We estimate maximal cyber capabilities by running this evaluation without production classifiers used to prevent models from pursuing high-risk cyber activity."

WHAT THEY MEAN

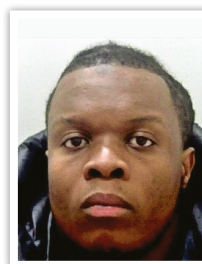
We let our AI off the leash to see what damage it could do. Not the best idea.

KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Olasukanmi Owoeye

Olasukanmi Owoeye must have been sleeping nervously after an international police operation took down the iSpooF software that scammers used to disguise the phone number they were calling from. He had managed to steal £277,000 from victims using iSpooF before the service was dismantled in 2022.

It wasn't until 2024 that UK police caught up with Owoeye, who had been operating from a flat in



Dartford, Kent. He was paying several women to phone victims impersonating their bank, with one handing over more than £100,000. Investigations identified more than 1,000 victims across the country. Globally, iSpooF has been used to make 10 million scam calls.

In July the 28-year-old pleaded guilty to fraud at Maidstone Crown Court and is now serving three years and nine months in prison.



LAPTOP | £899 from Dell www.snipca.com/59955

Dell XPS 13

Copy Book

There's one big reason to be disappointed with the new Dell XPS 13. In the US, where it was launched to compete with Apple's MacBook Neo, you can buy the basic model for \$699 (£520). In the UK, it's available to students and educators for £699, and £899 to everyone else.

“Handled our typical daily work tasks without any problems”

However, this still represents good value for what is essentially a premium laptop in every respect apart from its price. It's 12.7mm thick and weighs 1kg, making it even slimmer and lighter than the Neo. You can barely feel it in your backpack yet its aluminium chassis feels sturdy. It opens up one-handed, thanks to the lip at the front of the lid, while the keyboard deck gives you just enough space to type on comfortably. The touchpad is big enough for accurate tracking across the laptop's 13.4in screen.

Like the Neo, the XPS 13 has only two **USB-C** ports – one of these will be occupied when charging. However, here they're both 10Gbps **USB 3.2** Gen 2 ports, whereas the Neo scrimps with one slow **USB 2.0** port.

The XPS 13 is also bang up to date on wireless connectivity, with Wi-Fi 7 and Bluetooth 6. You can still connect to a monitor via its USB-C port and use Bluetooth for a wireless mouse and headphones, though you may not even need the latter, as the built-in mic and quad-speaker system sound surprisingly good.

The 13.4in touchscreen gives you an incredibly sharp 2560x1600-pixel resolution image, and we measured its

brightness at 398cd/m² with SDR content and 420cd/m² with **HDR**. That means it's fine for using anywhere – as long as you avoid direct sunlight. Its colour range is impressive, covering 105 per cent of the **sRGB** standard and 74.7 per cent of **DCI-P3**, ensuring photos and videos look great. It's a shame the same can't always be said of the footage from the **1080p** webcam, which often looks washed-out.

The XPS 13 uses one of Intel's new **six-core** Core 5 320 processors, which is designed for budget laptops, and combines this with 8GB of **RAM** and a 512GB **SSD**. Devices with this low amount of RAM can struggle on Windows 11, and the XPS 13's scores in our **benchmark** tests put it below the MacBook Neo's performance levels, and even further behind affordable 16GB alternatives like the Lenovo IdeaPad Slim 5x Gen 11 (reviewed in Issue 738).

Nevertheless, the XPS 13 still handled our typical daily work tasks without any

SPECIFICATIONS

Six-core Intel Core 5 320 processor • 8GB DDR5 RAM • Intel Graphics • 13.4in 2560x1600-pixel IPS screen • 512GB SSD • 2x USB 3.2 Gen 2 ports • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 6 • Windows 11 Home • 12.7x297x201mm (HxWxD) • 1Kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/59955



problems, even with 15 browser tabs open and a YouTube video running in the background. As long as you steer clear of games and more demanding apps, it's fine. Sadly, there's no way to upgrade the RAM after purchase.

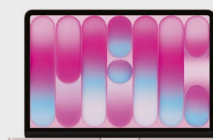
The XPS 13 beats the MacBook Neo on battery life, lasting 14 hours 26 minutes of continuous web browsing, whereas Apple's budget model managed 13 hours 25 minutes. That should easily get you through the average day.

Were it available at closer to the US price, we'd declare the XPS 13 the best budget Windows laptop currently available, even with its limited RAM. As it's priced, it's still a good option, provided you're aware of its limitations.

VERDICT The build and screen quality of a premium lightweight laptop at a lower price, though the modest 8GB of RAM limits performance

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Apple MacBook Neo £699 Apple's budget laptop has similar strengths, but macOS runs more efficiently on 8GB RAM



SMARTPHONE | £1,699 from Amazon www.snipca.com/59957

Samsung Galaxy Z Fold 8

Open wide

Samsung has tried something bold with the eighth-generation of its Galaxy Z Fold phone.

The passport-sized exterior looks uniquely squat and wide compared with most modern tall, thin Android phones, but this helps make it Samsung's smallest and lightest foldable phone to date.

What's more, when you unfold it, you now see a 4:3 **aspect ratio** main screen, which is more in line with iPads than Android tablets. This means it's better for reading, streaming video, browsing and gaming.

“Samsung's new technology makes the crease between the two halves of the screen close to invisible”

It helps that Samsung's new Flex Titanium technology makes the crease between the two halves of the opened screen close to invisible, with the two sections snapping neatly into place as you unfold them. With its two bright **AMOLED** screens and their anti-reflective coatings, the phone provides a fantastic viewing experience.

Some apps, such as Gmail, make the most of all that space, opening your inbox in one panel and your selected email in the other. With multi-tasking activated, you can also have multiple windows open on the same screen. Meanwhile, clever AI features prompt you to open related apps in a split view without having to leave the app you're using, so that when a text message asks if you're free to meet up, you can open your calendar instantly to check.

With the Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 processor, games will run at their highest



detail settings and you can run multiple apps on-screen without a worry. Our performance test results were among the best we've seen for a smartphone – even beating the mighty iPhone 17 Pro Max.

Meanwhile, Samsung's new silicon-carbon battery technology boosts capacity without adding bulk. In testing, we managed a day of mixed usage, checking emails, shooting videos and playing music, and we were still left with the battery at 52 per cent.

The one big compromise you make for the new design is that there's less room for cameras, so while you get a 50-megapixel main camera and **ultrawide** lens, there's no telephoto option. Luckily, Samsung's image-processing prowess means you still get excellent photos from the Z Fold 8, even in low light, and the screen gives you plenty of space to work with Samsung's excellent image-editing tools.

This is without doubt an expensive smartphone, and it's frustrating that it's **IP48** water-resistant but not **IP68** dust-proof. In all other ways, however, the Z Fold 8 feels like the future of foldable phones.

SPECIFICATIONS

Octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 processor • 12GB RAM • 5.5in 1972x1248-pixel resolution AMOLED cover screen • 7.6in 1848x2448-pixel resolution AMOLED folding screen • 256GB storage • 50-megapixel rear main camera • 50-megapixel rear ultrawide camera • 2x 10-megapixel front cameras • IP48 water resistance • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 6.0 • Android 16 • 124x82x9.7mm (HxWxD) • 201g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/59957

HOW WE TEST

Computeractive is owned by Future PLC, which employs a team of specialist technical reviewers. You'll often read references to our benchmark testing, which is a method of assessing products using the same criteria. For example, we test the speed of every PC and the battery life of every phone and tablet in exactly the same way. This makes our reviews authoritative, rigorous and accurate.

Future PLC also owns the magazines *PC Pro*, *T3* and *What Hi-Fi*, and the websites Tom's Hardware (www.tomshardware.com), TechRadar (www.techradar.com) and Windows Central (www.windowscentral.com). This means we can test thousands of products before choosing the most relevant for *Computeractive*.

FAIR AND IMPARTIAL

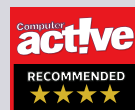
Our writers follow strict guidelines to ensure the reviews are fair and impartial. The manufacturer has no involvement in our tests.

OUR AWARDS



We award every product that gets five stars our Buy It! stamp of approval. It means we were

extremely impressed by the product, and we think you will be too.



Every product that gets a four-star review is given the Recommended award. We highly recommend these products, although they just fail to meet the high standard of our Buy It! winners.

PRICES

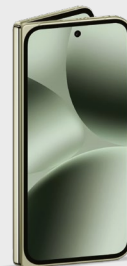
Our reviews contain a link to the best price we found online at the time of press.

VERDICT Samsung's new design makes this the best foldable phone/tablet yet, though it's probably too pricey for most



ALTERNATIVE

Google Pixel 10 Pro Fold
£1,299 Google's foldable phone isn't as innovative, but packs in powerful AI features and a 5x telephoto lens



MINI PC | £749 from Amazon www.snipca.com/59972

Geekom IT13 Max

Square deal

The majority of mini PCs are aimed at the budget market, with many using components that have gone beyond their normal sell-by date, including older **DDR4 RAM**. Not so the Geekom IT13 Max, which has an Intel Core Ultra 9 processor that's only two generations old plus a healthy chunk of **DDR5 RAM**. With its competitive price tag, it might be fast enough to tempt you away from some big-name, high-performance desktop PCs.

“A speedy all-rounder, capable of handling heavy workloads, if not the latest games”

At first glance, the IT13 Max looks much like many of Geekom's other models from the past few years. The front is dominated by an array of four **USB 3.2 Gen 2** ports – one of which provides power for charging even when the PC is turned off. Next to that you have the headphone socket and power button, with only a logo on the top to break up the rather businesslike matt-black finish.

The whole thing is quite large by mini PC standards, but because most of the casing is plastic, it's very light at just 380g. The metallic inner frame and base cover offer some protection from accidental knocks and Geekom claims it can withstand pressures of up to 200kg.

There are more ports around the back, including another **USB 3.2 Gen 2** port, a single **USB 2.0** port and two **USB-C 4.0** ports. Add two **2.5 Gigabit Ethernet** ports and a couple of **HDMI** ports, and you're well equipped for fairly complex desktop setups. There's even an **SD card** slot on the left-hand side.

The only glaring omission is an **OCuLink** port, giving you no way to hook up an external **GPU** for added 3D graphics power. At least with **Wi-Fi 7** built in, you shouldn't be struggling with



a slow **Wi-Fi** connection.

You'll need to undo screws from the four feet and remove the base to access the internal components, but once you're in there's little you can do except add a second **SSD** in the spare **M.2** slot. As it's a smaller **M.2 2242** (22mmx42mm) slot, you're restricted to drives of that size. **RAM** is soldered to the motherboard, so there's no further upgrade possible.

Thankfully, with 24GB of **RAM** already fitted, there's no desperate need to upgrade unless you're a creative professional or want to use more demanding **AI** tools. The IT13 Max's scores in our performance **benchmark** tests put it ahead of recent mini PCs like the **GMKtec NucBox K17** (reviewed in Issue 741) and **Minisforum AtomMan G1 Pro**. And while the super-powered **GMKtec NucBox Evo-T2** (reviewed in Issue 740) is even faster because it uses Intel's latest **Panther Lake** chips, it comes at a significantly higher price.

What's more, demanding graphics-

rendering and 3D tests show that the **Core Ultra 9 185H** processor is still a speedy all-rounder, capable of handling heavy workloads, if not the latest games.

This isn't a budget mini PC, but the IT13 Max looks very appealing and gives you more power and superior spec than cheaper mini PCs, without the exorbitant £1200-plus price tags we're seeing with some high-performance models. Its limited upgrade potential keeps it off our **Buy It!** mini PC top spot, but it's one of the best devices available for everyday home and office use.

VERDICT With a modern specification, great connectivity and strong performance levels at a decent price, this is an impressive mid-range mini PC



ALTERNATIVE **Minisforum AI X1-255** £659 A powerful **Ryzen** processor, more **RAM** and superior upgrade potential make this fantastic value



SPECIFICATIONS

16-core Intel Core Ultra 9 185H processor • 24GB **DDR5 RAM** • Intel Arc Graphics • 512GB **SSD** • **Wi-Fi 7** • **Bluetooth 5.4** • 2x **HDMI 2.0** ports • 5x **USB 3.2 Gen 2** ports • 1x **USB 2.0** port • 2x **USB-C 4.0** ports • 2x 2.5 **Gigabit Ethernet** ports • 1x 3.5mm audio socket • **Windows 11 Pro** • 50x136x132mm (HxWxD) • Three-year warranty www.snipca.com/58924

EBOOK READER | £429 from Amazon www.snipca.com/59974

Onyx Boox Go 10.3 Gen II Lumi

Easy read

There's no question that Onyx's latest Boox device gives you a fantastic reading experience. Its 10.3in monochrome screen has a 300ppi resolution, making text look superbly crisp whatever you're reading. With deeper contrast than your average E-ink screen, photos and illustrations look sharp and detailed, while the even frontlighting is perfect for reading after dark. There's a non-frontlit version available for £30 less (www.snipca.com/59975), but the lighting means you can read whenever and wherever you want.

“It can run other reading apps and copes with any text or image file format”

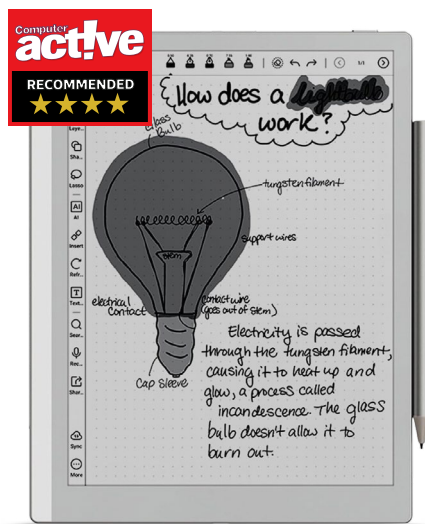
It also feels comfortable in the hand, thanks to its strong but lightweight metallic construction and its nicely textured fabric case. It's durable enough to sling into a backpack, but doesn't tire your hands while reading. Meanwhile, the 3,700mAh battery holds enough charge for a good week of heavy use.

Yet the greatest strength of the Boox Go 10.3 Gen II Lumi is that it runs Android 15 and can access the Google Play Store. While buying Amazon's equivalent Kindle Scribe locks you into the Kindle store, the Boox can run other reading apps and can cope with pretty much any popular text or image file format, including PDFs, web articles and digital textbooks.

The one thing that lets it down is the writing experience. It's mostly fine – you can annotate documents and create long digital notebooks that you can scroll

SPECIFICATIONS

10.3in 2480x1860-pixel E-Ink touchscreen • Octa-core processor • 4GB RAM • 64GB storage • Wi-Fi 5 • Bluetooth 5.1 • USB-C charging port • Boox InkSense Plus stylus • 235x183x4.8mm (HxWxD) • 350g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/59974



vertically or horizontally. And its handwriting recognition can transform all but the most illegible scrawl into editable text and successfully search for words and phrases. However, the friction between the stylus and the surface of the screen can make it feel like you're dragging it around, while latency means you're often waiting for the E-ink to catch up with the nib.

In addition, apps can be slow to load and more image-heavy books can take time to render, and the Boox Go 10.3 Gen II Lumi doesn't always feel quite as responsive as it should.

This shouldn't be a deal-breaker, but it's certainly not as slick a digital notepad as the Kindle Scribe. All the same, if you're more interested in reading than note-taking and want an escape from Amazon's ecosystem, the Boox Go 10.3 Gen II Lumi is the better buy.

VERDICT Its superb screen, lightweight build and durable battery make for a delightful reading experience

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Amazon Kindle Scribe
£430 Amazon's ebook reader/writing tablet is better for taking notes, but locks you into the Kindle book store



BEST REFURBISHED PRODUCTS

Big-screen Android tablets



What should you look out for?

Pre-owned and refurbished Android tablets with 12in and 14in screens are available at bargain prices. Keep an eye out for high-resolution screens, fast processors and 8GB of RAM, and you may even find one with a keyboard or stylus if you look hard enough.

What are the drawbacks?

As always with mobile devices, check that the tablet is still getting software updates – particularly security fixes – and that the battery isn't on its last legs. If you're buying something that's no longer getting updates, be careful about which apps or information it holds. Some tablets may also have physical damage. The odd scratch on the back isn't a problem, but big scratches or cracks on the screen should be avoided.

What are the best options?

The Honor MagicPad 2 came out in 2024 but is still a fantastic Android tablet, with a vivid 12.3in OLED screen, speedy Snapdragon 8s Gen 3 processor and excellent battery life. It's no longer receiving Android software updates, but it's still getting security patches. We spotted one for £315 on Amazon Resale (www.snipca.com/59981).

The Lenovo Idea Tab Pro (pictured) is another contender. We've seen first-generation versions for £300 on Amazon Resale (www.snipca.com/59979),

which is great for a tablet with a 12.7in 3K screen, Mediatek Dimensity 8300 processor and 8GB of RAM. Meanwhile, Back Market has a great supply of pre-owned Galaxy Tab S-series tablets. If you can stretch to the 14.6in Galaxy Tab S9 Ultra, it feels as sleek and luxurious as it did when it launched in 2023. It could be yours for £520 (www.snipca.com/59980).



SECURITY CAMERA | £50 from Amazon www.snipca.com/60020

Reolink Argus MagiCam

Safe spaces



While most security cameras are designed with permanent installation in mind, the Reolink Argus MagiCam is all about portability and flexibility. At 68mm squared, it's shorter and not much wider than a pack of cards, while it weighs just 108g without its batteries.

It connects to your home network via **dual-band** Wi-Fi, and will clamp directly to metallic surfaces using an internal magnet, or to the adhesive magnetic mounting pad. Reolink also includes a rotatable mounting bracket.

Its **IP67** weatherproofing means it's equally at home indoors or out. You can put the camera in your pocket, then stick it almost anywhere you like within Wi-Fi range. Setting it up is incredibly easy, with the Reolink app guiding you through the process within a few minutes.

Footage is stored locally on a **microSD card** (up to 256GB) or in the Reolink Cloud. The basic single camera plan for cloud storage is free, but if you want to

SPECIFICATIONS

1920x1080-pixel resolution • 113.3° horizontal, 62.7° vertical field of view • Motion detection with PIR sensor • Infrared night vision • Two-way audio • Compatible with Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa • Dual-band Wi-Fi • 2x AA lithium batteries or USB-C power • Magnetic desktop mount • 68x68x29mm (HxWxD) • 108g • Two year-warranty www.snipca.com/60020

“You can stick it almost anywhere you like within Wi-Fi range”

keep your clips for more than a week you'll need to spend £4.17 per month on Reolink's Standard plan. This covers up to five cameras and stores videos for 30 days.

The Argus MagiCam records in **1080p Full HD** with a decent **field of view**, allowing it to cover a large area. It can distinguish between people, vehicles and animals, while a 'Passive Infrared' (PIR) motion sensor can spot moving bodies and reduce annoying false alarms. Notifications come through quickly, and the captured video is sharp enough to get a clear picture of what's happening in or around your home.

In fact, our only serious criticism is that its battery life isn't great. Reolink claims that two lithium AA batteries will power it for nine months, but this is heavily dependent on the level of activity in front of the lens. In our tests, mounted to a puppy's cage, the batteries didn't even last a week. In less active areas we saw

the lifespan increase to over 13 days, but if you want to keep the camera running day after day, you might want to power it with a power bank or an adapter (not supplied) through the **USB-C** port.

VERDICT Small, affordable and flexible, the Argus MagiCam is a great security camera, even if its battery life could be improved

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Wyze Cam V3 £44

This equally tiny rival has to be plugged in, but has excellent night vision and motion detection



WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

What's the best iPod replacement?

Q My iPod is giving up after many years of service, and I'm looking for an inexpensive MP3 player to replace it.

I've imported my music library and playlists into MusicBee and MediaMonkey, so I'm looking for a device that would work – preferably via USB – with that particular software. I have no need for Wi-Fi or compatibility with Spotify or podcast playlists. Any ideas?

Morvyn Finch

A MP3 players have been neglected by the big manufacturers for a while, but they're making a bit of a comeback, with smaller brands leading the way. A lot of new MP3 players are high-end players aimed at hi-fi enthusiasts, but there are a couple of options that should fit your budget without throwing in features you don't need.

The Oakcastle MP300 (£35 from www.snipca.com/60021, pictured) is



probably your best bet. It has a simple interface with a full-colour screen, plus Bluetooth support for wireless speakers and headphones. We haven't tested it with MusicBee or MediaMonkey, but you shouldn't have any problems transferring your music. Alternatively, take a look at the tiny Wolfgang MP3 Player (£25 from www.snipca.com/60022). It has basic controls and features but great battery life and cheap microSD card storage.



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



G-MASTER™
by **iiyama**

TITAN FALCON™



MASTER THE GAME WITH OLED

The new **G-Master Titan Falcon™ GOB2701QSC-B1**, featuring META 3.0 WOLED technology for uncompromising competitive gaming.

27"
67cm

OLED
META 3.0

0.03ms
280Hz

65W
USB-C

DOCK

KVM

nVIDIA
G-SYNC
COMPATIBLE

iiyama



Find your gaming monitor
at [iiyama.com](https://www.iiyama.com)



Reviews

FITNESS BAND | £180 from Amazon www.snipca.com/60001

Garmin Cirqa

On the right track

Like Google's £85 Fitbit Air (see Issue 739, p28), the Garmin Cirqa is a fitness band for those who don't want a smartwatch, ditching the screen in favour of a smaller tracker concealed within a fabric band. Garmin's tracker is larger and heavier than Google's, but curves to mimic the shape of your wrist and is still light and comfortable enough to forget you're wearing it. What's more, the design leaves room for a button, used to start and stop workouts or turn off its vibrating alarm.

The Cirqa works with the Garmin Connect app, tracking your heart rate,

SPECIFICATIONS

Optical heart-rate monitor • Pulse OX2 blood oxygen monitor • Accelerometer • Skin temperature sensor • Bluetooth LE • 10-day battery life • Connects to Garmin Connect app • 9x27x47mm (HxWxD) • 18-20g (with wrist strap) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/60001

blood oxygen levels, activities and sleep. It lets you know if you're under-exercising or overdoing it, and combines data to give you a 'fitness age'. Meanwhile, the Sleep Coach recommends bedtimes and sleep length, letting you know if you're not getting enough shuteye and gently waking you up with a low buzz.

Tested against a specialist heart-rate monitor, the Cirqa came within two to three beats per minute in every trial, bar one 40-minute workout where it fell off by 10bpm. The sleep tracking is just as reliable, spotting when we slept well or woke in the early hours.

In most ways, the Cirqa beats the Fitbit Air, but it costs more than twice as much. Still, where Google charges you a monthly subscription for all but the most basic tracking features, Garmin gives you



nearly everything except an AI health coach without any ongoing charges.

VERDICT Garmin's band beats the Fitbit Air on features and equals it on comfort, even if it's too pricey to win on value

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Google Fitbit Air £85

Cheaper and lighter, but some of its best features are locked behind a monthly plan



EARBUDS | £76 from Amazon www.snipca.com/60004

Panasonic RB-F10

Open call hours

Panasonic's open-ear earbuds are lightweight and comfortable for all-day wear, while producing a bright and well-balanced sound. A metallic hook fits over your ear and holds the speaker in place. Each bud weighs just 8.7g. There's no dust protection, but they're IPX4-rated so can survive a light shower.

The controls are very sensitive, and there's a short delay between your taps and the music pausing or skipping. However, these earbuds can tell when they've been taken off and will immediately pause your track.

SPECIFICATIONS

25-hour battery life with case • Bluetooth 5.4 • IPX4 splash resistance • 2x mics with Environmental Noise Cancellation (ENC) • AAC and SBC support • 8.7g per bud • 36g charging case • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/60004

Two **beamforming** microphones use Panasonic's Environmental Noise Cancellation tech to reduce external noise and focus on your voice. This worked reliably in our call tests, even when walking past heavy traffic.

The sound doesn't have a huge amount of bass – as usual with open-ear designs – but otherwise it's very clean and enjoyable, especially on tracks with simple arrangements and upfront vocals. Pounding beats and heavy guitars are not a strength. The batteries last for around seven hours, with 18 hours of charge in the lightweight charging case.

EarFun's Clip 2 earbuds (£70 from www.snipca.com/58945) have slightly more bass and an even longer battery life, but if you're looking for comfortable earbuds that don't block out the world



around you, the RB-F10s are up there with the best.

VERDICT They won't please fans of dance music or heavy rock, but these earbuds mix great comfort with impressive sound

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

EarFun Clip 2 £70

The clip design isn't for everyone, but these buds storm ahead on battery life and bass



TRAVEL ROUTER | £100 from Amazon www.snipca.com/60017

TP-Link TL-WR3602BE

Well connected

The TL-WR3602BE is a compact **Wi-Fi 7** travel router that turns internet connections into your own private network. There's no need to reconnect all your devices when you're in a new location; just turn on the router and they'll automatically connect through it, provided they've been connected at least once before.

Unlike most mobile routers, there's no **4G** or **5G SIM** card or any internal battery. Your internet connection comes through Wi-Fi, your smartphone, the 2.5 **Gigabit Ethernet** port or a USB modem. It's powered through the supplied adapter, a **USB-C** charger or a **power bank**.

It's 126mm wide and 36mm tall, with a vent at the front and two aerials that fold flat against the sides to make it easier to carry. An LED on the front shows connections or activity. There's another Gigabit Ethernet port for connecting a laptop or PC (pictured below), plus the **USB 3.0** and USB-C ports.

The router might be tiny, but it's packed with features. You can use it as a **dual-band Wi-Fi 7** router, **hotspot**, **access point** or **range extender**. A clever Failover feature lets you connect it to another router or a tethered smartphone, and it will switch automatically to whichever provides the best connection. You can run a VPN on the router, with OpenVPN and WireGuard supported. TP-Link's Tether app makes setting up and using all these features easy, though you may need to use the web-based admin panel to find some of the more advanced tools.

In tests in a local café, we got the router connected to a smartphone and laptop within minutes, with no



configuration needed for either device as they'd already been connected at home. Speeds will depend on the connection on which you're piggybacking, but we saw download speeds of over 83Mbps and uploads of 98.5Mbps on a single laptop, dropping to between 11.5Mbps and 75.4Mbps when we had three devices connected. Either way, it was fast enough to browse the internet, watch **4K** video on YouTube and upload files to a server, even through the built-in VPN.

If you want the freedom to connect from anywhere, a mobile 5G router is still your best bet. You can share a 4G or 5G connection without running down your smartphone battery, and take your network everywhere you go. However, if you're travelling within reach of public Wi-Fi, this will give you high-speed access for less. And with Wi-Fi 7 onboard, there's ample **bandwidth** for the latest phones, laptops and tablets.

SPECIFICATIONS

Dual-band Wi-Fi 7 BE3600 • 2x Wi-Fi antennae • 1x Gigabit Ethernet LAN port • 1x 2.5 Gigabit Ethernet WAN port • 1x USB 3.0 port • 1x USB-C port • Up to 7Gbps max download speed • 36x126x94mm (HxWxD) • 250g • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/60017

VERDICT While it can't provide its own internet connection, this mobile router gives you great features and Wi-Fi 7 speeds at a bargain price

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE TP-Link M8850 **£399**

This 5G mobile router gives you internet access wherever you need it plus **tri-band Wi-Fi 6E** networking



DO I REALLY NEED...

A toaster that shows photos?

What is it?

The Revolution R180 Connect is a touchscreen-controlled smart toaster with an exciting bonus feature: it can show off your photos while you wait for your toast.



What does it do?

You can also select from 38 different bread types and seven browning levels before you toast. Meanwhile, the screen doubles as a photo frame and calendar, showing any photos you've uploaded, plus today's events and weather forecast.

What's the catch?

It costs \$400 – almost £300 – (www.snipca.com/60028) and is currently only available in the US. You also need to splash out on the Toastie Press accessory to cook toasties and paninis.

So can I do without it?

Yep. For half that money you could buy a fantastic toaster and an Amazon Echo Show to display your snaps.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale Weds 9 Sep

Beelink EQi mini PC

16GB RAM for under £400 – what's the catch?



Samsung Galaxy Z Flip8

New foldable phone: groundbreaking or gimmick?

These and much more...

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

LAPTOP

PRICE
DROP

MSI Prestige A16 AI+ (2026)
£1,249 from www.snipca.com/60029
Tested Issue 737



Not better than its 2025 predecessor in every department, but has a more attractive design, is superior in everyday use and over £200 cheaper.

ALTERNATIVE PC Specialist 16 Fusion British-made laptop with superb screen and built for advanced AI tasks. £892 from www.snipca.com/55094

DESKTOP PC

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



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

ALTERNATIVE Medion Erazer Bandit P20 Powerful PC for gaming and editing videos, with 16GB RAM, 8GB Nvidia graphics card and 1TB SSD. £900 from www.snipca.com/60030

APPLE iPad

Apple iPad 11
£429 from www.snipca.com/60031
Tested Issue 711



With a faster processor and increased storage (from 64GB to 128GB), the 2025 edition of the iPad is simply stunning. Battery life is over 11 hours, which is better than any other iPad, including more expensive models.

ALTERNATIVE iPad Air M4 A better choice if you need more demanding creative apps, like video editing. The screen is superb and the battery lasts nearly 10 hours. £749 from www.snipca.com/60032

ANDROID TABLET

Honor MagicPad4
£604 from www.snipca.com/60033
Tested Issue 733



More expensive than our previous favourite, but it's faster, more responsive and has a better screen. Buy the £50 keyboard and it becomes a great laptop alternative too. £600 gets you 12GB/256GB; £700, 16GB/512GB.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy Tab S9 This former Buy It! tablet is available at half price refurbished. Its 11in screen is amazing and battery life should still be around 13 hours. £330 from www.snipca.com/60034

APPLE iPhone

Apple iPhone 16
£699 from www.snipca.com/60035
Tested Issue 695



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

ALTERNATIVE iPhone 16e Now £100 cheaper than at launch, its 6.1in screen is fantastically bright and battery life is almost 13 hours. Best bargain iPhone you can buy. £499 from www.snipca.com/60036

ANDROID PHONE

Google Pixel 9a
£349 from www.snipca.com/60037
Tested Issue 710



The newer Pixel 10a is a slightly better phone, but for under £400 the 9a is better value. Great screen, performance and battery.

ALTERNATIVE Samsung Galaxy A56 This is a great phone, with a stunning screen and 29-hour battery life, but it can't quite beat the Pixel 9a. £255 from www.snipca.com/60038

tom's guide[★]

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🔍 New tech |



Searching for the right product
shouldn't leave you drowning in options.

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Buy It

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

MINI PC

NEW ENTRY

GMKtec NucBox K17

£520 from www.snipca.com/59685

Tested Issue 741



A highly capable machine with 16GB RAM, a 1TB SSD and plenty of ports. You can't upgrade the RAM, but it's still the best bang for your buck available. Will keep you going for many years..

ALTERNATIVE Wired2Fire AMD R8845

An outstandingly fast machine, with 32GB of DDR5 RAM and a 2TB SSD. Measures 53x135x127mm (HxWxD). £1,200 from www.snipca.com/56881

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite

£160 from www.snipca.com/60039

Tested Issue 698



The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

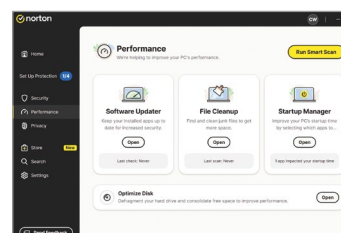
ALTERNATIVE Kobo Libra Kobo's first colour e-reader, with over 4,000 tones to make illustrations and photos leap out. £240 from www.snipca.com/60040

SECURITY SOFTWARE

Norton 360 Deluxe 2025

£19.99 from www.snipca.com/58522

Tested Issue 629



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

ALTERNATIVE Bitdefender Total Security Another top performer that we're offering at a discount. £24.99 from www.snipca.com/41141

WEBCAM

Obsbot Meet SE

£79 from www.snipca.com/60041

Tested Issue 710



The Meet SE from Chinese firm Obsbot beats the picture quality of our previous favourite, Logitech's C925e. Colours are vibrant and accurate, with terrific detail even in poor lighting thanks to a relatively wide aperture.

ALTERNATIVE Creative Live Cam Sync 4K Affordable 4K webcam with high-quality video that can also capture voice from a distance. £60 from www.snipca.com/60042

PC MONITOR

PRICE DROP

Philips 27E1N1600AE

£139 from www.snipca.com/60043

Tested Issue 692



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

ALTERNATIVE Asus ROG Strix XG27ACS Another excellent 27in monitor with 1440p resolution and a fast refresh rate aimed at gamers. £249 from www.snipca.com/60044

SOLID-STATE DRIVE

PRICE DROP

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB

£228 from www.snipca.com/60045

Tested Issue 630



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

ALTERNATIVE Crucial MX500 1TB As fast as an SSD can get in the traditional 2.5in SATA format, this is a great-value upgrade. £240 from www.snipca.com/60046

Buy It



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

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 2 FRITZ!Box 7690 Wi-Fi 7 routers

Equipped with super-fast Wi-Fi 7, the FRITZ!Box 7690 router guarantees transmission rates of up to 7,136Mbps. Wi-Fi 7 brings top speeds and offers even more powerful connections for multiple devices. It's therefore ideal for real-time software such as gaming, virtual reality or video calls. Wi-Fi 7 is perfectly integrated into the FRITZ! ecosystem – all wireless devices work together optimally in the mesh system.

The 2.5 Gigabit WAN/LAN port,

the 2.5 Gigabit LAN port, and two Gigabit LAN ports provide network devices with even faster connections to your home network. Through Zigbee you can use smart-home devices via the router.

It also includes a complete telephone system. You can register up to six DECT phones to the built-in base station. Security is covered too, with a firewall that guarantees secure browsing.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/59985



and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 8 September. Good luck!

You can buy the **FRITZ!Box 7690 Wi-Fi 7 router** from www.snipca.com/58010 for £240. For more FRITZ! products such as routers, mesh repeaters and DECT phones, visit <https://uk.fritz.com>.

PRINTER

HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e

£187 from www.snipca.com/60047

Tested Issue 700



A versatile cartridge printer-scanner for the home office that makes printing jobs quicker and easier than most of its inkjet rivals. Colour prints cost a reasonable 6p per page, while mono pages cost 2p. Printed text is superb and photos are pretty good, too.

ALTERNATIVE Epson EcoTank ET-1810

Not the fastest printer, but comes with enough ink for 4,500 mono and 7,500 colour pages. £140 from www.snipca.com/60048

SMART TV

TCL 50C6KS-UK

£429 from www.snipca.com/60050

Tested Issue 727



This is an absolute bargain, with a brightness level you rarely see under £500. 4K HDR content looks fantastically sharp and it sounds great too. Its Google TV software includes all the major UK TV apps.

ALTERNATIVE Mitchell & Brown

JB-55Q1811 Great TV from the Bolton firm, with excellent picture quality once you select the Cinema mode. Its TiVo system has all the major UK streaming services, including Freely. £539 from www.snipca.com/60049

ROUTER

TP-Link Archer BE550

£199 from www.snipca.com/60051

Tested Issue 718



This tri-band router is the first Wi-Fi 7 model to be our top choice. It had enough bandwidth across our test house to stream six 4K movies simultaneously, and has five 2.5Gbps Ethernet ports.

ALTERNATIVE Asus RT-AXE7800

Our previous favourite is also tri-band, but only on Wi-Fi 6E. That still delivers incredibly fast speeds that stretched deep into our test house. £218 from www.snipca.com/60052

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by Nik Rawlinson

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1

The screenshot shows the 'Welcome to calibre' window. Under the 'Manufacturers' tab, 'Amazon' is selected. Under the 'Devices' tab, 'Kindle PaperWhite' is selected. A red box with the text 'Amazon Kindle PaperWhite' is overlaid on the screen, with red lines connecting it to the selected items in both lists.

If you select **Kindle**, Calibre will ask for additional details, including email addresses for sending documents wirelessly to your Kindle. Don't worry about this at this stage: we'll transfer them over USB. Click **Next** once more, then **Finish** to complete the process.



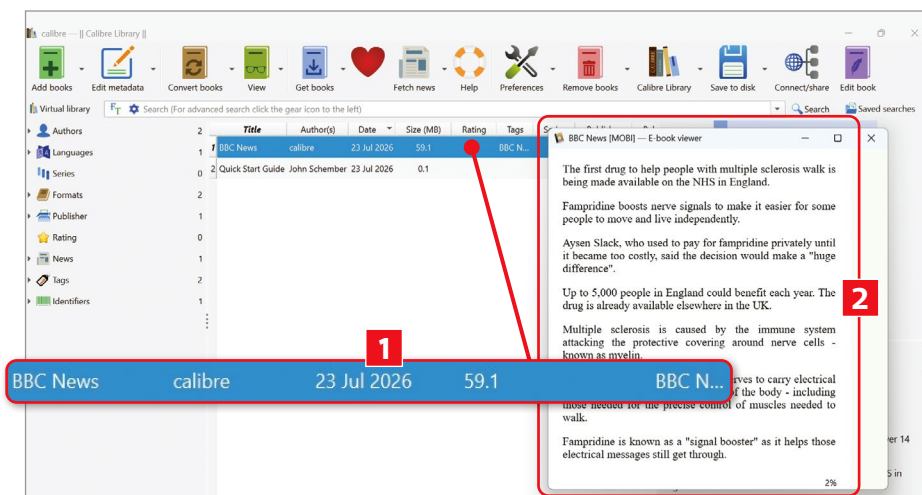
Pick a news feed then tell Calibre when to download it

2 Add your first news feed

Click 'Fetch news' on the top toolbar, then type, for example, **bbc** into the search box (1 in our screenshot above). Click 'Go' (2) and Calibre will narrow the list of pre-defined news feeds to only those published by the BBC. Click BBC News in the 'English (United Kingdom)' section (3).

Next, tick 'Schedule for download' and untick any boxes on days you don't want the download to appear (4). Use the 'Download after' box to set a time for the download (5). For scheduling to work you'll need to leave Calibre running. If you'd prefer not to do that, just click 'Download now' (6).

When it's finished downloading, double-click the publication in the list of books in the Calibre library (1 in our screenshot below) to open it in a new window (2). Now use the Page Down and Page Up buttons or the arrow keys to turn the pages. You can either scroll through the ebook like this, or when you reach the index, click the links to skip directly to each section.



You can read your news-feed download like a regular ebook

How I read the news on my ebook reader



I previously used Pocket to synchronise saved news stories to my Kobo ebook reader. When Pocket shut down in July 2025, Kobo updated its software to work with Instapaper (www.snipca.com/59867), so I now save stories there. I prefer catching up with my reading using an E-Ink screen as I find it more relaxing. Sometimes it's too relaxing – I've been known to wake up unexpectedly an hour or so after sitting down to read!

Nik Rawlinson

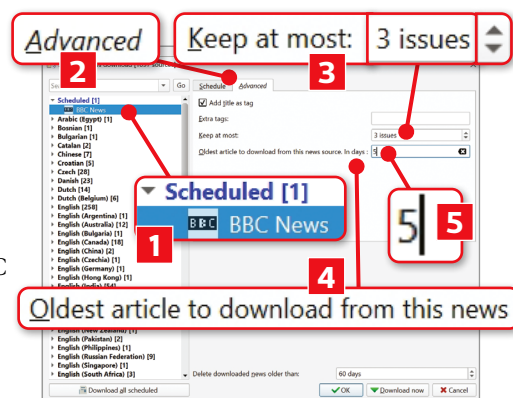
How do you read your news feeds?
Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

3 Tell Calibre how many downloaded copies to keep

At the moment, we've only told Calibre what to download, not how we want to handle it. Click the top menu bar's 'Fetch news' button again, then the arrow beside Scheduled to reveal the BBC News feed you set up earlier (1 in our screenshot right). Click the Advanced tab (2), then use the arrows beside 'Keep at most' (3) to specify how many copies of the downloaded updates Calibre should keep in its library. By default, it keeps everything, but because our first download was over 50MB, we'd rather delete old editions over time.

As news goes stale fairly quickly, you could afford to set this to a low number, like two or three for a current-affairs feed, but might want to set it to a higher number for a more features-led publication, especially if it doesn't contain so many stories.

Below this option you'll see a box for 'Oldest article to download from this



Specify how many copies of the downloaded updates Calibre should keep

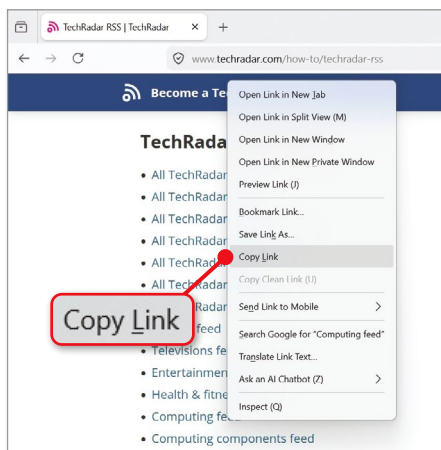
news source. In days' (4). Publishers can control how many stories appear in their feeds, automatically retiring the oldest to make way for new ones.

However, if the feed is very long, downloading the whole thing may mean that, on some sites, you are downloading old stories, which again will use up precious hard-drive space. If you find that one of your selected feeds frequently includes too many old stories, use this box to cap the figure at something more manageable. We've set ours to five days (5).

4 Add more feeds

We found the BBC News feed by searching for BBC, which filtered Calibre's catalogue of news feeds to just the handful published by the BBC. To explore the full list, scroll down the left-hand column and click the arrow beside 'English (United Kingdom)'. You can subscribe to them in the same way you subscribed to BBC News.

However, as you'll have noticed from the square brackets beside the category you just expanded, Calibre currently only has 35 feeds in this category. If the one you want isn't there, you can add it



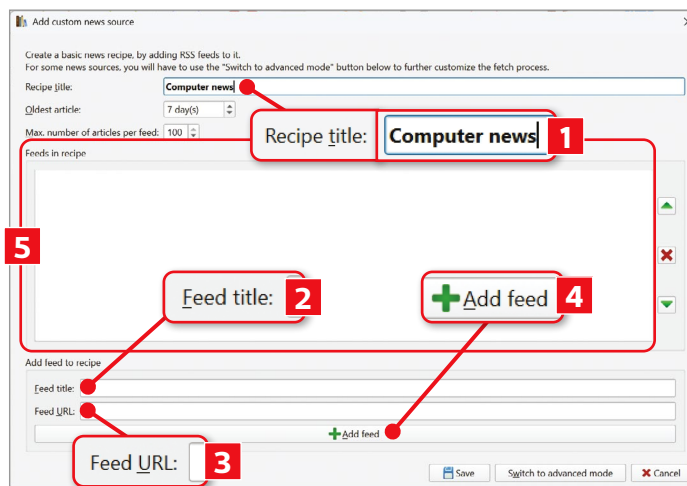
You can copy feed links and paste them into Calibre 'recipes'

manually. You can also add multiple feeds to the same download job – known as a 'recipe' – and they'll then be compiled into a single magazine-style publication.

If the site you want already publishes a news feed, it will be much easier to do this. To demonstrate, we'll add a feed from our sister site, TechRadar, which lists all of its feeds at www.snipca.com/59850. To subscribe to its computer-related stories, right-click 'Computing feed' and click 'Copy Link' (in Firefox – see screenshot above) or Copy Link Address (in Chromium-based browsers).

Now return to Calibre, click the down-pointing arrow that appears immediately to the right of 'Fetch news' on the top menu bar and click 'Add or edit a custom news source' on the menu that appears.

Now click '+New recipe'. You can now add multiple feeds to a single download, and they will be compiled into something that's similar to a digital issue of a magazine. So, choose something that will help explain what this magazine is about, and enter it in the box beside 'Recipe



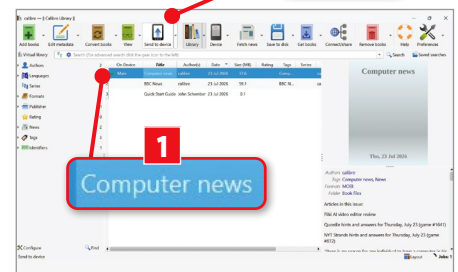
Give your feed a title then paste the address you copied from your browser

title' (1 in our screenshot above).

Click in the 'Feed title' box 2 and type **TechRadar Computing Feed**, then click in the Feed URL box 3 and paste the address you copied from your browser. Now click 'Add feed' 4 and it will appear in the 'Feeds in recipe' box 5.

Now we'll add the feed from another of our sister sites, Windows Central (www.windowcentral.com). There's only one feed here, as you'll see if you click the **RSS** (Really Simple Syndication) link in the menu bar at the top. Rather than left-clicking this link, right-click it and copy it as you did the link from TechRadar, then return to Calibre and add it as another feed in your recipe, following the instructions outlined above.

So, as you'll see in our example, we've added the Windows Central title and URL (1 in screenshot below), and when we click 'Add feed' 2 it will join the TechRadar feed we added earlier in the 'Feeds in recipe' box 3. You can use the 'Oldest article' 4 and 'Max. number of articles per feed' 5 boxes to keep your download to a manageable size.



Select the download you want then click 'Send to device'

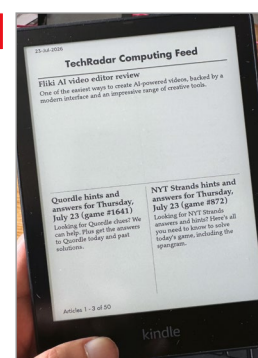
5 Read feeds on your ebook reader

Unless you're happy reading your downloaded feeds on your computer, you'll probably want to transfer them to your ebook reader.

To do this, connect your device to your PC while Calibre is still running, then select the download you want to transfer in the main window within Calibre (1 in our screenshot above). Now click the large 'Send to device' button 2 that appears on the main toolbar. If Calibre asks if you want to automatically convert the book before uploading it to the device, click Yes.

When the transfer is complete, eject

A recipe can contain multiple feeds



We've transferred our downloaded stories to our Kindle

your e-reader from your PC. Wait for your screen to update and you'll see your compiled feeds in the list of books. Tap to open it, and it will be presented in a similar style to a magazine (pictured left).

Wipe junk from your PC on a schedule

What you need: FluentCleaner 26.07.05, Windows 10 (x64) or 11

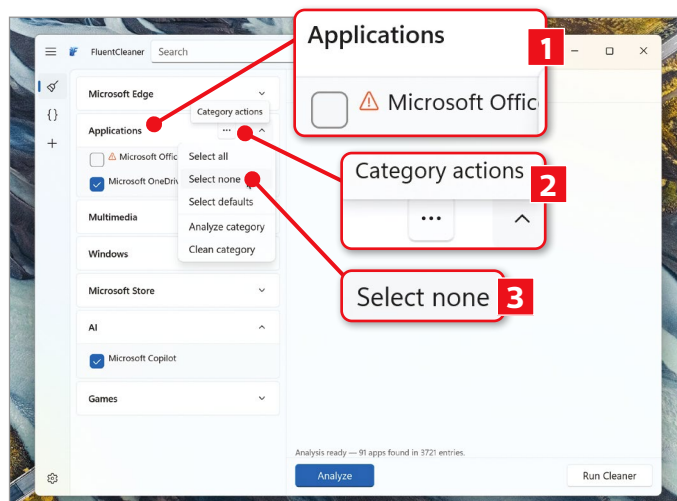
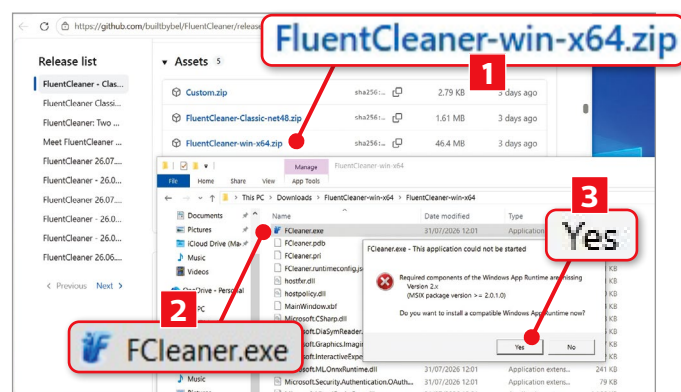
Time required: 20 minutes

While Windows' Storage Sense feature removes temporary system files, it often overlooks junk created by third-party programs and web browsers. FluentCleaner bridges this gap by scanning Windows system folders along with **temporary files** and **caches** across a wide range of programs. Even

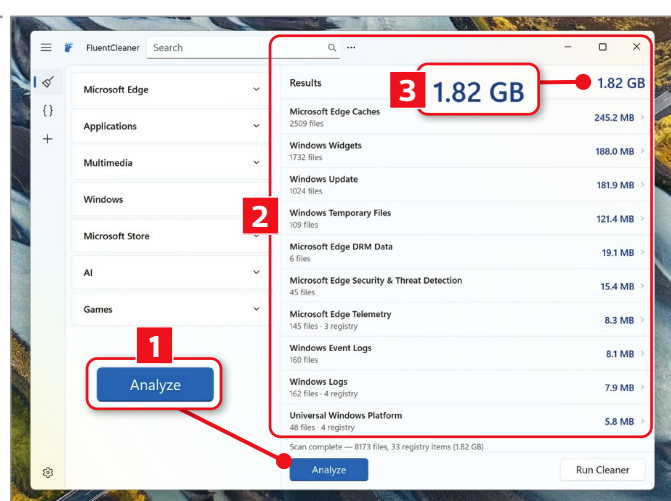
better, it now lets you clean your PC automatically on a regular schedule. FluentCleaner is available in two versions. Here, we focus on the Modern version, which features a new interface. However, if you're using Windows 10, the Classic version offers the same features with a lightweight, more traditional interface – see Steps 6 and 7.



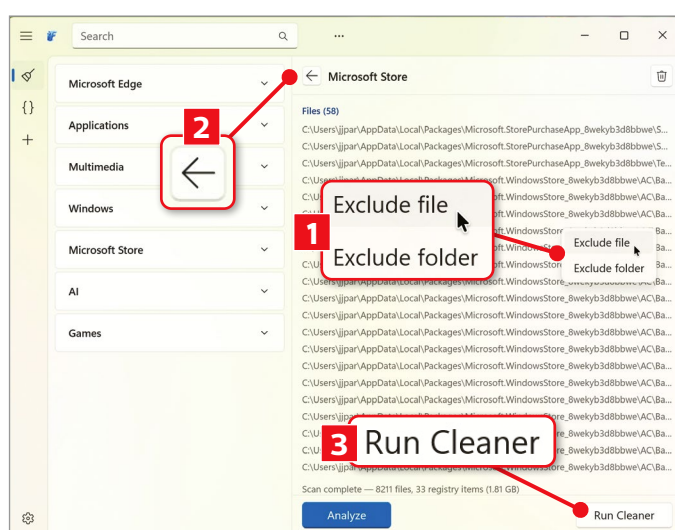
STEP 1 Go to the tool's official GitHub page at www.snipca.com/59026, then scroll down and click the 'FluentCleaner-win-x64.zip' link **1** under Assets. Extract the ZIP file and double-click the 'FCleaner.exe' file **2** to run the tool. If you see a Windows SmartScreen warning, click 'More info', then 'Run anyway' – FluentCleaner is safe to use. If you're using Windows 10 and you see a message saying: 'This application could not be started', click Yes **3** and Microsoft's Windows App SDK 2.0 download page will open. Click the latest version of 'Installer (x64)' to download and run it, then double-click the 'FCleaner.exe' file again (or use the Classic version instead – see Steps 6 and 7).



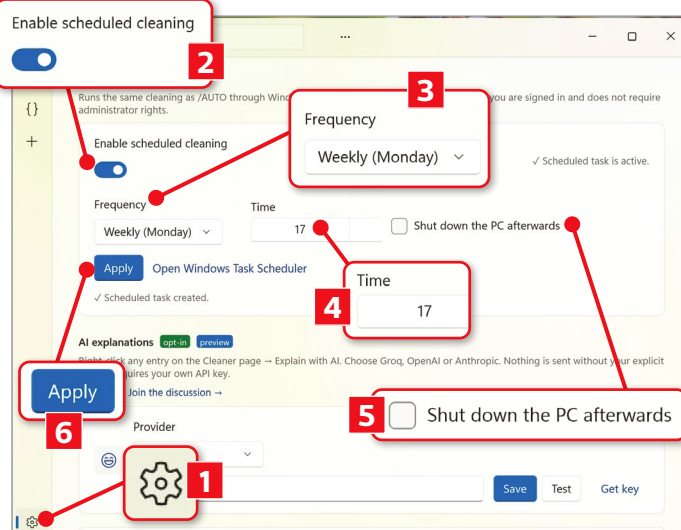
STEP 2 When FluentCleaner loads, you'll see a selection of categories on the left – Microsoft Edge, Applications, Multimedia and more. Click any of these to see exactly what the tool will scan in each section when it looks for junk. You can leave these as they are. But if there's a specific app you don't want FluentCleaner to analyse, you can untick it under Applications **1**. There's also a useful hidden 'Category actions' three-dots button **2** – hover your mouse over a category to reveal it. Click this to see more options. For example, choosing 'Select none' **3** here will exclude the entire category.



STEP 3 You can carry out a manual clean at any time by clicking the Analyze button **1**. Before you do so, however, it's a good idea to close down any programs you have running, so that FluentCleaner can carry out the most comprehensive scan possible. Once you've clicked Analyze, FluentCleaner will search all the categories you've selected on the left for junk. This shouldn't take long and you'll soon see a list of results **2**, along with the total amount of drive space you'll reclaim in the top right **3**.

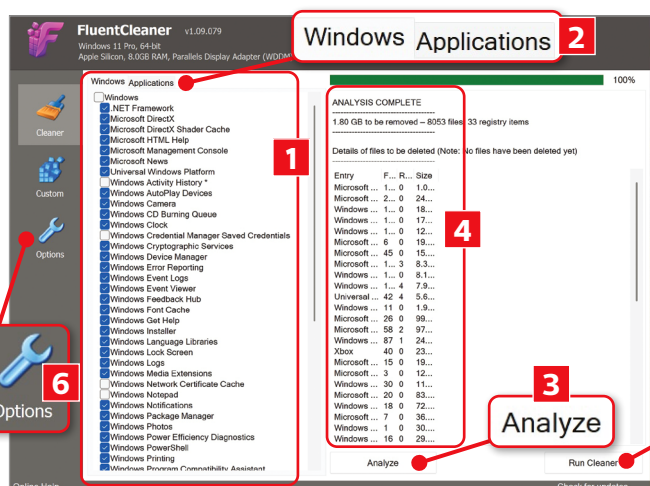
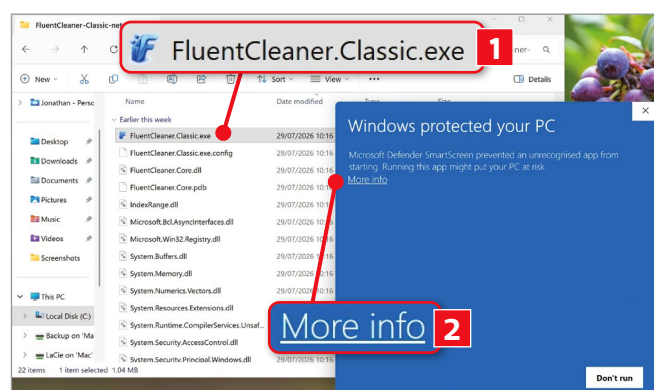


STEP 4 You can click any of the entries in the list for more details – in each case you’ll see a long list of temporary and cache files. It’s possible to right-click any of the files shown and select either ‘Exclude file’ (to exclude a specific file from your clean-up) or ‘Exclude folder’ (to omit the entire folder) **1**. In most cases however, you shouldn’t need to change anything here. When you’re ready, click the Back button **2** to return to the results screen to review any further selections. When you’re happy to proceed, click Run Cleaner **3** to remove all the junk FluentCleaner has found.



STEP 5 To set FluentCleaner to clean your PC on a schedule, click the Settings cog **1**, then scroll down to ‘Scheduled cleaning’ and switch on the slider under ‘Enable scheduled cleaning’ **2**. Under Frequency **3**, select Daily, Weekly (which will run every Monday) or ‘At logon’ (every time you log into Windows) – Weekly is probably enough for most users. Under ‘Time’ **4**, select what hour of the day you want the task to run – choose a time the computer is likely to be switched on. We suggest leaving ‘Shut down the PC afterwards’ unticked **5**. Click ‘Apply’ **6** to save your clean-up schedule.

STEP 6 The Classic version of FluentCleaner may appeal to those who prefer more traditional-looking tools. And, if you’re still using Windows 10, FluentCleaner Classic has the additional benefit that it doesn’t require you to install Microsoft’s Windows App SDK (see Step 1). Otherwise, it offers the same features and cleaning abilities as the Modern version. To get FluentCleaner Classic, go to www.snipca.com/59026 – note the developer’s warning to avoid fake download sites, including fluentcleaner.org. Scroll down and click the ‘FluentCleaner-Classic-net48.zip’ link. Download and extract the ZIP file, then double-click the ‘FluentCleaner.Classic.exe’ file **1**. Click ‘More info’ **2**, then ‘Run anyway’ if you see a Windows SmartScreen warning.



STEP 7 Though it looks a little different, FluentCleaner Classic works in much the same way as FluentCleaner Modern. You can see which categories have been pre-selected on the left **1**. Click the tabs at the top to switch between Windows and Applications **2** and untick anything you want to exclude. You can carry out a manual clean by clicking Analyze **3**, reviewing the results of the analysis on the right **4**, then clicking Run Cleaner **5**. To set up a schedule, click Options **6**, then click Scheduler and follow the instructions we provided in Step 5.

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Always play a sound when files have transferred

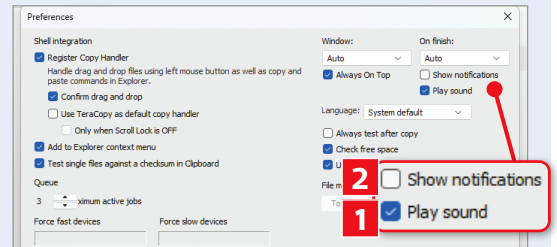
I often use the excellent TeraCopy (www.snipca.com/59617) to transfer large files between my work PC and a laptop I use only for personal reasons, so was pleased to see version 4.0 has finally been released (Issue 740, page 18).

It sometimes takes up to an hour for my files to be transferred, and it's vital for me to know that they've been moved successfully. The way I get this confirmed is by telling TeraCopy to play a sound when the process has

completed. I can then read or catch up on paperwork while I wait.

To access this option, launch TeraCopy then click the cog icon at the top right. Now, in the Preferences box that appears, look for the 'On finish' heading top right. Tick 'Play sound' (1 in our screenshot) then click OK.

There's also an option to show a notification (2) when the transfer finishes, but that would mean I'd keep



having to glance at the screen. For my purposes, a sound alert is more suitable.

Pat Talbot



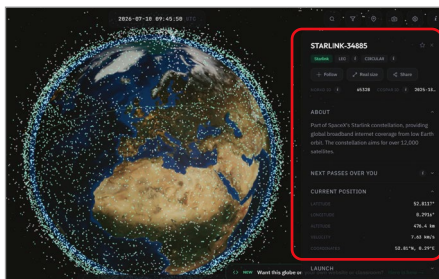
Pat wins a copy of our 2025 Back Issue Stick

Buy it from us at www.snipca.com/58714

WEBSITE

See every satellite orbiting Earth

My nine-year-old grandson recently came home from school and told me there were over 15,000 active satellites in space. I told him I was old enough to remember the Soviets sending up the first ever satellite, Sputnik, in 1957. He then showed the website proving his claim – it's called Azmth (<https://azmth.space>) and indeed confirmed there were



over 15,900 satellites. It tracks them all on a visualisation of Earth, and you can click each dot to learn what they are (see screenshot below left). None of that was possible when I was nine!

Eddie Statham



supports Spotify Connect. Many households probably have one lying around already and they're readily available

second hand for about £25-£30 on sites like CeX and eBay. You can control it from your phone or via Alexa. Hope this tip helps save some people some money.

Pete Utting

AUDIO

Stream from Echo Dot to old speakers

Following Issue 740's feature (page 62) about adding streaming to older stereo systems, I agree that the WiiM devices you recommended are an excellent idea. However, one cheaper option you didn't mention was the Amazon Echo Dot, which I have linked to an old mini hi-fi.

The third-generation Dot (pictured above right) has an audio line-out and

WINDOWS

Turn on 'Flight mode' to quickly cut the web

I still think Windows 10 is excellent, so since Microsoft ended support I've been using a remarkably simple way of removing much of the potential danger of using it.

We all know that a computer not connected to the internet is perfectly

Why I stopped using...

Freeview

My Freeview aerial failed a year or two back so I had to find an alternative. Reception had also been unreliable before this.

And what I use instead...

I moved to **Freesat** and haven't been disappointed. It contains all the main channels, and there are no reception black spots. The dish doesn't scar the front of the house because the 'transmitter' is high in the sky, so

my dish is low down in my back garden.

For those who say scrapping Freeview will disenfranchise viewers, there are set-top boxes on the market, such as the Manhattan SX Freesat (£70 from www.snipca.com/59917, pictured), that provide TV through satellite.

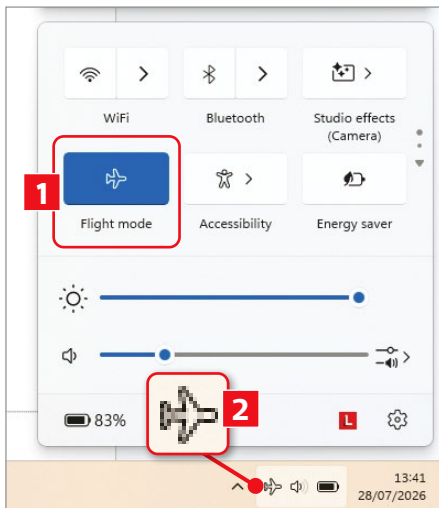
And for those unable to get satellite TV, for technical or personal circumstances, the Government might force mobile companies to provide Freely boxes as a



condition of their use of the additional spectrum freed up by the closure of terrestrial TV.

Duncan Whittle

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



secure, but I still need to be online for short bursts of around 10 minutes every day. I was concerned that my Windows 10 laptop would be vulnerable during long idle periods when I didn't actually require online access.

My solution is simply to left-click the Wi-Fi icon on the taskbar and select 'Flight mode' so it turns blue (1 in our screenshot above). An airplane icon in the taskbar (2) will indicate that Wi-Fi has been disconnected and thus the computer is effectively safely isolated from the outside world. Clicking the same button restores Wi-Fi.

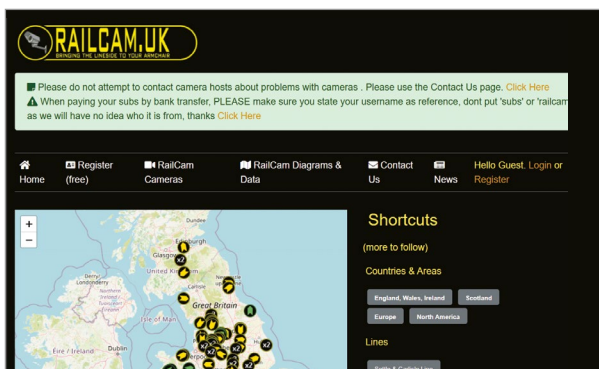
John Hale

WEBSITE

See free cams at RailCam

It was great to see RailCam (<https://railcam.uk>) get a mention in Issue 740 (page 20). The reader, John Ray, didn't say that you have to pay to watch every camera. But there are enough available for free to satisfy many train buffs. You can compare free and paid-for at www.snipca.com/59804. Scroll down for thumbnails of free cams. This UK map is helpful too: www.snipca.com/59805 (see screenshot below).

Bill Taylor



Reader recommends...

SanDisk Ultra Dual Drive Go

£38 (256GB) from www.snipca.com/59803



I've just read Issue 731's feature on ditching old USB sticks for faster alternatives (page 60) and can thoroughly recommend the SanDisk Ultra Dual Drive Go. I bought the 256GB model in July 2025 for only £16.99 and it has proved to be an absolute bargain, especially because it now costs more than twice that.

I use it to carry all my documents, photos, videos, music and even Outlook emails between two Windows

11 laptops in the UK and abroad. It's so small and efficient and has replaced my three old, smaller-capacity sticks.

I update it quickly using the brilliant and simple program FreeFileSync (<https://freefilesync.org>) which you recommended many years ago.

John Perkins

Want to recommend hardware or software to fellow readers?

Email letters@computeractive.co.uk

SOFTWARE

Remove AI info for ChatGPT posters

I enjoyed Issue 738's Cover Feature on AI chatbots and what they are best at. Personally, I've found ChatGPT to be the best at designing posters, with the only downside being the daily limit. But whichever one you choose, if you upload to somewhere like Facebook it now often tags the image with 'AI info' indicating it was created by AI.

This may not be a problem for you, but there's an easy way to get rid of that information. Open the original picture and use Snipping Tool to make a copy of it. When you save this it strips away all the AI info to leave a fresh image which you can upload.

Kev Williams

SOFTWARE

Check fake SD cards using ValiDrive

Following on from Robert Irvine using H2testw (www.snipca.com/59506) to test whether his SD cards are genuine (Issue 740, page 74), there's a

faster alternative that doesn't take four-and-a-half hours – and that's to use ValiDrive (<https://validrive.org>, pictured below left).

It's designed for USB sticks and external hard drives, but would work with SD cards in a card reader on a desktop computer. It's quite fast. I've used it for proving fake drives to get refunds.

Geoff Miles

SOFTWARE

Disguise Winaero so Windows updates don't move it

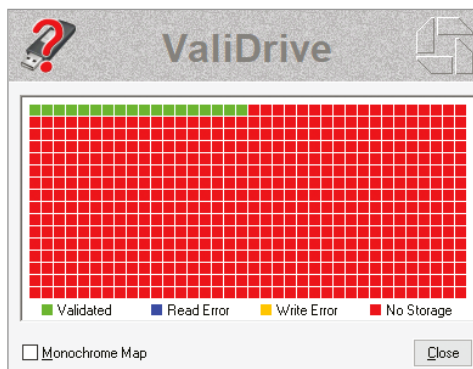
In Issue 740's Problems Solved (page 68) Jon Thompson said he used to play the classic Microsoft Solitaire on Windows 10 by downloading it from Winaero (www.snipca.com/59352). You reassured him this method would also work on Windows 11. My wife and I have played thousands of games from Winaero and would recommend them to anybody.

However, whenever there's a big update to Windows 11 (and, before it, Windows 10), Winaero disappears from where I had last saved it. It's still there – it just has to

be searched for. I cope with this by installing Winaero in a folder with a disguised name in my workspace. This folder doesn't get deleted in the updates.

Then it's just a matter of quickly setting up the program again. And the games all retain previous scores.

Don Palmer



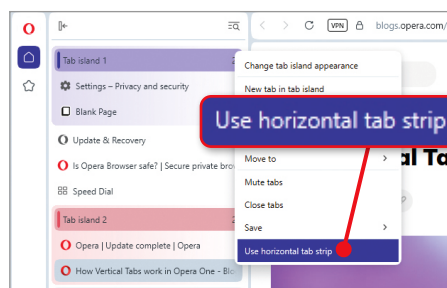
OPERA

Switch to vertical tabs

Opera is the latest browser to add a vertical-tabs feature, following Chrome, Edge, Firefox, Brave and Vivaldi. This displays your tabs down the left-hand side of the window, rather than across the top. It makes them easier to view and click when you have lots of web pages open.

To switch to vertical tabs in Opera, right-click a tab and choose 'Use vertical tab strip'. This will move your tabs to a left-hand panel, with the New Tab button at the bottom.

Drag the tab strip to resize it or click the 'Collapse panel' button top left to shrink it to a narrow toolbar. To switch back to horizontal tabs, right-click the panel and select 'Use horizontal tab strip' (see screenshot below).



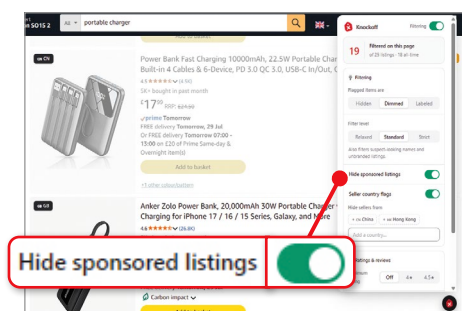
CHROMIUM & FIREFOX

Hide dubious products on Amazon



The excellent new extension Knockoff (www.snipca.com/59920) filters products from fake brands in Amazon search results. It uses a curated register of established manufacturers to identify 'pseudo-brands' that sell knockoff goods with "no company, no warranty and no reputation behind them".

When you search for items on Amazon, Knockoff automatically dims dubious listings and tells you how many it's filtered. It also labels products with their country of origin – usually CN (China)



FIREFOX

Browse privately using Containers

Firefox 153, released in July, brings Containers to the browser. Just like the feature recently added by Brave (see Issue 742, page 42), containers separate your browsing activities into private, colour-coded tabs.

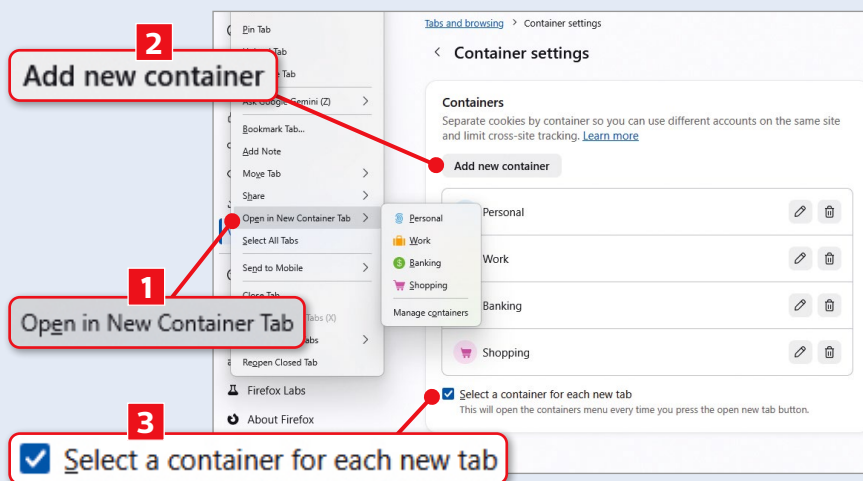
These are isolated from other tabs, so your cookies, login details and browsing data aren't shared across other websites. It means you can sign into different accounts with the same site in separate containers.

Firefox actually introduced Containers before Brave, but you previously needed to install an extension. Now

you can simply right-click a tab, choose 'Open in New Container Tab' (1 in our screenshot) and select a suitable container category.

Options include Personal, Work, Banking and Shopping. To create your own container, click 'Manage containers' then 'Add new container' (2). Assign it a name, colour and icon, then click Done.

To always open pages in containers, rather than as standard new tabs, tick the box 'Select a container for each new tab' (3). The container's colour-coded name and icon are shown in your address bar.



for knockoffs.

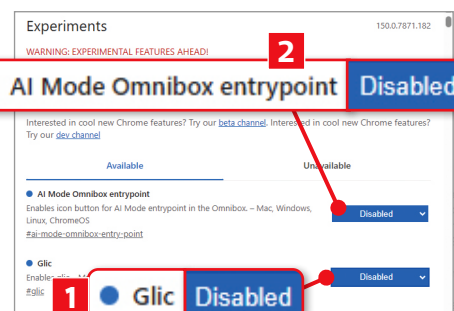
Click the icon bottom right to customise how Knockoff works. You can hide dodgy listings instead of dimming them, and apply stricter filtering. The extension can also hide Amazon's sponsored listings (see screenshot below left).

CHROME

Remove the new Gemini features

As we reported in Issue 742 (page 42), Google has now integrated Gemini with Chrome in the UK. If you don't want the AI assistant in your browser, you can reduce its presence or disable it altogether.

To remove the Ask Gemini button from Chrome's top-right corner, click the three-line menu button and choose Settings, then 'AI innovations'. Click



'Gemini in Chrome' and switch off 'Show Gemini at the top of the browser'.

To completely remove Gemini, type `chrome://flags` in the address bar and press Enter. Search for `glic` then click the dropdown menu next to 'Glic' and choose Disabled (1 in our screenshot above).

To remove the Gemini-powered AI Mode button too, disable 'AI Mode Omnibox entrypoint' (2). Relaunch Chrome and it will now be Gemini-free.

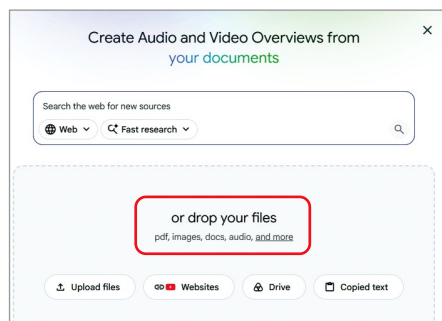
GEMINI

Combine multiple sources into notebooks

Google has rebranded its NotebookLM tool as Gemini Notebook and integrated it more closely with its AI assistant. This makes it easier to use the Gemini-powered note-taking service to combine, analyse and convert lots of different information.

Create a notebook in Gemini Notebook, and add sources such as websites, YouTube videos, PDFs, Word documents and audio files (see screenshot below). It will then 'synthesise' all the content and answer your questions about it. In the Studio section, you can convert your notebook into a podcast; present it as a slideshow; and generate reports, infographics and quizzes.

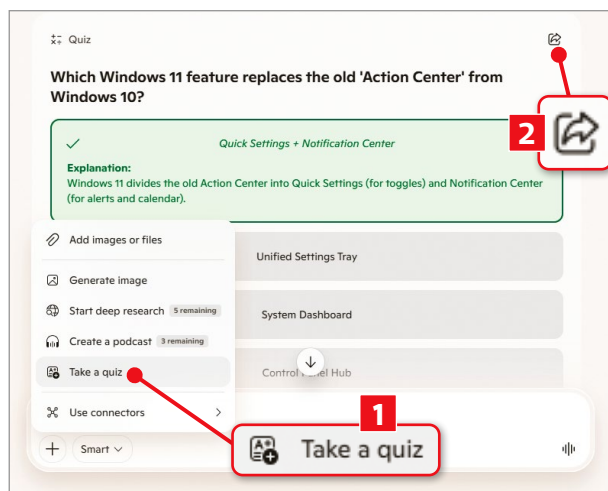
To access Gemini Notebook, click the Settings cog in the bottom-left corner of the Gemini website. In the mobile app, just open the left-hand menu and choose 'New notebook'. There are also Gemini Notebook apps for Android (www.snipca.com/59926) and iOS (www.snipca.com/59928).



COPILOT

Take a quiz on any topic

Copilot has added the option to generate an instant, interactive



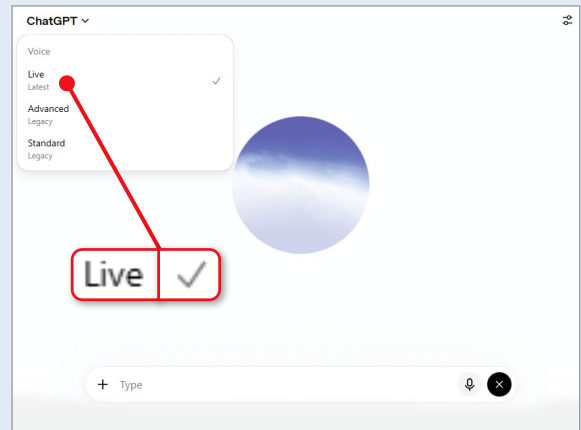
CHATGPT

Chat naturally in Live voice mode

ChatGPT's voice mode has been upgraded with a new AI model, GPT-Live – or Live for short. This expands its capabilities to make your conversations more natural.

For example, you can interrupt the AI assistant while it's speaking, if you want to change your original question or ask another. The new Live model can also translate whatever you say into foreign languages. Tell it the language to use, start talking and ChatGPT will respond with the translation.

A transcript of your Live interaction appears in your current chat. The upgraded voice mode can search the web, draw on your ChatGPT 'memory'



and even show visual results such as weather forecasts and maps.

To activate Live voice mode, click or tap the Start Voice button in ChatGPT's message box. The new model should be enabled by default – if not, select 'Live' (see screenshot) in the top-left corner.

quiz. It's a great way to test your knowledge of a particular subject, or to pass the time when you're bored.

To get started, click or tap the plus-sign button in Copilot's message box and choose 'Take a quiz' (1 in our screenshot below) – or 'Start a quiz' in the mobile app. This will switch the AI assistant to Quiz mode and display the prompt 'Quiz me on'.

Specify the topic you want to be tested on to generate a

five-question, multiple-choice quiz. If you get stuck, choose 'Show hint'. Send the quiz to other people using the Share button (2 in the top-right corner).

PROTON LUMO

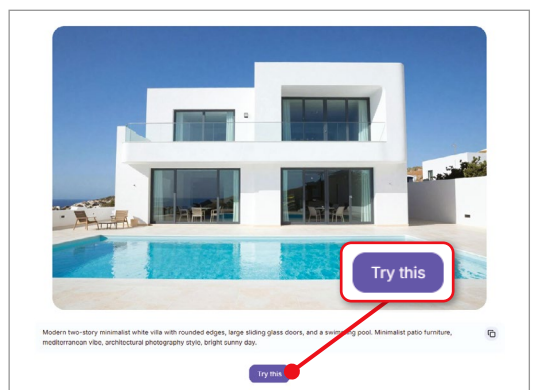
Create and edit images more easily

Proton has updated the Images feature in its privacy-focused AI assistant to make it easier to generate pictures. It now includes a gallery of

styles, backgrounds and other images generated by Lumo, to give you a starting point for your own creations.

Click or tap the Gallery tab in the Images section of the Lumo website or app to browse these ready-made pictures. Select one to see the prompt used to create it, then choose 'Try this' (see screenshot above) to copy that description to a Lumo chat. You can then edit the details as required.

Lumo has also simplified its image-editing process. Click or tap Modify on a picture you've created to open it in a new window. Here, you can describe the changes you want to make, and annotate the image with coloured pens.



Phone and Tablet Tips

Brilliant things to do on your device

ANDROID

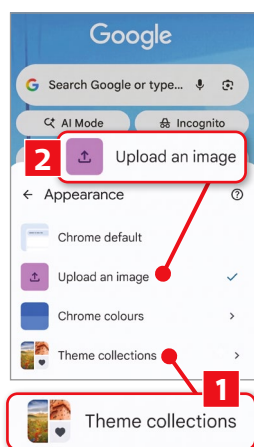
Customise Chrome's New Tab page



Google now lets you customise the New Tab page in its Chrome browser. You can apply attractive themes to the page, change its colour and even display one of your own photos.

To explore these options, tap the three-dot menu in the top-right corner and choose 'Customise new tab'. Select 'Appearance' in the pop-up panel that opens.

Tap 'Theme collections' (1 in our screenshot below) to browse theme



categories including Landscapes, Architecture and Illustrations. Press a theme to apply it to Chrome's New Tab page – you can also set the theme to refresh daily.

Alternatively, tap 'Chrome colours' to choose from

nine different shades. Or select 'Upload an image' (2) to use a photo from your own library. Tap 'Done' then Save to apply the picture to the page.

Tap 'Chrome default' to restore the browser's standard appearance.

iOS

Report malicious messages to Apple



At the end of July, Apple released iOS 26.6, which is likely to be the last update to the mobile operating system before iOS 27 arrives. The most notable

ANDROID & iOS

Try the new features in Ente Photos

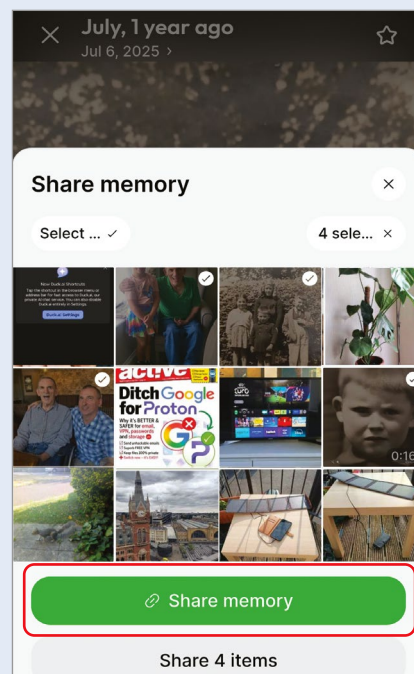


Ente Photos (Android www.snipca.com/59941; iOS www.snipca.com/59942), the privacy-focused alternative to Google Photos, has been updated with a redesigned photo viewer that lets you swipe through your gallery more smoothly. It has also added several new features.

When you share a 'memory' from the carousel across the top of the app, you can now choose exactly which photos to include. Just tap the images you want to send, so a tick appears in their corners, before you press 'Share memory' (see screenshot). Additionally, the people you share memories with can now comment on your photos and react to them using emojis – as can you on their shared memories.

Ente has also improved its detection and selection of text in images. Long-press a picture and it will identify the text it contains – choose 'Select all' then Copy to copy the text to your clipboard to paste elsewhere.

If your friends and family aren't yet using Ente Photos, you can refer them



to the app and earn yourself an extra 10GB of free online storage. Tap the three-line menu button and choose Referrals to get a referral code.

new feature is Malicious Message Detection, which warns you about messages that could harm your iPhone or compromise your privacy.

When you receive a potentially malicious message, iOS will display a pop-up warning. This gives you the option to report the message by tapping 'Share with Apple' (see screenshot right) – or you can ignore it by choosing Not

Now or Don't Report.

Malicious Message Detection doesn't automatically block suspicious messages, just in case they're safe. You can delete them manually then block the sender.

BEST APP FOR

Monitoring air quality

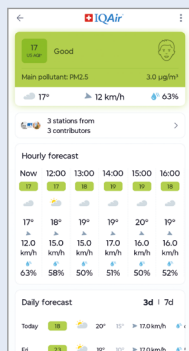
IQAir AirVisual

Free

Android www.snipca.com/59943

iOS www.snipca.com/59944

Although some weather apps include basic air-quality data, IQAir AirVisual is the best option if you're worried about the effects pollution and hot weather will have on your lungs – either at home or while on holiday. It uses locally sourced data to provide an AQI (air-quality index) rating, hourly and daily forecasts, details of specific pollutants, pollen counts, historical graphs and much more. Use the app as a guest to avoid signing up for an account.



Malicious Message Detected

Apple detected a message from a sender who may be trying to harm your iPhone or compromise your privacy. The most important step you can take to protect yourself and others from similar attacks is to share the message with Apple.

Sender: +1 (844) 402-3021

Sharing the message will help Apple investigate the attack and protect against future ones.

Not Now

Share with Apple

Don't Report

EXPRESSVPN

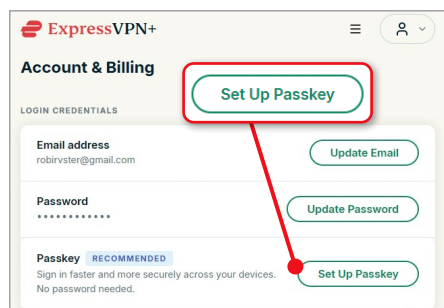
Sign into your account with a passkey

 ExpressVPN now lets you sign into your account using a **passkey** instead of a password. The change is part of a redesign of its ExpressVPN+ online dashboard, which brings together all your subscription settings and features in one place.

To set up a passkey, sign into ExpressVPN+ at www.snipca.com/59945 and click the Set Up Passkeys button on the Home page. If you don't see this, click your profile icon top right and choose 'Account & Billing' then Set Up Passkey (see screenshot below).

Enter the verification code sent to your email address, click Register and choose where to save your passkey – such as to Google Password Manager or Windows Hello. Click 'Create' and use your **biometric** login method – such as your fingerprint, face or PIN – to confirm and save the passkey.

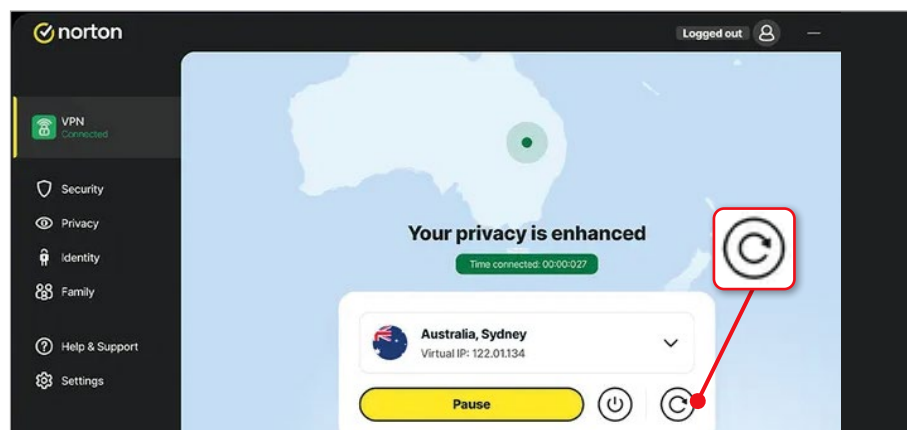
Note that the passkey only signs you into the ExpressVPN+ hub – not the VPN's desktop and mobile apps.



NORTON VPN

Manually rotate your IP address

 Norton VPN (www.snipca.com/59946) has expanded its network of servers to cover more than 130 locations. New countries include the Bahamas, Egypt,



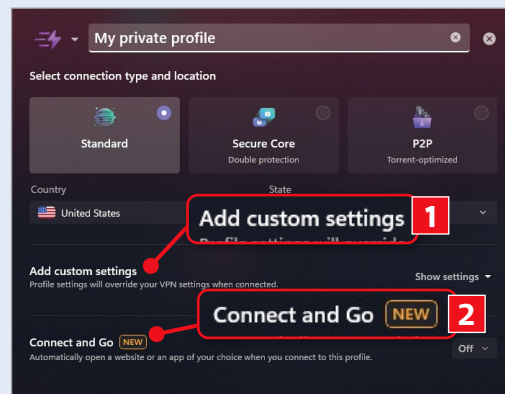
PROTON VPN

Create custom connection profiles

 Proton VPN's Profiles feature lets you create custom VPN connections for different types of online activity. Each profile can be set to connect to a server in a specific location; to use a particular VPN protocol; and to block or allow ads, trackers and adult content.

There are five pre-configured profiles in the Profiles section of Proton VPN's desktop and mobile apps. They include Streaming US, Anti-censorship and 'Max security'. You can either edit one of those or choose 'New profile' or 'Create profile' to set up your own.

Give your profile a name and select the connection type (Standard, Secure or P2P), country and city, and other custom settings (1 in our screenshot). The 'Connect and Go' (2



option 2, which Proton added last year, automatically opens specific websites and apps when you choose that profile – like an enhanced version of **split tunnelling**.

You can create as many profiles as you want and delete those you don't need. Profiles are only available with a Proton VPN Plus or Proton Unlimited subscription – not with the free plan.

Jamaica, Nepal, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, plus – unusually for a VPN – Jersey.

It has also added a useful new Manual IP Rotation feature. This lets you change your **IP address** to prevent websites from tracking what you do while connected to a VPN server.

Norton VPN already had an Automatic IP Rotation option, which changes your IP address every 30 seconds, but the new feature gives you more control. Simply click the Rotate button (see screenshot below) to switch to a new IP address whenever you want – or when you suspect you're being tracked.

Although rotating usually entails connecting to a different server, this happens almost instantly and you won't lose the VPN's protection. Manual IP Rotation is currently available in Norton VPN's Windows and macOS apps, and will be added to the Android and iOS apps soon.

DEAL OF THE FORTNIGHT

Save 85% on Surfshark

Surfshark is offering *Computeractive* readers an amazing discount of 85 per cent, plus an extra three months, when you sign up for its Starter plan for two years. That works out at just £1.79 per month – you pay £58 upfront including VAT.

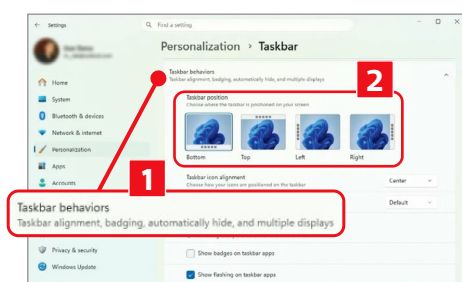
To claim the offer, visit www.snipca.com/59656 or scan the QR code. The discount code will be applied automatically at checkout.



WINDOWS INSIDER

Move the taskbar top, left or right

Windows Insiders can now move the desktop taskbar in Windows 11. Press Windows key+I to open Settings, followed by Personalization on the left. Scroll down and click Taskbar then 'Taskbar behaviors' (1 in our screenshot below). Now select where you want your taskbar: bottom, top, left or right (2). If you don't see these options, make sure you've installed Preview Build 26220.9022, released on 31 July. You might need to restart your computer.



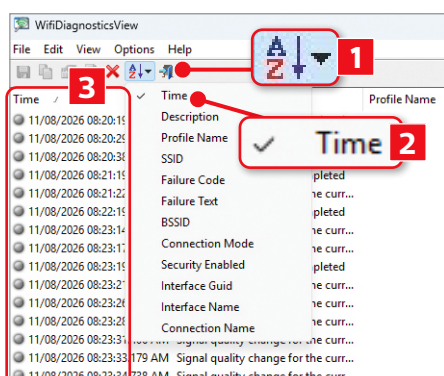
WINDOWS 10 & 11

Sort Wi-Fi activity by time and other criteria

NirSoft's WifiDiagnosticsView monitors your Wi-Fi adapter for changes and tells you exactly when they occurred, helping you discover the source of problems. For example, it shows you scans for available networks and when it connects to and disconnects from an access point. When a failure is detected, it shows an error code and description, so you can search online for a fix.

Version 1.09, released on 1 August, adds a 'Sort By' option which lists events by criteria including time, Wi-Fi profile name and failure (error) code, making it easier to spot patterns in a long list of Wi-Fi activity.

First, download WifiDiagnosticsView



WINDOWS 11

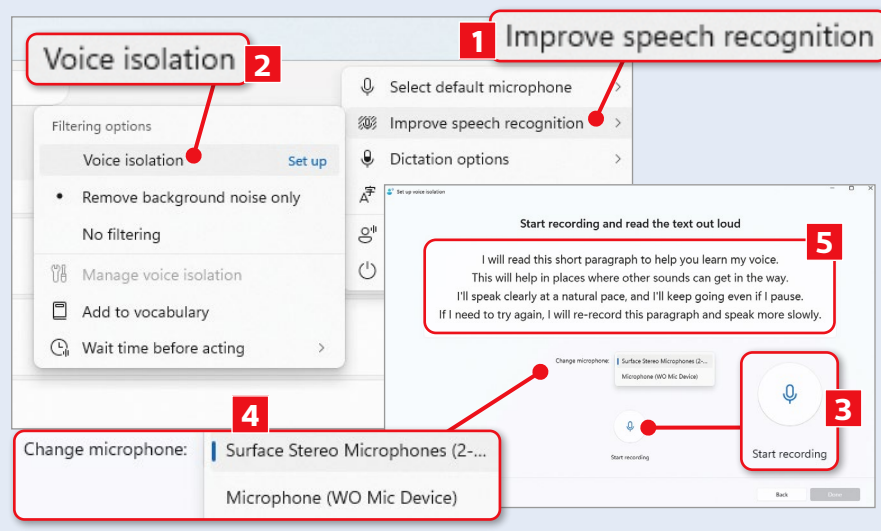
Reduce background noise when giving voice commands

Microsoft has improved Voice Access by letting you eliminate background noise, making it easier for Windows to hear which commands you're speaking. It's part of the 11 August 'Patch Tuesday' update, so first make sure you've installed that.

Next, press Windows key+Ctrl+S to open Voice Access then click the top-right Settings cog. Now click 'Improve speech recognition' (1 in our

screenshot) followed by 'Voice isolation' (2), then Proceed. On the next page click 'Start recording' (3), select a microphone (4) and read the text above (5). Click 'Stop recording' when done and you should see confirmation below that voice isolation setup is complete. Click Done to finish.

Visit Microsoft's site to see all the voice commands you can use: www.snipca.com/60011.



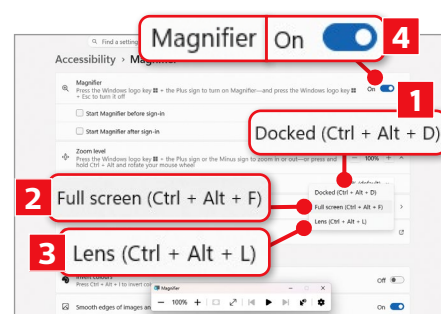
by visiting www.snipca.com/59994, then scroll down to the Feedback heading and click the download link below.

It's safe to run, so if Windows warns you about it during installation click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'. Now click the A-Z 'Sort By' icon (1 in our screenshot below left) and choose a criteria in the menu. We've chosen Time (2), which has listed our events chronologically (3).

WINDOWS 10 & 11

Switch between three Magnifier views

Windows Magnifier can enlarge your screen in three different ways, depending on what you want to see, and you can activate each with a keyboard shortcut. To see these shortcuts, press Windows key+I to open Settings then click Accessibility on the left, followed by Magnifier then the dropdown menu to the right of View.



Pressing Ctrl+Alt+D (1 in our screenshot above) opens the Docked view, which shows a magnified section in a fixed area of the screen while leaving the rest of the display at its normal size. Pressing Ctrl+Alt+F (2) opens 'Full screen' view, which enlarges the entire screen. Pressing Ctrl+Alt+L (3) opens Lens view, which shows a small magnified area around your mouse pointer.

You can switch between the three views by pressing Ctrl+Alt+M. To use Magnifier, make sure the slider is turned on at the top (4).

MICROSOFT EXCEL

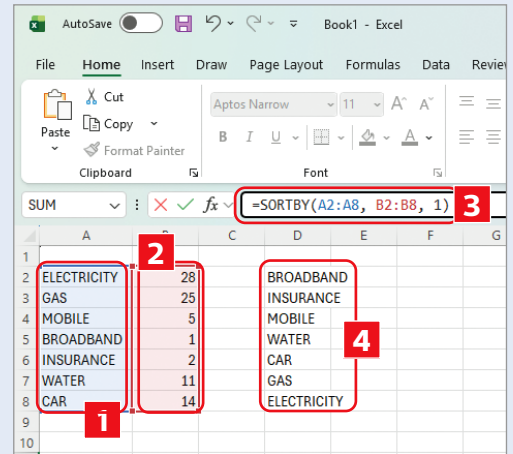
Order lists using data from another column

Excel's SORTBY function, added in Office 2021, lets you sort a list based on information stored in a different column. This is useful when the thing you want to sort – such as names, items or bills – isn't in the same order as the values you want to sort by, such as dates, prices or amounts. SORTBY creates a separate, neatly sorted version of your list that updates automatically whenever the underlying data changes.

A simple home example is sorting your household bills by their due

dates. In our screenshot, column A (A2:A8) contains bill names (1 in our screenshot), and column B (B2:B8) contains the dates they're due (2 – make sure you write dates as 1, 2, 3 and so on, not 1st, 2nd, 3rd).

In any empty cell, type `=SORTBY(A2:A8, B2:B8, 1)` (3 and Excel will display the bills sorted by their due dates (4). The 1 at the end of the formula tells Excel to use ascending order. To use descending order, so the date order is reversed, type `-1` at the end instead.

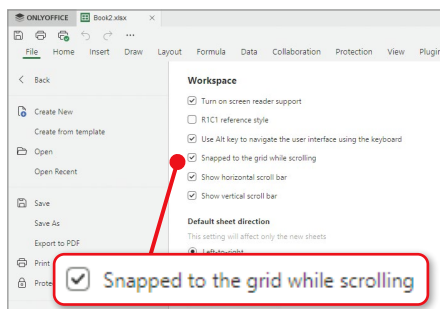


ONLYOFFICE

'Snap' spreadsheet scrolling

OnlyOffice's Spreadsheet Editor has a setting that makes scrolling snap neatly into place, instead of stopping at awkward positions between rows. It's handy on big spreadsheets because you always see full rows and can tell exactly where you are.

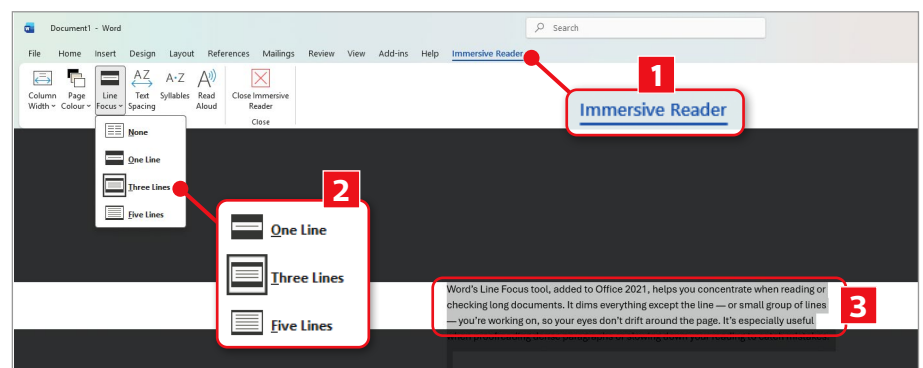
It's turned off by default, so click File top left then Advanced Settings at the bottom. Now scroll down on the right until you see the Workspace heading and tick 'Snapped to the grid while scrolling' (see screenshot below). Leave it unticked if you prefer smooth, free-flowing scrolling.



MICROSOFT WORD

Stay focused when reading long documents

Word's Line Focus tool, added to Office 2021, helps you concentrate when reading or checking long documents. It dims everything except the line – or small group of lines – you're working on, so



your eyes don't drift around the page. It's especially useful when proofreading dense paragraphs or slowing down your reading to catch mistakes.

Open a document, then click View and select Immersive Reader. Now click 'Immersive Reader' in the toolbar (1 in our screenshot above) then the Line Focus dropdown menu and pick whether you want one, three or five lines visible (2. Word will highlight only those number of lines as you scroll, and fade the rest of the page. In our screenshot we've picked three lines (3).

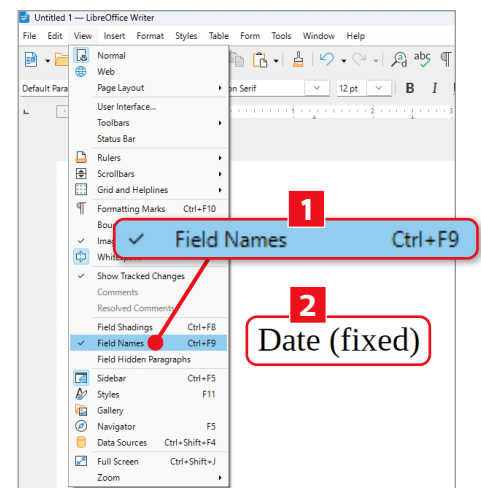
LIBREOFFICE WRITER

See field names in documents

By default, LibreOffice Writer shows the result of a field – such as the date, page number or document title – instead of the field itself. If instead you want to see the title of fields you've actually used, you can easily show their names. Open a document then click View and choose Field Names (1 in our screenshot right).

Writer will replace each field's output with its name – 'Date (fixed)' in our example (2 – so you can identify every field in your document.

You can also press the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+F9 to quickly switch between field names and results. This only changes what you see on screen, not the fields themselves.



In The Club

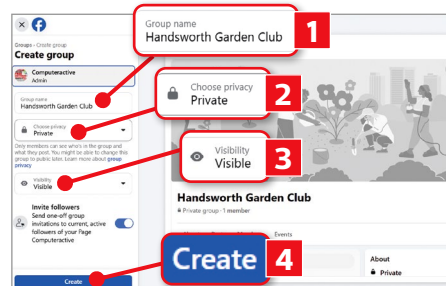


Run a club or society? Here's how your tech can make it easier

Stream live events through Facebook

Members who can't make meetings in person don't have to miss out. Stream a live event through your Facebook group and they can watch from their phone, tablet or computer, posting comments in real time. We've covered how to create a Facebook group before, but here's a quick recap. Open Facebook in a browser on your PC and log in with your account. Click 'Groups' on the left, then '+ Create New Group'. Now give it a name at the top left (1 in our screenshot below) then click Privacy and select your Privacy level (2) – Private is best if you only want members to see who's in the group and view posts.

Next set your Visibility level (3) – Visible is best if you want new members to be able to find your group on Facebook. Tap Create (4) when you're done and you'll be prompted to add an image for your group and invite members. You can select people from your existing Facebook friends or invite members by email.

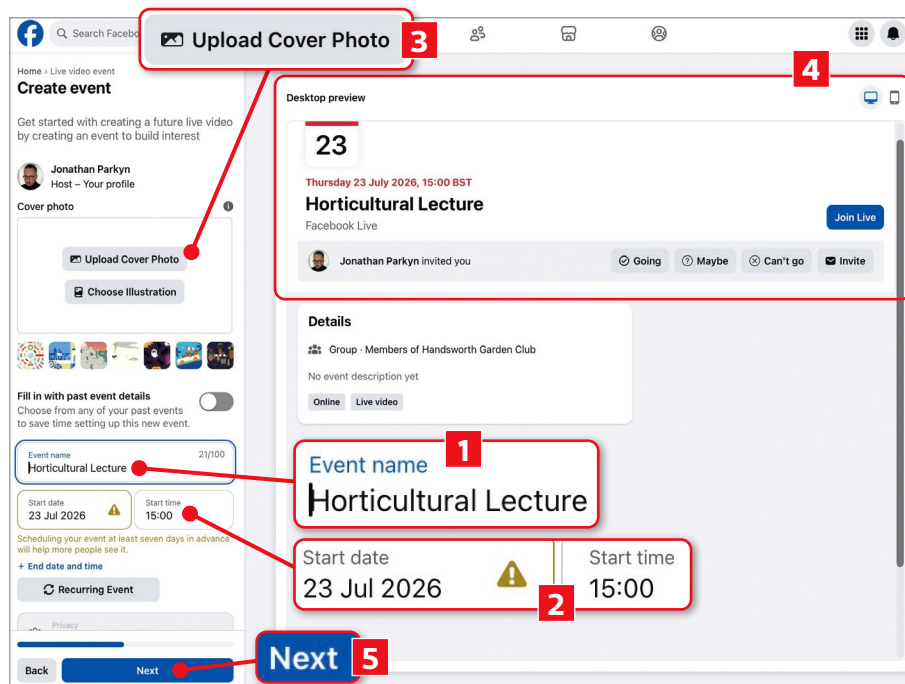


Give your group a name then set its privacy and visibility levels

Name your event and set a date

Once you know the time and date for your event, open your Facebook group and click in the 'Write something...' box. Now click the three horizontal dots button and select Live Video. Next, click the 'Create event' button. On the page that loads, type a name for your event (1 in our screenshot above right), then select the start date and time (2).

Optionally, you can add a photo (3) and scroll down to type a short description. By default, all members of your Facebook group will receive a notification inviting them to the live event and asking them to

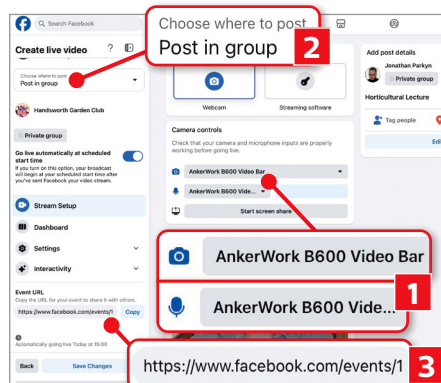


Name your event, pick a time and date, and add a photo if required

RSVP; you'll see a preview of the invitation on the right (4). When you're happy, click Next (5), then Create Event.

Start your live stream

Just before the event, go to your Facebook group and click Events. Click your upcoming event, followed by 'Set Up Live Video'. Make sure your computer's webcam and microphone are selected under 'Camera controls' (1 in our screenshot below) and that your camera is pointing at what you want to film.



Select your cam and mic then send the URL to the group's members

Check that 'Post in group' is selected (2). A URL for the event will be shown (3) – click Copy to send this link to anyone. Leave the page open and, when it's time for your scheduled stream to begin, click 'Start Live Video' at the bottom right.

Once you've started, use the dashboard of tools to monitor activity, such as the number of viewers, and read any comments. You can also set polls to ask your members questions.

When the event has finished, click 'End Live Video', then End. Your video will remain viewable for 30 days after. To download it, click 'View post', then tap the three horizontal dots and select 'Download video'.

Alternatively, start a live stream from the Facebook app on your phone by tapping the Menu (three horizontal lines) button top-left, then Groups (tap 'See more' if Groups isn't visible). Tap 'Your groups', then select your club's group, tap in the 'Write something...' box and tap the 'Live' icon at the bottom of the screen. Tap the 'switch view' icon to switch between your front and rear cameras, then tap Go Live.

What's All the Fuss About...

Microsoft Publisher

The 35-year-old tool is heading for the great recycle bin in the sky

What is it?

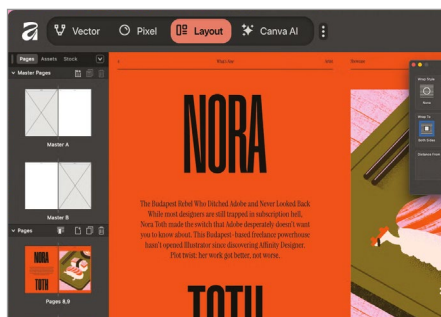
Microsoft's much-loved desktop-publishing software for creating layouts and designing pages. It lets users easily combine text and images to design flyers, brochures and newsletters. It arrived in 1991 as a separate program before being added to Office in 1996. However, it doesn't have long left. Microsoft says Publisher will reach its "end of life" in October.

Does that mean I won't be able to use it any more?

It depends on which version you have. If you use it as part of your Microsoft 365 subscription then you'll lose access for good on 1 October. Microsoft recommends converting your Publisher files to PDFs then opening them in Word (if you need to edit them), or any PDF viewer (such as Adobe Acrobat Reader) if you only need to view them. It claims PowerPoint and Word offer many Publisher tools, but they can't compare with a dedicated desktop-publishing program.

So what should I use instead?

The best alternative is probably Canva's Affinity (pictured below), which brings together Affinity Designer, Photos and Publisher in one tool. Even better, it's now a free download from www.snipca.com/60002 (it previously cost £68). It lets you use designs you've created in Microsoft Publisher, but you'll first need to save them as PDFs – we explained how in Issue 725's 'In the Club' (page 48).



Canva's free software Affinity is the best replacement for Microsoft Publisher



What if I don't subscribe to Microsoft 365?

Then you must use Publisher in a 'perpetual' version of Office – in other words, one that you bought as a one-off purchase. The last version of Office containing Publisher was Office 2021, for which Microsoft ends support on 13 October. This effectively scraps all support for the perpetual edition of Publisher.

But I'll still be able to use it?

Yes, indefinitely. But Microsoft won't release any new features, nor will it fix any security flaws. You'll have to decide whether it's worth the risk. It's a desktop program and doesn't need to connect to the internet to work, so it isn't directly exposed to online threats. However, you should be cautious about opening Publisher files from untrusted sources, as Microsoft will no longer fix vulnerabilities that could be exploited by malicious files. You can bet scammers are already planning their attacks (and we'll warn you when they come).

Why is Microsoft abandoning Publisher?

Do you want the official version or our own cynical take?

“

Publisher doesn't make Microsoft enough money to bother with any more

”

Start with the official version...

On its support page (www.snipca.com/59999) Microsoft says it's "dedicated to providing our customers with the tools they need to achieve what matters" and "in order to focus on new benefits, we occasionally remove features and products". It then goes on to explain the "retirement" plans and the actions you can take to preserve your files, but not why Publisher is one of the products it has chosen to "occasionally remove".

And now let's have your cynical take...

Publisher doesn't make Microsoft enough money to bother with any more. Plenty of people still use it, but they're mostly clubs, community groups and small organisations, not the big, lucrative businesses Microsoft makes millions from. The company is increasingly moving to a subscription business model, prioritising Microsoft 365 ahead of perpetual editions of Office, and it's presumably concluded that few people subscribe *because* of Publisher.

Will it eventually scrap those perpetual editions?

Almost certainly. Microsoft is keen to empty your pockets every month. We'll keep explaining how to avoid this.



WhatsApp

STOP USING IT WRONG!

There's so much more to WhatsApp than chats, calls and emojis. Robert Irvine reveals how to use the brilliant messaging app to its full potential

With more than 3.3 billion users, WhatsApp is by far the most popular messaging app in the world. It's also one of the most downloaded apps of any type, vying with Facebook, Instagram and TikTok for the top spot.

Unlike those three, and despite sharing the same owner – Meta – with the first

two, WhatsApp has a deservedly good reputation. That's because it has stuck to its original purpose as a communication tool, doesn't collect your data to target you with ads and protects your messages with **end-to-end encryption**.

WhatsApp's smart design and useful features make keeping in touch with friends and family incredibly easy. It's no

wonder so many of us have ditched **SMS** and now 'WhatsApp' each other rather than text.

But even if you use WhatsApp every day, you're probably not aware of its full range of tools. The deceptively simple app is packed with extra options that enhance your messages and calls in practical and fun ways.

Here, we reveal WhatsApp's best hidden features in its mobile apps, online version WhatsApp Web (www.snipca.com/59971) and Desktop program for Windows and macOS (www.snipca.com/59970). And we don't mean features like location-sharing, disappearing messages or its Updates tab, which most users are now familiar with. We focus on new and advanced options you won't want to ignore.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Edit your photos and videos before you share them
- Scan paper documents and convert them into PDFs
- Turn lengthy voice messages into readable text transcripts
- Make free voice and video calls in your web browser
- Lock and hide private chats so only you can see them
- Switch between two WhatsApp accounts on your phone

ENHANCE YOUR VOICE & VIDEO CALLS

Make voice and video calls in your browser

As we reported in Issue 742 (page 6), you can now make free voice and video calls through WhatsApp Web. This effectively turns the web-based version into a replacement for Zoom or Google Meet (or the now defunct Skype).

Previously, you could use WhatsApp Desktop for voice and video calls on your PC, but this required downloading and installing the program. WhatsApp Web works directly in your browser so is much more convenient.

To use the online version, visit <https://web.whatsapp.com> and scan the QR code with your phone's camera. Tap the link to open WhatsApp, press Continue then scan the QR code again. Alternatively, log into WhatsApp Web using your phone number.

To make a call, click the 'Voice call' or 'Video call' button in the top-right corner of a chat, and allow WhatsApp Web to access your microphone and/or webcam. You can conduct group voice calls with up to 32 people, with no time

limit, and enjoy the benefit of your PC's larger screen.

Click the Calls button in WhatsApp Web's left-hand sidebar (1 in our screenshot below left) to view your call history and start calls from there. This includes to phone numbers you haven't saved as contacts (2).

Leave 'voicemail' messages for missed calls

Last December, WhatsApp introduced the ability to record a voice or video message when someone misses your call. This is similar to leaving a voicemail for a standard call, but you may not have noticed the feature.

When a person doesn't answer your voice or video call, you'll now see a 'Record voice message' (see screenshot below) or 'Record video message' option. Tap this to record your message, play it back to ensure you're happy with it, then press Send.

The other person will receive a notification that you've left them a message. They can then listen to or

watch it before deciding whether to call you back.

Schedule your voice and video calls

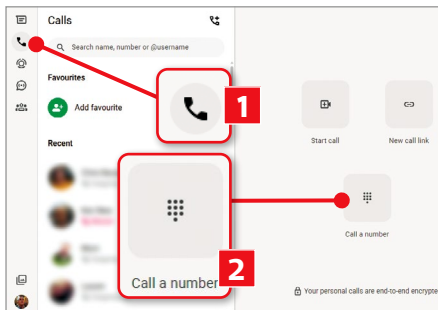
WhatsApp now lets you schedule voice and video calls for specific dates and times. This is particularly useful for group chats, including business meetings, remote family discussions and catch-ups with old friends, ensuring everyone is present from the start.

To use the feature, tap the Calls tab in WhatsApp then the Schedule button – or press the green Call button and choose 'Schedule call'. Select the date, start and end times of your call (you can remove the latter for less formal chats), and Voice or Video for 'Call type'.

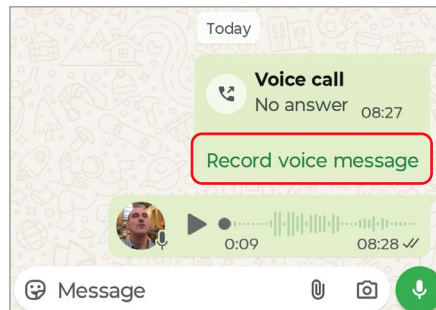
You can optionally provide a description for the call and require participants to get your approval before they can join. Tap 'Reminder' to remind participants when the call starts, from 15 minutes before to one day (see screenshot below). Press the Send button, choose the contacts you want to include, then press Send again.

Your upcoming calls are shown on the Calls tab, including a list of attendees. To change the details or cancel the call, tap 'Edit event'.

Call-scheduling isn't available in WhatsApp Web or Desktop, but you can send people links so they can join your voice and video calls.



Make voice and video calls in your browser using WhatsApp Web



Record a voice or video message when someone misses your WhatsApp call

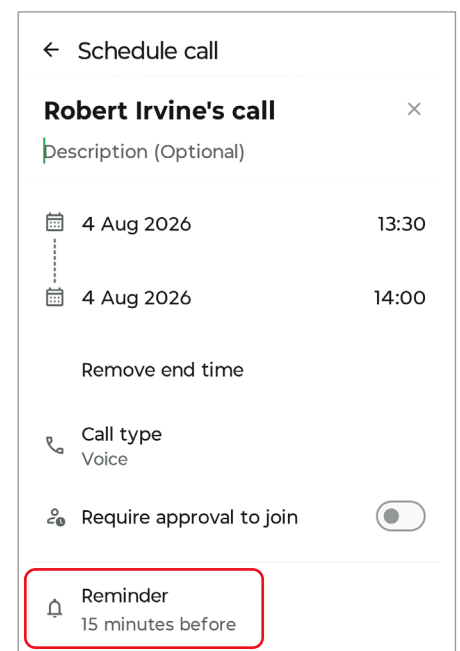
Make WhatsApp the default for messages and calls

If you use WhatsApp more than the Messages and Phone apps on your iPhone, you can set it as your default for messages and calls. However, this doesn't allow WhatsApp to replace the built-in iOS apps – standard messages and calls will still come through those tools.

Instead, it means that when you tap the Message or Call buttons in the Phone or Contacts app, your iPhone will open WhatsApp to perform those actions. That's provided the person you want to contact also has WhatsApp installed.

To make WhatsApp your default

messaging and calling app, open Settings on your iPhone and tap Apps, then Default Apps. Press 'Messaging' and select WhatsApp (1 in our screenshot), then do the same for Calling (2). You can revert to Apple's apps if you change your mind. This option isn't yet available on Android phones, where Google is stricter about third-party apps as defaults.



Schedule WhatsApp calls and send reminders before they start

CONVERT, EDIT & SHARE FILES

Scan documents to PDF

One of WhatsApp's most useful but least-known tools is its document scanner. This digitises paper items such as letters, receipts and tickets, then converts them into PDFs you can share within chats.

To use this secret feature, tap the paperclip icon in the message box and select Documents, then 'Scan document'. Point your phone's camera at the paper

item and WhatsApp will automatically detect its edges and scan the content (1 in our screenshot left). You can also scan the document manually by tapping Manual (2) and pressing the shutter button.

Once the document is scanned,

WhatsApp uses AI to enhance the quality. Tap 'Filter' to adjust the colour, apply shadows or make the scan black-and-white or greyscale. Other options let you crop and rotate the image, and clean it to remove stains and blemishes, or redact sensitive information.

Press 'Next' to save the result as a PDF, then add a caption and share it to the chat. The people you're chatting to can then open the document in their preferred PDF viewer.

View and edit PDF files

In the Web and Desktop versions of WhatsApp, you can now view and edit PDFs directly in chats. You don't need to use a separate program or extension, nor download the PDF to your PC.

Just click the PDF in the chat and WhatsApp will open it in a full-screen viewer. Use the options bottom right to scroll through the document and zoom in and out of the content.

The 'Edit PDF' button at the top of the viewer (1 in our screenshot right) lets you draw on the PDF in various coloured pens, highlight sections of text, and underline and strikethrough specific words. Select the 'Edit in Acrobat' option (2) to open the PDF in Adobe Acrobat. This

lets you add text to the document, insert your signature and summarise its content using AI – other features require an Acrobat Pro subscription. Edited PDFs can be reshared to WhatsApp or downloaded to your PC.

Transfer files of up to 2GB

We all use WhatsApp to share photos and videos with friends and family, but it can also serve as a free file-transfer service. It's a great way to send files from your device to other people's, without knowing their email address or signing up for an account – as you have to with WeTransfer, for example.

You can share files of up to 2GB in size, including PDFs, MP3s and ZIP archives – and up to 100 images in one go. However, videos must be smaller than 100MB. These limits apply across WhatsApp's mobile and desktop apps, as well as its

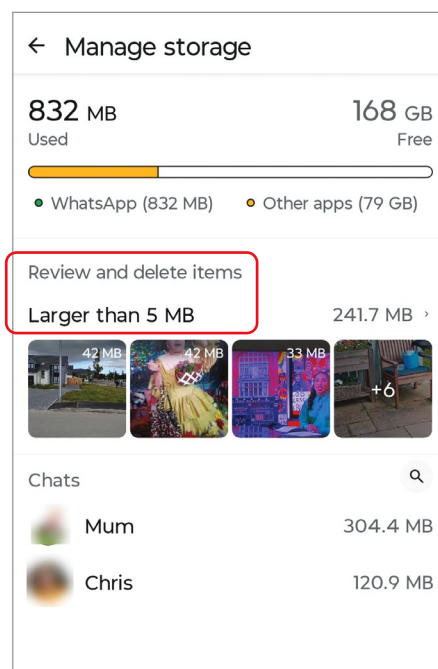
Web version.

To share a file, tap the paperclip icon and choose either Gallery or Photos (to send photos and videos) or Document (to send other file types). The latter lets you browse your device and storage services, such as Google Drive and

WhatsApp lets you send documents and other files of up to 2GB

iCloud, for documents and other files to share (see screenshot above). In WhatsApp Web or Desktop, click the plus-sign button and choose 'Photos & Videos' or Document.

Press the Send button to transfer the file via the chat. The other person can then download it to their device.



Free up storage by deleting large files from your WhatsApp chats

Delete large files from your chats

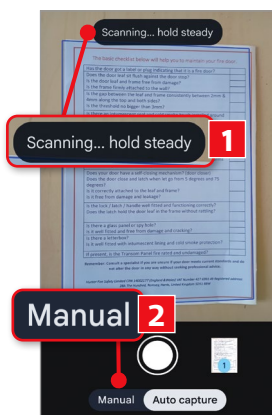
One problem with using WhatsApp as a file-transfer service is that your device storage will start filling up with items people share with you. This also happens with photos and videos you've been sent, which are automatically downloaded to your phone.

To reclaim space from large files on an Android device, tap the three-dot menu button on the Chats tab and choose Settings then 'Storage and data'. On an iPhone, just tap Settings and select 'Storage and data'. Tap 'Manage storage' to review and delete all files larger than 5MB (see our screenshot above).

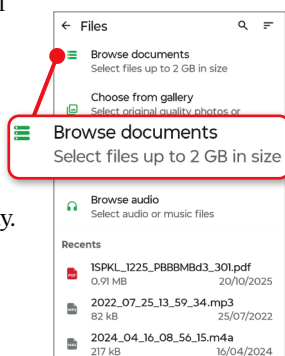
You can also tap individual and group chats to view all the files shared in them, and delete those you don't need.

To do this from within a chat, tap its name then 'Manage storage'. Files won't be removed from WhatsApp for the other chat participants – just from your phone.

To stop WhatsApp automatically downloading photos and videos, tap Chats in its Settings. Switch off 'Media visibility' on an Android phone or 'Save to Photos' on an iPhone.



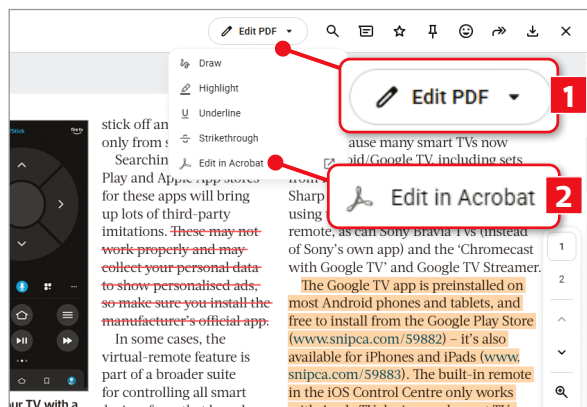
WhatsApp's document scanner converts paper items into PDFs



WhatsApp lets you send documents and other files of up to 2GB

iCloud, for documents and other files to share (see screenshot above). In WhatsApp Web or Desktop, click the plus-sign button and choose 'Photos & Videos' or Document.

Press the Send button to transfer the file via the chat. The other person can then download it to their device.



Edit PDFs in WhatsApp's Web and Desktop versions

ENHANCE YOUR WHATSAPP CHATS

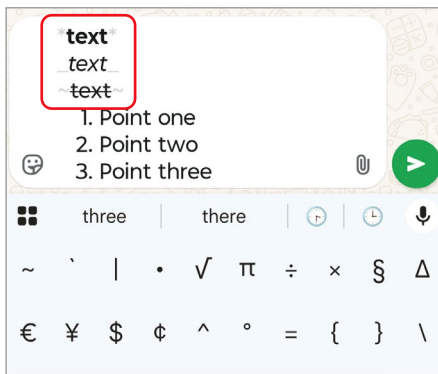
Format the text in your messages

WhatsApp lets you emphasise specific words and phrases in your messages by making them bold or italicised. But because those options – and other ways to format text – aren't accessible from your keyboard or a toolbar, many users aren't aware of them.

To make text **bold** in a WhatsApp chat, simply place asterisks on either side of the words – for example, ***text***. To *italicise* it, surround the words with underscores, like this: *text*. You can also cross out words using a **strikethrough** by placing a tilde symbol either side: ~~text~~ (see all three options in our screenshot below).

Alternatively, apply formatting *after* you've typed your message. Long-press and select the relevant text to open a pop-up menu that includes a Bold option. Tap the three-dot icon to access Italic and Strikethrough.

To create a bullet-pointed list in a



WhatsApp offers several ways to format the text in messages

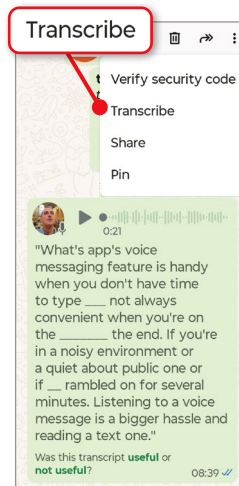
WhatsApp conversation, place an asterisk or hyphen with a space before each word or sentence. To make a numbered list, insert a number, full stop and space before each point.

Read transcripts of voice messages

WhatsApp's voice-messaging feature is handy when you don't have time to type, but not always convenient when you're on the receiving end. If you're in a noisy environment or a quiet but public one, or if the sender has rambled on for several minutes, listening to a voice message is a bigger hassle than reading a text one.

To make life easier, WhatsApp can generate transcripts of voice messages. Select 'Chats' in its Settings and tap 'Voice message transcripts'. Press 'Choose language' and select English to download the language pack.

To read a transcription, long-press the voice message and choose Transcribe – on Android, the option is in the three-dot menu (see screenshot above).



WhatsApp can transcribe any voice messages you receive

WhatsApp will then convert the audio into text – it may not recognise every word.

Translate foreign-language messages

WhatsApp can now translate messages you receive in many foreign languages. This saves you having to copy the text to a translation app such as Google Translate to find out what it means.

The translation feature works with messages in both individual and group chats. In WhatsApp for Android, you can currently translate 17 languages – including French, German, Italian, Spanish, Hindi, Portuguese and Turkish – while the iOS app supports 19.

To try the option, long-press a foreign language message, then tap the three-dot menu (on Android) or More menu (on iOS) and select Translate. Tap 'Choose' and download the relevant language pack – you only need to do this the first time you translate that language.



WhatsApp can translate foreign-language messages to English

Press Translate (1 in our screenshot above) and WhatsApp will replace the foreign text with its English translation and mark it as 'Translated'. You can set the Android app to automatically translate all new messages in the chat (2).

To revert to the original language, long-press the message, tap the three-dot or More menu and choose 'Remove translation'. Translation is only available in WhatsApp's mobile apps.

Create shortcuts to your favourite chats

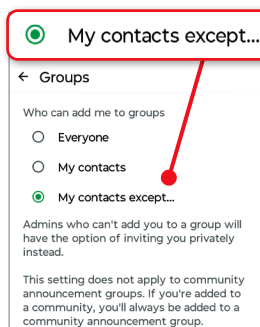
Rather than open WhatsApp each time you want to message close friends and family members, add shortcuts for those chats to your phone's home screen. You can then resume the conversation with a single tap.

In the Android app, tap the three-dot menu button in the top-right corner of a chat and choose More, then 'Add

Stop people adding you to group chats

WhatsApp lets anyone who knows your phone number add you to a group chat without asking you first. While this isn't usually a problem if, for example, you've been invited to an event or a neighbourhood discussion, it can sometimes prove annoying.

It means you'll receive notifications every time other members post messages and will draw attention to yourself if you leave the group. There's also the risk you could be added to a group set up by spammers or

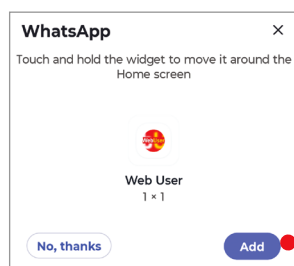


scammers.

To stop people adding you to WhatsApp groups without your permission, tap Privacy in Settings and select Groups. Change the 'Who can add me to groups' setting from Everyone to 'My contacts except' (see screenshot). You can then specify who's not allowed to add you to groups – or select

all if you're feeling particularly antisocial.

Group admins will now need to send you a private invitation to join – they won't be able to add you without your consent.



Add one-tap shortcuts to WhatsApp chats to your home screen

Add

shortcut'. Tap 'Add' (see screenshot above) then drag the **widget** to a suitable place on your home screen.

On an iPhone or iPad, long-press the home screen and tap Edit, then Add Widget. Select 'WhatsApp' in the list of apps and press Add Widget for one of the Chats options. This will provide shortcuts to your most recent chats – long-press the widget and choose Edit Widget to include frequent, favourite or pinned chats instead.

Customise your WhatsApp chats

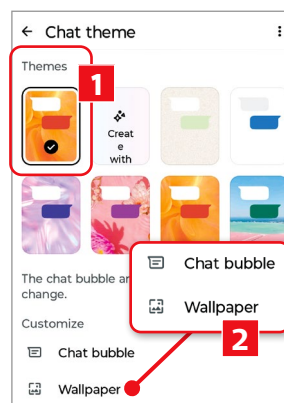
You can make WhatsApp look more interesting by applying different themes to chats with specific people and groups. In the Android app, tap the three-dot menu and select 'Chat theme'; on iOS,

tap the name of the chat to find this option.

Choose a theme (**1** in our screenshot below) to change the message-bubble colour and wallpaper for the current conversation. Swipe left or right to see previews of each theme. Press the green tick button to apply your chosen theme, then tap 'Set theme' to confirm.

Alternatively, customise the colour of the chat bubbles and the wallpaper design separately **2**. You can use one of your own pictures by tapping the 'Choose from gallery' option, or create one using Meta AI.

To change the theme, bubble colour and/or wallpaper for *all* your WhatsApp conversations, tap Chats in WhatsApp's Settings and select 'Default chat theme'. This gives you access to the same options we've described.



Apply colourful themes to specific or all WhatsApp chats

Note that your custom theme is only visible to you – the people you talk to in WhatsApp will still see its default green, white and grey theme.

Send notes and reminders to yourself

Although WhatsApp doesn't include a note-taking tool, you can save reminders, useful web links, important information and random thoughts by sending a message to yourself. This also lets you test that content displays properly before you share it with someone else.

To save a note in this way, tap the New Message button in the bottom-right corner of the Chats screen. Select your name at the top of the Contacts list to start a conversation as you would normally. Once you've finished, tap 'Send' and the chat will appear in your Chats list, so you can continue talking to yourself. The feature is available in all WhatsApp versions, so is also useful for moving photos, videos and other files from one device to another.

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CHAT MORE PRIVATELY IN WHATSAPP

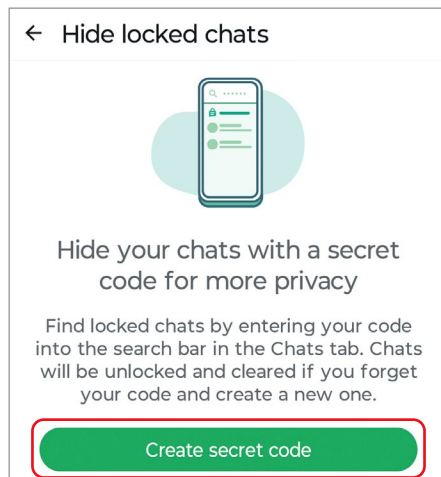
Lock and hide your private chats

Stop people reading your private WhatsApp conversations using its surprisingly little-known Chat Lock feature. This moves selected chats to a secret folder that can only be accessed with the password, PIN or **biometric** method (such as your fingerprint) you use to unlock your phone.

Long-press a private conversation and choose 'Lock chat' (in the three-dot menu on Android) to secure it. The 'Locked chats' folder appears at the top of your chat list when you swipe down.

If that's not private enough, you can hide it completely. Open the folder, tap the three-dot icon (on Android) or Settings (on iOS), and choose 'Chat lock settings'. Switch on 'Hide locked chats' and create a secret code (see screenshot below).

This will reveal the hidden folder when you type the code into your search box – nobody else will know it exists. The secret code also lets you access your locked chats in WhatsApp Web and Desktop.

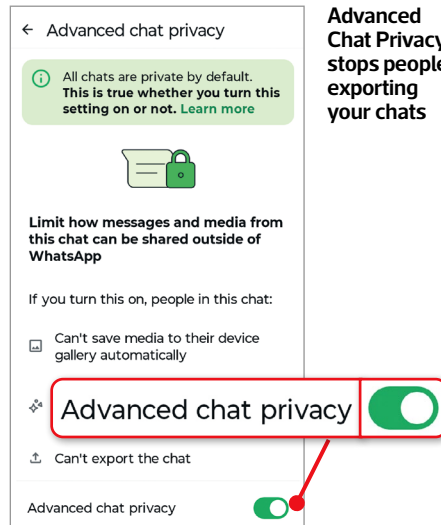


Create a secret code to hide your locked chats in WhatsApp

WhatsApp will notify you when your locked chats receive new messages, without displaying the senders' names or a preview of the content. Restore hidden conversations to your main chat list by long-pressing them and choosing 'Unlock chat'.

Stop people sharing your chats

Although WhatsApp protects your chats using end-to-end encryption, your privacy can still be compromised by its 'Export chat' feature. This saves text files of conversations (and optionally the photos and videos posted in them) in a ZIP file that can be shared to other apps



Advanced Chat Privacy stops people exporting your chats

and with other people.

To prevent this from happening, enable WhatsApp's Advanced Chat Privacy option, which it introduced last year. This stops people exporting your chats, and automatically downloading your photos and videos to their devices. It also blocks Meta's AI features.

To activate Advanced Chat Privacy for your current conversation, tap the name of the chat, select 'Advanced chat privacy' then switch on the second option with that name (see screenshot above). In WhatsApp Web, click the three-dot icon and choose 'Contact info' then 'Advanced chat privacy'.

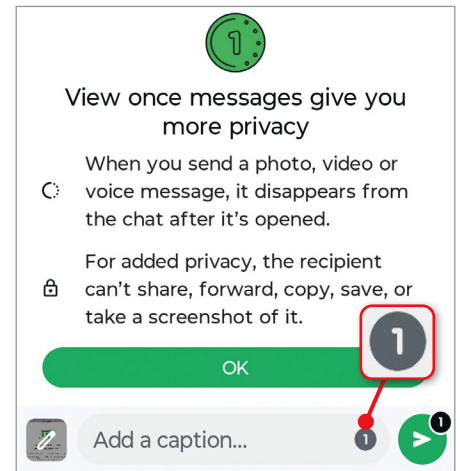
The feature can also be enabled for group chats, but only if you're the group admin. The people you're chatting to are notified when Advanced Chat Privacy is switched on.

Block screenshots of photos and videos

Advanced Chat Privacy doesn't stop people taking screenshots of your chats, and nor does WhatsApp's 'disappearing messages' feature, which sets messages to expire after a specific time. However, you can use its 'View once' option to block screenshots of photos and videos you share.

Tap the paperclip icon in the message, and either capture a photo or video, or choose one from your Gallery or Photos library. Press the '1' icon in the 'Add a caption' box so its circle turns solid (see screenshot above right). Tap 'OK' then press Send to share your 'view once' photo or video.

The content will disappear as soon as the recipient closes their photo or video viewer – you'll be notified when they open



'View once' photos and videos can't be screengrabbed or saved

it. No one can screenshot, forward or download 'view once' media. 'View once' is also available for WhatsApp voice messages, so they disappear once played.

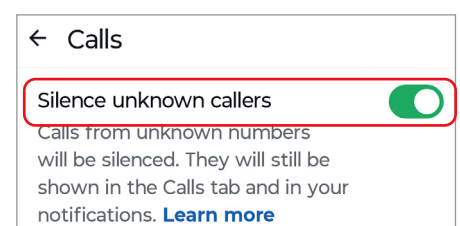
Silence calls from unknown numbers

Anyone who knows your phone number can call you through WhatsApp. That means you're just as vulnerable to spam and scam calls as you are in your standard Phone app.

To stop nuisance calls disturbing you at all hours, without blocking genuine calls, switch on WhatsApp's 'Silence unknown callers' feature. This mutes calls from numbers that aren't saved in your contacts, so your phone doesn't ring.

You'll still be notified of the call, and the details will appear on WhatsApp's Calls tab. This means you won't completely miss calls from, for example, tradespeople who are trying to reach you or someone who's obtained your number from a friend or family member.

To enable the feature, tap Privacy in WhatsApp's Settings, select Calls and turn on 'Silence unknown callers' (see screenshot below). Note that once you call back or send a message to a silenced caller, you won't be able to silence them in future.



Silence calls from numbers that aren't saved to your contacts

EDIT & ENHANCE PHOTOS & VIDEOS

Edit photos before sending

WhatsApp's built-in image-editing tools are easy to overlook. They let you perfect your photos before you share them in chats, without using a separate app such as Google Photos or Apple Photos.

To try these tools, tap the camera icon in the message box and either take a photo or press the picture icon to select one from your Gallery (on Android) or Photos library (on iOS). Don't tap the Send button, but instead press the pencil icon next to 'Add a caption' to open WhatsApp's image editor. With new photos, this opens automatically.

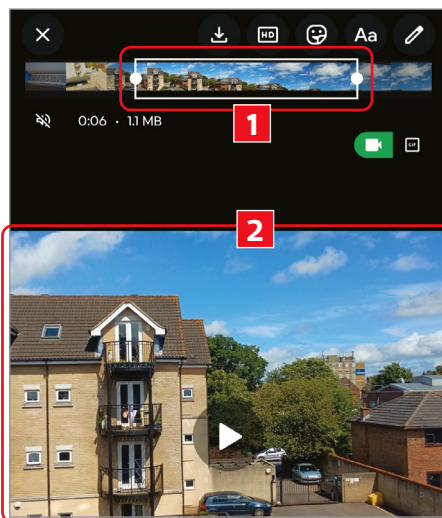
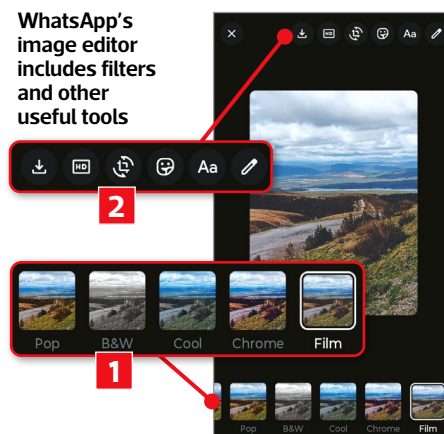
Swipe up on the image to browse WhatsApp's choice of filters (1 in our screenshot below). These include B&W (black and white), Cool (a blue tint) and Film (a grainy retro effect). Tap a filter to apply it to your photo.

The toolbar at the top of the image editor (2) includes options for cropping and rotating your pictures; overlaying stickers and emojis; and adding annotations and text. With the latter, you can choose your preferred font and colour, and whether to align the text left, right or centre.

WhatsApp decreases the quality of photos to make their file size smaller and therefore faster to send. To share an image at its original size and quality (if available), tap the HD icon in the toolbar and select 'HD quality'.

Another handy tool lets you blur sensitive elements in pictures, such as phone numbers, email addresses and account details. Tap the pen icon top right, then the blocky-squiggle option on the bottom toolbar. Swipe the area of the image you want to blur. Although the feature can pixelate faces, it doesn't disguise them – you're better off hiding the person behind a sticker.

WhatsApp's image editor includes filters and other useful tools



Crop your WhatsApp video to focus on the important moment

Edit videos before sending

Before you share a video in a chat, you can crop it to focus on the important or amusing moment. This saves other people having to watch the whole thing.

Switch to WhatsApp's video editor in the same way as the image editor, and you'll see a timeline at the top of the screen. Drag the handles either side to crop the clip to the relevant part (1 in our screenshot above) – a preview will then play below (2).

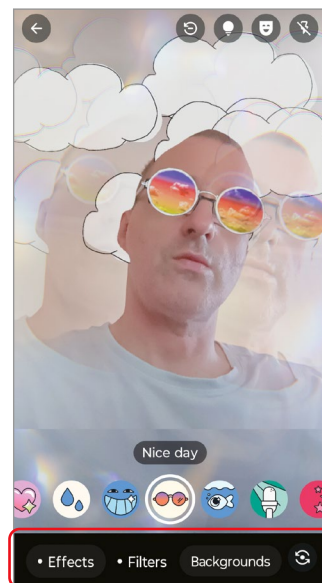
To remove audio from the video, tap the speaker icon to mute it before sharing. Like WhatsApp's image editor, the video editor includes options for adding stickers, annotations and text, and lets you restore clips to their original HD versions.

Apply effects to photos and videos

WhatsApp can enhance photos and videos before you capture them, using effects, filters and backgrounds. Also available for video calls, these tools make your selfies and recordings more fun and interesting. They even have privacy benefits, letting you blur or replace your background.

To try these features, press the camera button in the message box and select either Photo or Video. Tap the magic-wand button and three options will appear below the camera viewfinder: Effects, Filters and Backgrounds (see screenshot above right).

Tap 'Effects' to choose from over 20 quirky effects including Puppy, Kaleidoscope and Underwater. Press 'Filters' for 16 artistic options, such as 'Rainy day', 'Frosted glass' and Dreamy. Combine



Apply creative effects to photos and videos you share in chats

filters and effects for more creative results.

Tap 'Background' to select backgrounds including Cafe, Office and Sunset. You can either share your enhanced photo or video in the current chat or save it to your Gallery or Photos library.

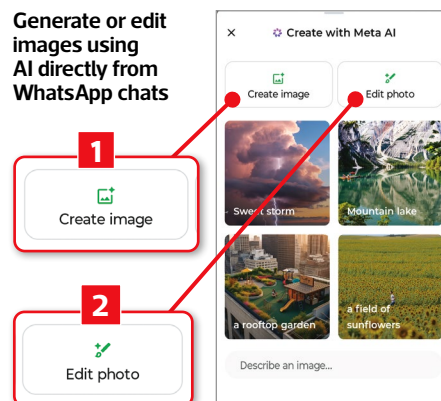
Create and edit images using AI

WhatsApp recently added the option to create images in chats using Meta AI. It means you no longer need to open ChatGPT, Gemini or any another AI tool to generate pictures.

Tap the paperclip icon in the message box and select 'AI images' to open a 'Create with Meta AI' panel. You can either select a template such as 'Mountain lake' or 'A rooftop garden', or tap 'Create image' (1 in our screenshot below) and describe the image you want to create.

Alternatively, tap 'Edit photo' (2) to select a picture stored on your phone, and edit, restyle or animate it using Meta AI. Press the Send button to share your AI images in the current chat.

Generate or edit images using AI directly from WhatsApp chats



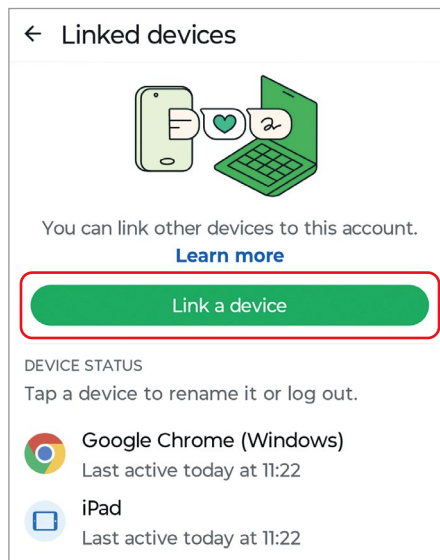
USE MULTIPLE DEVICES & ACCOUNTS

Use WhatsApp on your tablet

Many people don't realise that you can use WhatsApp on the larger and more comfortable screen of an Android tablet or iPad. First, install the app from the Google Play Store (www.snipca.com/59965) or the Apple App Store (www.snipca.com/59966 – an iPad-optimised version was introduced last year). Open the app, tap 'Agree and continue', then 'Log in', and WhatsApp will display a QR code.

In WhatsApp on your Android phone, tap the three-dot menu and choose 'Linked devices'. On an iPhone, tap Settings, then 'Linked devices'. Select 'Link a device' then scan the QR code with your phone's camera. WhatsApp will open on your Android tablet or iPad, with all your chats, calls and settings intact.

You can link up to four devices to WhatsApp, including other phones and your PC (for WhatsApp Web and Desktop). WhatsApp is currently rolling out the option to create an account directly on an iPad without linking your phone (www.snipca.com/59967).



Link your tablet to your phone to use WhatsApp on its bigger screen

Try new features in group chats

In August, WhatsApp upgraded its group chats with several new features (www.snipca.com/59969). These include a way to get everyone's attention when you make an important announcement.

Type @all in your message and all group members will receive a notification. It's useful for ensuring no one misses

your post, but may prove annoying if people overuse it. You can mute '@all' notifications in WhatsApp's Settings.

Another new option lets a group spin off from an existing one. Select 'Create a similar group' in the chat's settings to start a new group chat with the same members, then add and remove people as required.

Use two WhatsApp accounts on one phone

If you have a dual-SIM phone, you can switch between two WhatsApp accounts in the same app. This allows you to have one account for personal messages and calls, and the other for work.

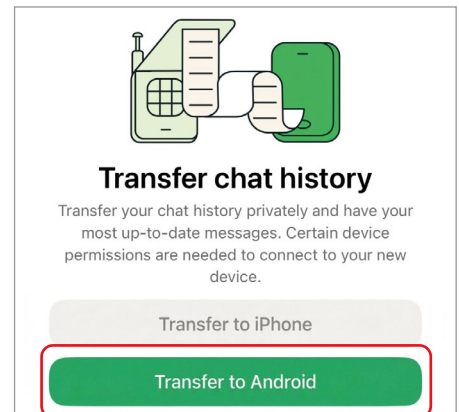
To set up a second WhatsApp account, select Account in WhatsApp's Settings and tap 'Add account'. Press 'Add WhatsApp account', then 'Agree and continue' and enter the phone number for your SIM or eSIM. WhatsApp will verify the number with a missed call to your phone, or you can receive an SMS verification code.

Once confirmed, you'll be able to switch between the two accounts by tapping your WhatsApp profile picture. Your phone will notify you when a new message is sent to either number, so you can respond through the relevant account.

Transfer chats between devices

Earlier this year, WhatsApp made it easier to transfer your chats from an iPhone to an Android phone. This is handy if you've switched from Apple to Google and don't want to lose your WhatsApp chats.

To start the transfer, open WhatsApp's Settings on your iPhone and choose Chats, then 'Transfer chat history'. Select 'Transfer to Android' (see screenshot above right), tap Continue and WhatsApp will prepare the chat data – this includes your account information, individual and group chats, call history, and photos and videos.



Transfer your chats from an iPhone to an Android phone

On your Android phone (which must be connected to the same Wi-Fi network), open WhatsApp and verify your account with your phone number. Tap 'Allow' then use your iPhone's camera to scan the QR code provided and transfer your WhatsApp data.

To move chats from Android to iOS, install Apple's 'Move to iOS' app (www.snipca.com/58536). Start the setup process on your new iPhone and select 'Move Data from Android' on the 'Apps & Data' screen. Tap 'Continue' then enter the code provided in the 'Move to iOS' app. Select 'WhatsApp' on the Transfer Data screen, then tap Start.

Transferring chats from Android to Android, or iPhone to iPhone, is simpler because you can restore a backup from Google Drive or iCloud. **ca**

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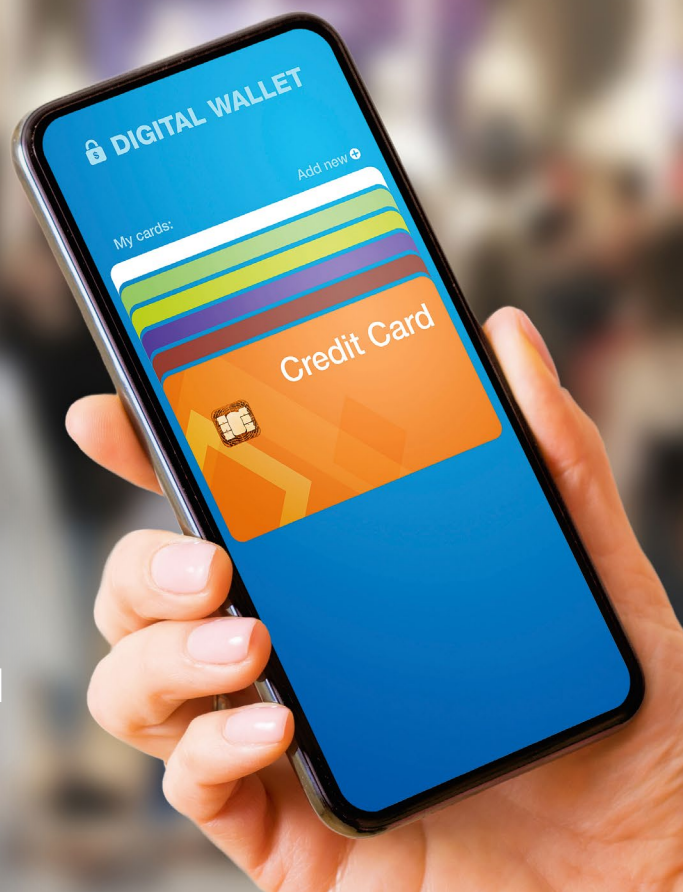
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Why you need a Digital Wallet

Digital wallets are becoming an essential part of modern life. Jonathan Parkyn explains what they are, how they work and why now is the time to get one



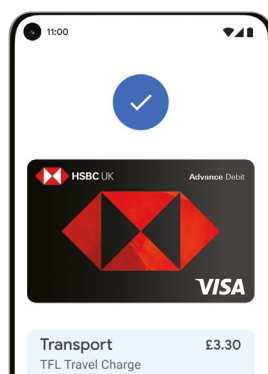
Think of Apple Wallet or Google Wallet and the first thing that comes to mind is contactless payments. But tapping your phone to pay for your morning coffee is just the start. Increasingly, digital wallets are being used to store tickets, travel passes, loyalty cards and much more. Governments, banks and even the NHS are beginning to embrace them, too.

Digital wallets aren't just convenient. They're also secure, easy to use and available to anyone who has a smartphone. Whether you've started using one yourself or have resisted so far, digital wallets are becoming an important part of everyday life. Here, we explain what they are, how they work, how you can take advantage of them – and, crucially, how to use them safely.

What exactly is a digital wallet?

A digital wallet is a secure app that stores digital versions of items you'd normally keep in your physical wallet, including debit and credit cards (see screenshot right).

Adding a payment card to your wallet is usually as simple as opening your wallet app, tapping the Add button, scanning your card with your phone's camera and verifying it with your



Digital wallets store digitised versions of your debit and credit cards

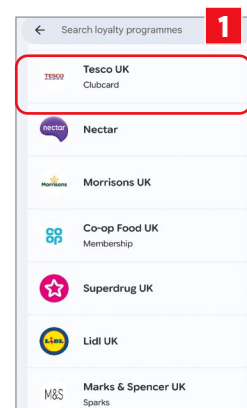
bank. Once it's been approved, contactless payments are made using Apple Pay, Google Pay or Samsung Pay, depending on your device.

Digital wallets use Near Field Communication (NFC) – the same short-range wireless technology used by contactless bank cards. After confirming your identity using your fingerprint, face or phone PIN (where required), simply hold your phone close to the payment terminal and your transaction will be authorised in a fraction of a second. You don't need a mobile signal or Wi-Fi connection for contactless payments to work.

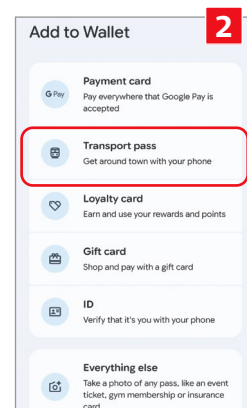
What else can you use it for?

Digital wallets can hold store cards, loyalty cards, gift cards and vouchers alongside your payment cards. So, instead of opening a supermarket app to scan your loyalty card, such as a Tesco Clubcard (see screenshot 1 above right), before switching back to your wallet to pay, everything you need is available from the same place.

Many airlines let you save boarding passes directly to



Your digital wallet can hold all your loyalty cards for high-street shops



Add travel passes, gift cards and much more to your digital wallet

your wallet, where they can easily be shared with travelling companions. Train tickets, railcards, bus passes and other travel passes can often be stored there too.

Cinemas, concert venues and sports stadiums also let you add tickets to your wallet. Some hotels can issue digital room keys, while gyms, universities and workplaces are beginning to offer digital membership and access passes too.

Some passes can appear automatically when you need them – for example, your boarding pass at the airport or your cinema ticket as you arrive at the venue, saving you having to search through emails or apps.

Travel passes can normally be added by tapping the relevant option in your wallet (see screenshot 2 above). Most tickets,

boarding passes and loyalty cards can be added by tapping an 'Add to Wallet' button in an email, website or the provider's own app. Others may require you to scan a **QR code**.

Are digital wallets safe to use?

Several layers of protection make digital wallets at least as secure as carrying physical cards – and, in some ways, more so. The wallet itself is encrypted and protected by your phone's security, usually requiring your fingerprint, face or PIN before it can be used. That means someone who picks up your phone can't automatically start spending your money, and the risk of someone **skimming** your phone's wallet by walking past with a card reader is extremely low.

Also, when you use your wallet to make a payment, it doesn't transmit your actual card number. Instead, it creates a unique encrypted code – known as a token – that represents your card for that single transaction. The process (called 'tokenisation') means your real card details aren't shared with the retailer. And even if someone intercepts the token, it can't be reused to make further purchases.

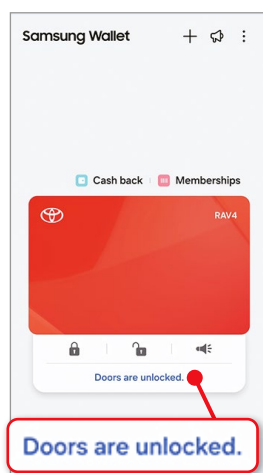
However, it's still a good idea to also carry a physical payment card as a backup. If your phone's battery runs flat, or your device is lost, stolen or develops a fault, then a backup card (and even some good, old-fashioned cash) can save you a great deal of inconvenience.

In the event of loss or theft, you can lock your phone remotely using Apple's Find My or Google's Find Hub, and suspend or erase its contents, if necessary. Many banks also let you freeze individual cards.

Which wallet should you use?

Your choice of wallet is largely governed by the type of phone you own. If you have an iPhone, you'll use the built-in Apple Wallet app. Android users should generally use Google Wallet, which comes installed on many phones, and is free to download from the Google Play Store (www.snipca.com/59964).

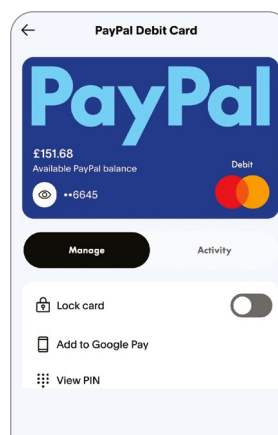
Samsung Galaxy owners have another option in the form of Samsung Wallet. It offers many of the same features as Google Wallet, including support for payment cards, tickets, travel



The Samsung Wallet app for Galaxy phones can store digital keys

What about third-party digital wallets?

For most people, Apple Wallet, Google Wallet or Samsung Wallet will be the most-used digital wallets on their phones. You'll also come across bank apps and services that describe themselves as 'wallets', but these aren't usually direct replacements. Banking apps from Barclays, NatWest, Monzo and other providers focus on managing your account – checking your balance, viewing transactions, freezing cards and transferring money. Most still let you



add your debit or credit card to your phone's main digital wallet for contactless payments.

Services such as PayPal (see screenshot), Curve and Revolut work slightly differently again. They're financial services that can be linked to your main digital wallet, giving you extra ways to pay or manage your money.

In most cases, you'll continue using your phone's default wallet for everyday payments.

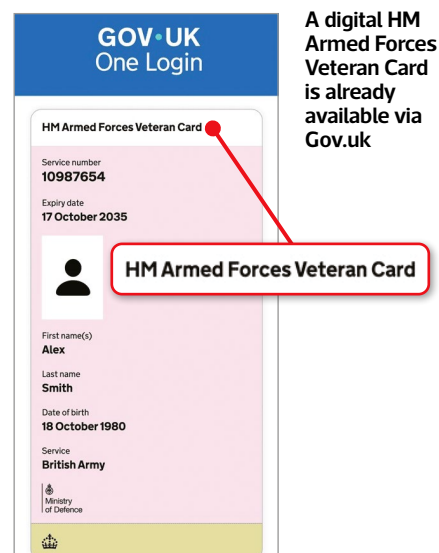
passes and digital keys (see screenshot below), and is tightly integrated with Samsung's Galaxy phones and smartwatches. However, because Google Wallet works across almost all Android devices, it's likely to be the more convenient choice – especially if you change to a different Android brand in the future.

All three wallets are evolving. Apple, for example, has started integrating more banking features into its Wallet, allowing customers of some participating banks to view their account balance, recent transactions and other account information without having to open their banking app. Google Wallet can also display recent transactions.

Your wallet is becoming your ID

Several countries already use digital wallets to store government-issued credentials. In Ireland, for example, the government is rolling out its own Digital Wallet that will eventually allow citizens to store documents such as driving licences, passports and birth certificates securely on their phone.

In the UK, the proposed national Digital ID scheme was abandoned in July, but development of the Gov.uk One Login programme (www.sign-in.service.gov.uk) and is designed specifically for



A digital HM Armed Forces Veteran Card is already available via Gov.uk

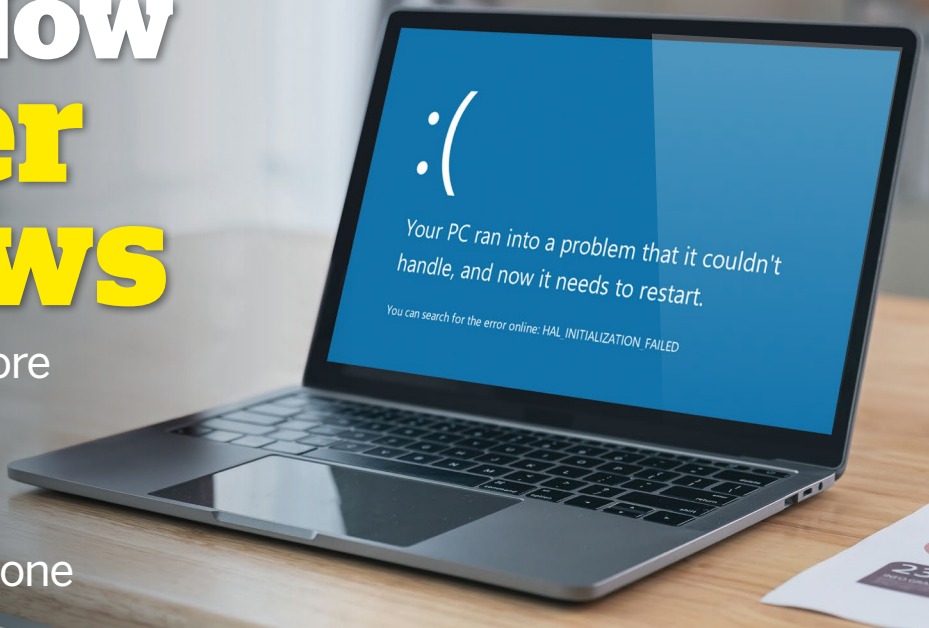
storing official government documents on your phone. Unlike Apple Wallet or Google Wallet, it won't hold bank cards or things like concert tickets.

A digital HM Armed Forces Veteran Card is already available through the Gov.uk One Login app (see screenshot above), while digital driving licences have been tested in private trials with the DVLA ahead of a wider rollout. Over time, more government-issued credentials are expected to be added, although using the wallet will remain entirely optional and physical documents will continue to be available.

Healthcare is another area where digital wallets could become useful. For example, during the Covid pandemic, people could add their NHS Covid Pass to Apple or Google Wallet. For now, however, most health information still lives in the NHS App. **ca**

Every Way You Can Now Recover Windows

Microsoft now provides more ways than ever to restore a faulty PC to working order. Jonathan Parkyn explains how and when to use each one



Recovering your PC after a serious crash used to entail restoring a **system-image** backup (assuming you'd remembered to make one) or – worse still – reinstalling Windows from scratch. Today, Windows 11 comes with a wide range of recovery tools, including the new 'Point-in-time Restore' feature.

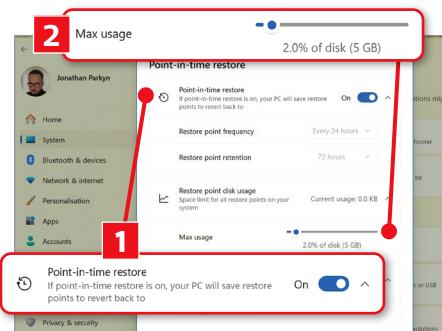
The problem lies in knowing which method of recovery to use – and how or when to use it. Here, we explain all of Windows' built-in options and which scenario each one is best suited to – from fixing minor glitches to recovering from a complete system failure.

It's important to remember that recovery tools don't replace regular backups. We strongly recommend backing up all your important files before attempting any of the following procedures.

Undo a recent problem Point-in-time Restore

Introduced in the June 2026 update for Windows 11 (KB5094126), 'Point-in-time Restore' is Microsoft's biggest overhaul of Windows recovery in years. Like the older System Restore tool (more on that later), it lets you roll back your PC to an earlier state if something goes wrong.

Unlike System Restore, however, it reinstates not only your Windows settings and installed programs, but also your personal files – returning them all to the state they were in when the restore point was created.



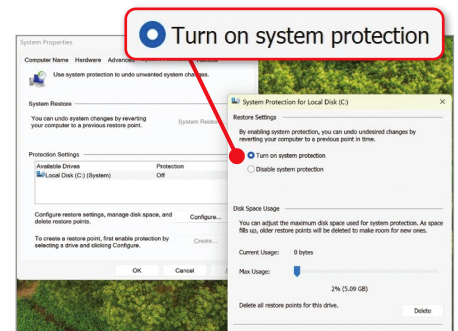
Ensure the new 'Point-in-time Restore' feature is enabled in Windows 11

The feature works automatically in the background by creating regular restore points – essentially, snapshots of your PC stored on your hard drive. By default, Windows creates one roughly every 24 hours and keeps the restore points for around 72 hours before deleting older ones to free up space.

To check that 'Point-in-time Restore' is enabled, open Settings, click System followed by Recovery, then click the 'View or edit' button next to 'Point-in-time Restore'.

On PCs with a 200GB (or larger) system drive, the feature should already be switched on (1 in our screenshot above). From here you can also see how much drive space Windows is allowed to use for restore points. The default is two per cent of your hard drive 2, which will be enough for most people.

If Windows develops a serious problem, you can resuscitate your PC via the Windows Recovery Environment (see



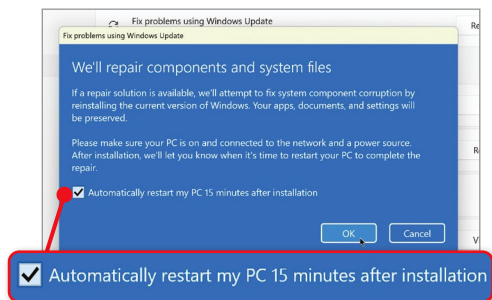
Switch on System Restore to protect your Windows 10 PC from disasters

opposite page). This will return your PC to exactly how it was when that snapshot was taken.

System Restore

Windows 10 users can't access the new 'Point-in-time Restore' tool. But its precursor, System Restore, can still help you recover from most common Windows problems. It creates automatic restore points that include system files, settings, **drivers** and the registry, while removing any apps and drivers that were installed since the chosen restore point was created.

System Restore is disabled by default on many PCs, so type **Create a restore point** into the Start menu and press Enter. Select your system drive, then click Configure. Here, ensure 'Turn on system protection' is selected (see screenshot above) and click OK. You can now restore your PC via the Windows Recovery Environment even if Windows won't start.



Reinstall Windows 11 without losing your programs, files or settings

Recover Windows without losing files Repair Windows using Windows Update

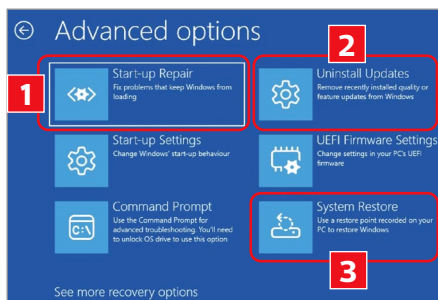
A new Windows 11 feature (it's not available in Windows 10) provides a simple way to fix problems *without* affecting your programs, files or settings. It is essentially a Windows reinstall, but without having to download and mount a Windows ISO file or create a bootable USB drive. All you need is an internet connection and enough free storage to download the repaired files.

To use it, go to Settings, System, Recovery, then click the 'Reinstall now' button next to 'Fix problems using Windows Update'. Tick the 'Automatically restart my PC 15 minutes after installation' box (see screenshot above), then click OK.

Windows Recovery Environment

The aforementioned Windows Recovery Environment (WinRE) is an emergency toolbox that offers several repair and recovery options. And because it runs separately from Windows, you can access it even if your PC won't start in the normal way.

You can launch WinRE by navigating to Settings, System, Recovery, then clicking



The Windows Recovery Environment offers several repair and recovery tools

'Restart now' next to 'Advanced startup'. Alternatively, hold down the Shift key on your keyboard while clicking Restart in the Start menu. If Windows repeatedly fails to boot, WinRE should start automatically. When the blue recovery screen appears, click Troubleshoot to access the available tools.

From here, you can launch 'Point-in-time Restore' or 'Reset this PC' (more on this later), but selecting 'Advanced options' reveals several additional recovery tools. 'Start-up Repair' (1 in our screenshot above) automatically checks for problems that prevent Windows from starting and attempts to fix them. It's usually the best place to start if your PC won't boot.

'Uninstall Updates' (2) lets you remove the most recent update if you suspect this has caused the problem. Clicking 'System Restore' (3) lets you return to an earlier restore point without needing to boot into Windows first.

Quick Machine Recovery

Introduced by Microsoft following the 2024 CrowdStrike outage (see www.snipca.com/59956), Quick Machine Recovery is designed to help Windows 11 PCs come back from serious boot failures automatically if a faulty Windows update

or other widespread problem prevents your PC from starting.

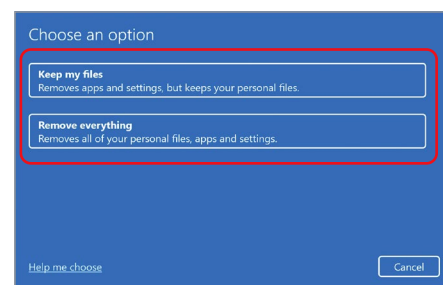
When Windows repeatedly fails to start, your PC will boot into the Windows Recovery Environment, connect to the internet and check Windows Update to see whether Microsoft has released a fix. If one is available, it will be downloaded and applied automatically. If not, you'll be taken to the standard WinRE options.

The feature is available in recent versions of Windows 11 (though not Windows 10) and should be enabled by default on most PCs. To check, go to Settings, System, Recovery, then click 'Quick machine recovery'. Make sure the 'Quick machine recovery' and 'Automatically check for solutions' options are both switched on.

Make a fresh start Reset this PC

If none of the other recovery tools solve your problem, you can use 'Reset this PC' to reinstall Windows. Access it by clicking 'Reset PC' under Settings, System, Recovery – or via the Windows Recovery Environment by clicking Troubleshoot, then 'Reset this PC'.

You'll now be asked whether you want to 'Keep my files' or 'Remove everything' (see screenshot below). The former reinstalls Windows while keeping your personal files, though your installed apps, programs and any changes you've made to Windows settings will be removed. The latter performs a full reinstall, deleting files, apps and settings so you can start with a clean slate.



Keep your files when you reset your PC or start with a clean slate

Next, choose either 'Local reinstall', which uses the recovery files already stored on your PC, or 'Cloud download', which downloads a fresh copy of Windows from Microsoft's servers. The latter takes longer and requires an internet connection, but can be useful if your existing Windows installation has become badly damaged. Once you've made your choices, click Next, read the summary, then click Reset. **ca**

Try these older recovery tools

Windows 10 and 11 still include a system-image backup tool – click Start, type **control panel** and press Enter, then select 'Back up and Restore (Windows 7)'. Click 'Create a system image' to generate an exact copy of your PC on an external drive, including Windows and all your programs, settings and files. This copy can restore your PC if your hard drive fails or Windows becomes unusable.

If Windows won't start, you can restore a system image via the Windows Recovery Environment, by clicking Troubleshoot, 'Advanced options', then

'See more recovery options'.

Windows can also create a Recovery Drive on a USB stick, which provides you with a bootable copy of the Windows Recovery Environment you can use if the copy of WinRE stored on your PC isn't available – for example, because your system drive has failed or its recovery **partition** has become corrupted.

To create one, plug in an empty USB drive (16GB or larger is recommended), then click Start, type **recovery** and press Enter. Tick the 'Back up system files' option and follow the instructions.

Problems **Solved**

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Will an authenticator fix my SMS woes?

Q As a regular reader, I've noticed an increase in letters and articles discussing **passkeys**, **two-factor authentication** (2FA) and **authenticator** apps. To be honest, I've not taken much interest – until now.

Recently, I received an email from my pension provider telling me I could no longer receive login codes via email and would need to use **SMS** or install an authenticator app. SMS is an issue because I'm not that attached to my phone, and it might not be with me when I need a code. Does the same apply to an authenticator app?

Can I use different authenticator apps on different devices? Will lesser-known apps like Authy remain available and free if I commit to them? How easy would it be to change to a different app if I needed or wanted to?

Chris Ellison

A These are all good questions. First, at least in terms of receiving 2FA codes, if you don't keep your phone to hand then an authenticator app will be no better than SMS. That's because, while such an app can generate codes without a mobile signal – and instantly – you still have to read the string of digits from

your phone's screen.

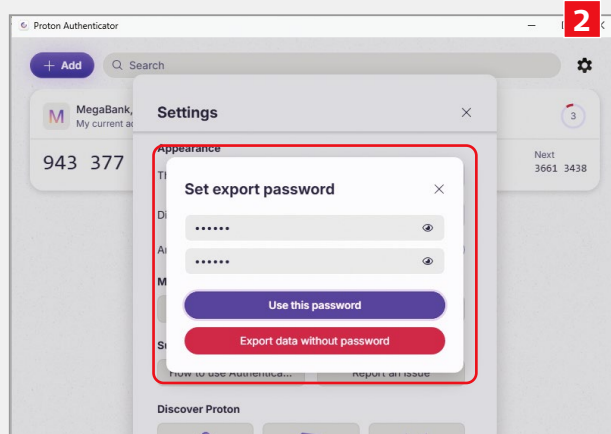
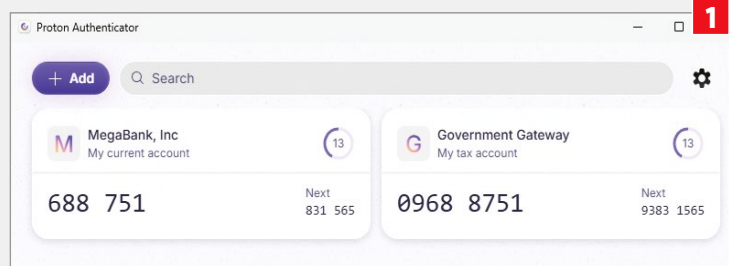
An obvious solution would seem to be a 2FA app for Windows that lives on your PC. However, big companies such as Microsoft and Google maintain only mobile apps. This is because they actively promote the idea that two-factor authentication is based not just on what you know, but also something you have. From this viewpoint, the thing you know is your password (the first factor), while the second factor is something you have – such as a smartphone. These days there's also something you 'are', meaning unique biometric factors such as fingerprints or your face. Collectively, this is known as **multi-factor authentication** (MFA).

But that's all background to explain why the best-known 2FA/MFA apps exist only for mobile devices. There are authenticator apps for Windows PCs, such as the free Proton Authenticator

(<https://proton.me/authenticator> – see screenshot 1), which works just fine. This will remove the need to keep your phone to hand so you can read the code on the screen.

There are also 2FA code-generation features in the paid-for editions of popular password-management apps such as Bitwarden (www.bitwarden.com) and 1Password (www.1password.com).

Apps such as Proton Authenticator do away with the need to use a phone



Proton Authenticator has the option to export data to another authenticator app should you decide to switch providers

You can use a variety of different authenticator apps if you wish, and on different devices, but we'd imagine that most people would find it easier sticking with just one.

Regardless, it's important to understand that keeping a 2FA code generator (and the associated secret keys) on a Windows PC does increase your risk slightly: if someone gains access to your computer and knows your Windows password, they can also access your 2FA codes. That's why Microsoft and Google promote smartphones as the second factor.

You mentioned Authy (www.authy.com) and it's certainly a popular authenticator app – and will do the fundamental job of generating and managing 2FA codes. However, we can offer no guarantees on its future availability or pricing. Twilio, the company behind it, is a multi-billion-dollar outfit but it's a minnow compared to the likes of Microsoft and Google. It could go bust, be acquired, shut down Authy or decide to start charging for it – only the company itself can know.

Finally, while you're not generally 'locked in' to any given authenticator app, switching can be a faff. Some let you transfer your data directly, but others require you to revisit each website and set up 2FA again. Others, such as Proton Authenticator, include an export option 2 – but any alternative app would need to support importing. In short, it's usually doable, but often a pain.

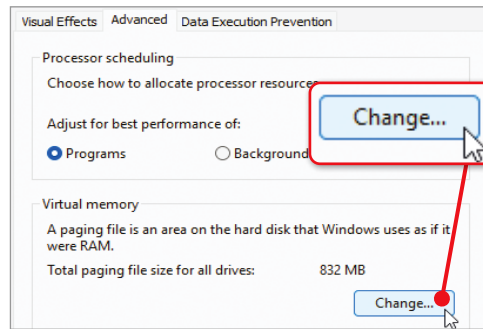
Why does my SSD space keep disappearing?

Q I have a Dell Inspiron 3910 desktop PC with a 256GB SSD and a 1TB hard drive. My problem is that the computer keeps telling me that the SSD is running out of space. One minute there's, say, 40GB of free space, and the next time I look, there's only 2GB. Checking programs installed on the SSD, aside from the operating system, there should be more than enough space.

I suspect that Windows is the culprit, but how do I stop it doing this? I've been a subscriber since day one, incidentally!

Mick Tasker

A Yes, this is probably down to something Windows is doing. There are a few possibilities, including temporary use by Windows Update, but by far the most likely candidate for wild swings in available storage is the use of a feature known as **virtual memory**. In essence, this 'borrows'



Change the amount of space Windows allocates to virtual memory in System Properties

variable chunks of drive space whenever Windows needs more working space than is available in the PC's real memory. As SSDs are fast enough to serve as surrogate memory, Windows grabs it from here.

This activity doesn't really reduce usable drive space, because the virtual memory feature will only ever borrow from current free space. However, if you want to manage how much it can use, or

disable it entirely, you can.

To do this, click Start followed by the Settings cog, then System followed by About and then 'Advanced system settings'. In the System Properties box that appears, click the Advanced tab. The Performance Options box will now open; once more click to select the Advanced tab and then, in the 'Virtual memory' section, click the Change button (see screenshot).

By default, Windows manages the settings for all drives, so override this by unticking 'Automatically manage paging file size for all drives'. Next, below, click to select a drive (almost certainly C in your case). Now, to disable the feature entirely, choose the 'No paging file' option and click Set followed by OK. Alternatively, select 'Custom size' and then tap in the minimum and maximum capacities you'd like. These figures should be in megabytes, so 10,000 is around 10GB, for example. Then click Set followed by OK.

Can I remove junk from Facebook?

Q Is there a way to clean up Facebook junk? I can hide unwanted stuff on a case-by-case basis, but there's just so much of it! I just want to see posts from friends and groups I follow. Years ago, I'm sure it wasn't as bad as it is now. Maybe it's a setting somewhere, but if so I can't find it.

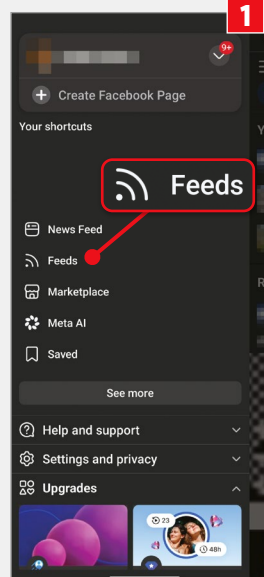
I might be partly to blame, as I've clicked on some recommended stuff – but I'd rather not see it at all!

Keith Pearce

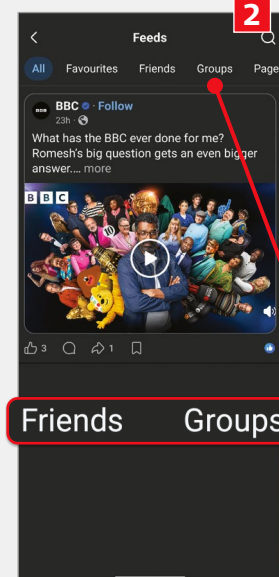
A Facebook owner Meta practically invented what's commonly known as 'the algorithm'. It's just a fancy way of saying the company's software works tirelessly to learn everything about you, so it can serve up stuff it thinks you'll like. Only Meta knows how its algorithm works so, to an extent, if you use its services, you have to put up with what it shows you.

However, there are ways to minimise

Click Feeds to choose what appears on your Facebook home page



the amount of unwanted stuff in the default Home view. On the website version of Facebook, in the left-hand pane, first click 'See more' then tap Feeds. In the app version, tap the menu button (three horizontal lines) followed



Choose to see only post from friends, groups or pages that you follow

by Feeds (see screenshot 1).

You can now use the tabs (on the left on the website, or at the top in the app) to filter posts to see only stuff by Friends, Groups or Pages that you follow 2.

Where have BBC iPlayer and ITVX gone?

Q Something has happened with our Sony Bravia TV, and I can no longer find the main catch-up tools BBC iPlayer and ITVX. They used to be right at the top, but now I can't locate them at all.

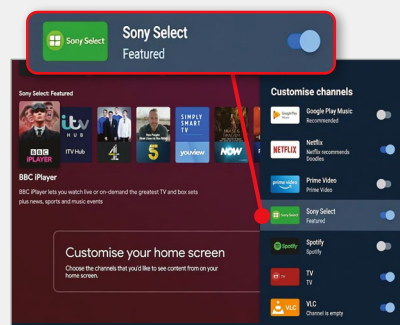
It was fine right up until a recent update, which I only knew had happened because I caught a message on the screen as it started. My husband used to sort out things like this but, unfortunately, he now has dementia and cannot help me. Can you?

Mary Wilkins

A Yes. This happened because an update to Bravia TVs switched off the display of a feature called Sony Select, which is where the set gathers the apps you mention – and quite a few more besides.

To re-enable it, keep pressing down on your TV remote control's direction pad (D-pad) until the selected item is 'Customise your home screen', then push the OK/Enter button.

Next, under the 'Customise channels' menu, again press down until Sony Select is highlighted, then once more push the OK/Enter button to flip the switch to its On position (see screenshot). Your favourite catch-up apps will now be back on your home screen.



Turn on the Sony Select option to get your favourite catch-up apps back on your Bravia TV

How can I get my old printer to also scan?

Q I purchased a 'new' old Brother MFC-5840CN printer-scanner, still in its original wrapping, to use with my Windows 10 PC. After a lot of faffing about I eventually got it to print, but it won't scan. The Brother website has no dedicated drivers and suggests using the operating system **drivers**.

Can you work a miracle and make it scan, please?

Oliver Rogers

1

Brother MFC-5840CN

Brother MFC-5840CN Technical Information

All Scanner Drivers / Brother Scanner Drivers / Brother MFC-5840CN

VueScan is compatible with the Brother MFC-5840CN on Windows, macOS and Linux.

If you're using Windows and you've installed a Brother driver, VueScan's built-in drivers won't conflict with this. If you haven't installed a Windows driver for this scanner, VueScan will automatically install a driver.

You can use this scanner on Mac OS X and Linux without installing any other software.

[Download VueScan for Windows](#)

VueScan 9.8.56, June 28, 2026, Windows 11, 10 x64, 8 x64, 7 x64, Vista x64
[Download VueScan for other operating systems or older versions](#)

VueScan is compatible with the Brother MFC-5840CN on Windows, macOS and Linux.

The Brother MFC-5840CN is among the thousands of devices that are supported by the VueScan tool

A Your device might be fresh out the box, but it's actually over two decades old and no longer supported. If Brother's advice to use Windows' drivers isn't working then we're afraid the only option is a paid-for tool called VueScan.

We've mentioned this a few times over the years. It's been developed over a couple of decades by just one person – Ed

Hamrick, based in Phoenix, Arizona. It now supports over 8,000 old devices, and your MFC-5840CN is on the list (www.snipca.com/59808 – see screenshot **1**).

VueScan costs just under £25, but you can try it out free of charge. If it works, then you can pay to keep using it. Otherwise, all you've lost is a bit of time and effort. You'll find the latest version at www.hamrick.com/download. **2**

2

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VueScan Scanner Software

Can't Find a Driver for Your Scanner?

VueScan is here to help

We reverse engineered over 8000 scanners and included built in drivers in VueScan so you can keep using the scanner you already have.

Download free trial of VueScan and start scanning in 60 seconds.

[Download VueScan for Windows](#)

VueScan 9.8.56, June 28, 2026, Windows 11, 10 x64, 8 x64, 7 x64, Vista x64
[Download VueScan for other operating systems or older versions](#)

Download the latest version of VueScan from www.hamrick.com/download

Q: How do rip my CD and DVD collection?

A: Issue 722, page 67 – find it on our 2025 Back Issue CD

Buy it from
www.snipca.com/57526



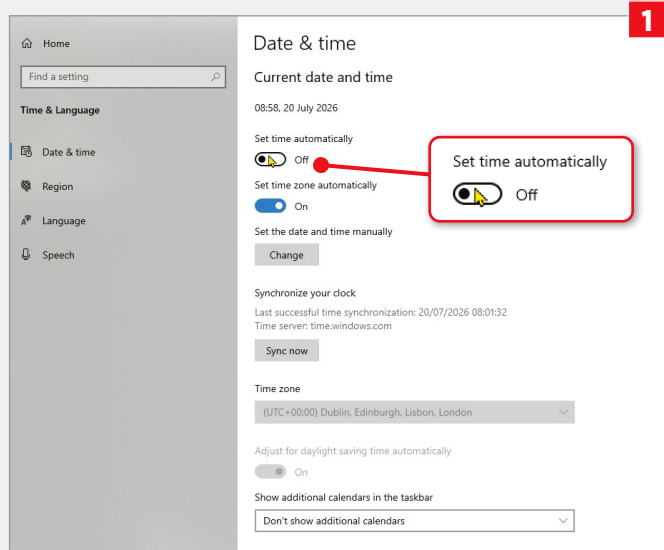
What's stopping my web browsers loading?

Q I have a Lenovo desktop PC running Windows 10 Pro. Recently, when I've tried to use my Edge web browser, all I get is an error message saying that the connection isn't secure. Other browsers show similar messages.

I've tried to run diagnostics, but as I can't connect to the web it's all rather pointless. Outlook is still working, so I can at least send and receive emails. What does this mean, and how can I get back online?

I'm fortunate enough to have a laptop that connects properly to the internet, but I'd like to resolve the desktop problem.

Shaun Hooper



1 If the time or date on your PC are wrong, flip the 'Set time automatically' switch to Off

A Outlook still works, so we know that your PC has a functioning internet connection. While there might be some network quirk, one common cause for browser error messages is an unsynchronised clock. In turn, this is often because the machine's backup BIOS battery has expired – a natural occurrence after a few years.

To check, first click the Start button followed by the Settings cog, and then 'Time & Language'. If the time or date are wrong then flip the 'Set time automatically' switch to its Off position

(see screenshot **1**), then click the Change button to manually correct the clock.

This should fix your problem. However, unless you replace the backup battery, the PC will just forget the time and date next time you switch it off. So, having disconnected your desktop from the mains, carefully open the case and look for the little CR2032 button-cell battery. Gently prise it out with a flat-edged tool, then pop in a new one (around £3 each from www.snipca.com/59809, **2**). Once you're back online, we'd also suggest flipping the 'Set time automatically' switch back to its On position.



2 If the backup battery has run out of juice, replace it with a new one

Why is my Wi-Fi extender unreliable?

Q I have a Netgear WIN2000RPTv3 Wi-Fi extender (pictured) that's probably obsolete but it's fine for me. Recently, its Wi-Fi connection has become unreliable. Turning the power off and on again generally restores things, but it's an unwelcome irritation.

I used to be able to log in to the extender's user interface but I can't remember how. Netgear seems to provide no worthwhile support for old models. What can I do?

Mike Metal

A The device's original manual is on the Netgear website, at www.snipca.com/59810.

This explains that, when using a connected PC, visiting www.mywifiext.net will open

the extender's administration page.

However, we doubt this will help, because we think the gadget is simply showing its age. The fact that turning the power off and on fixes the problem is a classic sign of a device that's overheating. We wouldn't be surprised if a build-up of dust is limiting airflow and that components are just getting too warm.

It's not a complicated unit, so we'd be tempted to give the insides a clean. There's just one screw and some plastic clips holding it together, and then a few more plastic clips securing the circuit board. Disconnect the power, remove the retaining screw and then gently prise it up. Now just use a can of compressed air (£4 from www.snipca.com/59811) to give



2 A blast of compressed air might be enough to get the extender working properly again

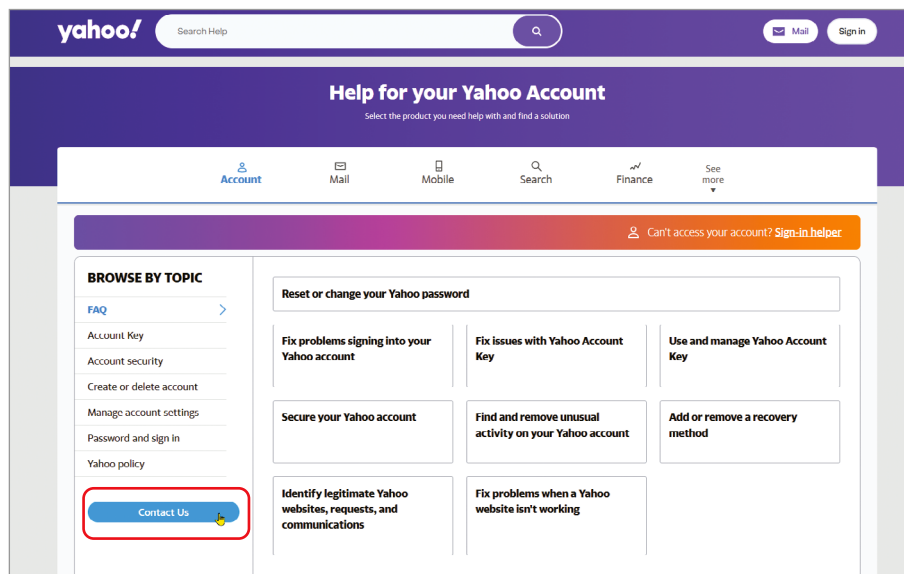
everything a thorough blast, before putting the gadget back together. It's not a sure thing, but you've little to lose – and we reckon it will probably do the job.

Why does Yahoo want my passport?

Q My Yahoo email account was hacked, and I couldn't log in. Corresponding with what I believe to be the Yahoo Help Centre, they said that they had fixed the problem. However, to let me back in they want me to send a copy of a government-issued ID, such as a passport or driving licence. They also want me to send a photo of my face alongside this document.

I'm suspicious of this, as it seems to be inviting further trouble. I fear that with such information a bank account could be opened in my name. Is this genuine? Do they really need government ID?

Chris Knowlson



Check you're on the correct Yahoo page then click Contact Us

A Given the circumstances, you're right to be extremely cautious. Equally, those same circumstances mean this is likely a legitimate request by Yahoo. The company can and does ask hacked users to verify their identities using a passport or driving licence. If you think about it, must – otherwise it might be handing

control of a compromised account to any Tom, Dick or Harriet. You'll find details about what Yahoo might ask for, and when, on its support website at www.snipca.com/59815 and www.snipca.com/59816 (see screenshot).

Nonetheless, we'd suggest double-checking every part of the procedure. Did you begin the support process via

the official Yahoo Help Centre, at [https://uk.help.yahoo.com/?](https://uk.help.yahoo.com?) Have all subsequent contacts stemmed from that, and arrived from a @yahoo.co.uk or @yahoo.com email address? If everything stacks up, then press ahead. Otherwise, start afresh (beginning only directly via <https://uk.help.yahoo.com?>, before clicking the blue Contact Us button).

Should I clean-install Windows 11 on my old laptop?

Q My HP Envy x360 15-cp0xxx Convertible laptop (pictured) was running Windows 10 and isn't supported by Windows 11. However, I've managed to upgrade it to Windows 11. I'm finding it unstable, with various aspects no longer working reliably. I was thinking of buying a copy of Windows 11 Home from the Computeractive store (www.snipca.com/59951) to try a **clean install**. Would this work?

Brian Steer

A Your particular model is the best part of a decade old and, as you note, isn't formally supported by Windows 11. While many unsupported PCs can be forced to install Microsoft's latest operating system, there's no guarantee of smooth ongoing operation, as you've discovered. Yes, a clean install of Windows 11 could be achieved, but the underlying hardware incompatibilities will remain.



The HP Envy x360 15-cp0xxx Convertible isn't formally supported by Windows 11

Considering the age of your machine, the problems that you've already experienced and the fact that Microsoft has recently extended Windows 10 support until at least October 2027, our advice is to revert to the original

operating system. Windows 10 might not have Windows 11's bells and whistles, but you know it works perfectly well on your machine – so sticking with it will save you both money and further trouble.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

Modular and non-modular PSUs?

Q

My teenage son recently persuaded me to help him build his first gaming PC. Researching this has been quite the challenge. In particular, I'm not sure whether to go with a modular or non-modular power supply unit (PSU). A non-modular one seems simpler, but is it worth paying extra for a modular one? Is there any practical difference? As it's a new build, I don't expect him to be upgrading it any time soon.

Graham Whitfield

A

Assuming other key specifications between any two given models are the same, then the fundamental difference is whether or not the cabling is permanently attached. This can have plenty of benefits, but also some significant downsides.

With a non-modular PSU, all the cables are permanently attached. The big benefit here is that it's ready to use

right out of the box. Install it in your chosen case, then use whatever connections you need. If it's a perfect match for the parts in your setup, then it will be a neat, tidy option. These models also tend to be the cheapest choice. However, it's also likely that you'll end up with unused cables hanging from the PSU, which will need to be secured somewhere – and might restrict airflow a little.

By contrast, a modular PSU model has only sockets for cables, which attach individually. This means you can connect only the cables you need for the build. If something changes later, cables can be added or removed. These models tend to be aimed at serious enthusiasts and are generally more expensive.

Finally, while you didn't ask, we should mention semi-modular variants. These models, such as the pictured



Semi-modular PSUs such as the Corsair Vengeance 650M combine ease of use, value and flexibility

Corsair Vengeance 650M (£80 from www.snipca.com/59812), are a halfway-house option. They have some permanently attached cables for key components – typically for the motherboard and CPU power – plus a bunch of spare sockets for anything else you might wish to attach, now or in the future. For many PC builders they're the best choice, combining ease, value and flexibility.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Will a Windows 10 PC rebuild include updates?

Q

Not so long ago I rebuilt my Windows 10 PC to get rid of a lot of clutter. It took several passes with Windows Update to get the latest updates installed before support ended.

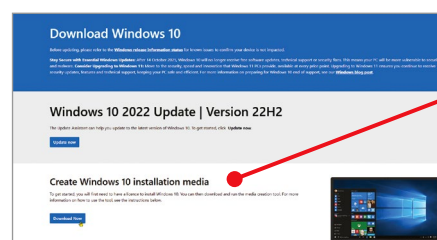
If I had to rebuild it again, would those updates that were installed after the rebuild still be available for download? My PC's specifications are below the minimum needed for Windows 11, and I'm not sure I'd want it anyway!

Nigel Dann

A

First, as you may already have heard, Microsoft has quietly extended Windows 10 support for another year to October 2027. This is free if you're using Windows Backup and OneDrive to synchronise your PC's settings, otherwise it costs \$30 (around £22) or 1,000 Microsoft Rewards points (www.snipca.com/59813).

So, at least until that date, Windows 10's installation files will remain available to download from www.snipca.com/59814 (see screenshot). Microsoft



Windows 10 installation files are still available online

regularly updates the download package to include the latest updates so, yes, those will be included. Should there be any new ones, those too will duly download via Windows Update, as normal.

Finally, even if Microsoft does stick to the October 2027 end-of-support date for Windows 10, we doubt that the Windows 10 download page will disappear then. You can get ahead of that possibility by downloading a Windows 10 ISO file any time before that date, and keeping it on your hard drive.

Moreover, Windows Update itself won't

Create Windows 10 installation media

To get started, you will first need to have a licence to install Windows 10. You can then download information on how to use the tool, see the instructions below.

stop working. Microsoft might just turn off the update tap come October 2027 but, were a serious flaw to be found in the subsequent months or years, the company will probably push out an emergency fix.

Next Issue

ONSALE
Weds
9 Sept

- Can I still activate Windows 7?
- Why does this window pop up when I rename files?
- Can I reset Windows but keep my files?
- ...And many more

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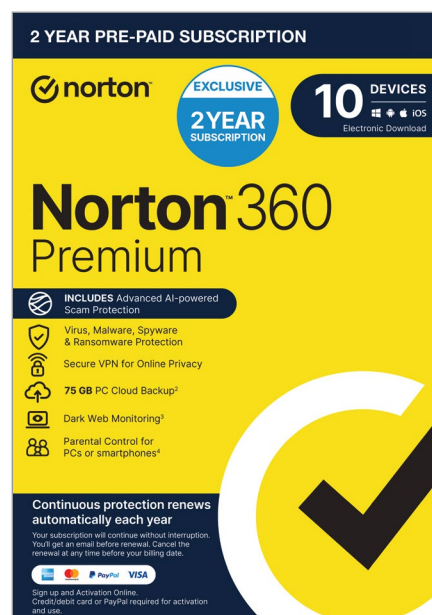
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Why can't I restore Edge's sidebar?

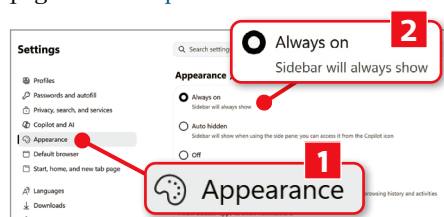
Q I tried to restore Edge's removed sidebar (Issue 740, page 42). Unfortunately, I didn't have an Edge shortcut on my Windows 11 PC, so I created one by right-clicking and choosing **C:\Program Files (x86)\Microsoft\Edge\Application**. I followed your instructions but, alas, I couldn't see any button to click that would reveal the sidebar.

Geoff Long

A If the sidebar doesn't reappear automatically when you add the `--disable-features=msHubAppsSidebarRetirement` line to the Target box in the Edge desktop shortcut properties, you may need to carry out some further steps.

Launch Edge from your shortcut, then click the three top-right buttons and select Settings. Now click Appearance (1 in our screenshot below), scroll down and you should see a Sidebar option listed under 'Other appearance settings'. Click this, then select 'Always on' (2). This should work even with the desktop shortcut you created yourself.

Paste the line above from our Pastebin page: www.snipca.com/59486.

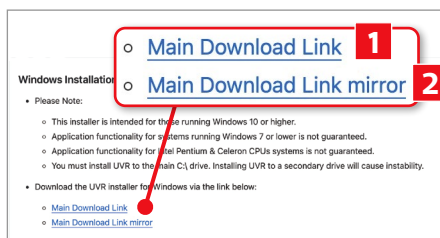


Re-enable the sidebar by opening Edge's settings and clicking Appearance, then 'Always on'

How do I download Ultimate Vocal Remover?

Q I tried to download Ultimate Vocal Remover (<https://ultimatevocalremover.com>) after you recommended it in Issue 736 (page 20) as a way to remove vocals from music, but instead I got this: 'Unconfirmed 376321.crdownload'. Could you please advise?

Robin Fahie



Try either of these links to download Ultimate Vocal Remover

A This almost certainly isn't a problem with Ultimate Vocal Remover itself. The '.crdownload' extension is used by Chrome (and other Chromium-based browsers such as Brave and Edge) to indicate that a download is still in progress. If the file name is stuck like that, it usually means the download was interrupted before it completed successfully.

Try downloading the installer again from the same link. Click the Download UVR button, then click where it says Main Download Link (1 in our screenshot above) under the 'Windows Installation' heading. If that doesn't work, try the download mirror link instead (2).

Why not warn that the Virtual OS Museum needs high specs?

Q I downloaded the Virtual OS Museum (<https://virtualosmuseum.org>) following your instructions in Issue 739 (page 62). However, it would have been nice to have included minimum-requirement specifications for this program. I feel that while some readers will be impressed by the number of operating systems it has, they may be disappointed with the overall performance of the package.

In my experience, you'll need a minimum of 16GB of RAM (though preferably 32GB or 64GB), an Intel i7 Core or Core Pro processor (preferably an i9) and, for comfortable viewing, a 40in monitor. In short, you need a serious gaming machine.

It's a big download (typically 15-20

hours for the full version) to discover your machine isn't up to its minimal mark. My machine – a Core i7 laptop with 8GB RAM and Nvidia graphics – couldn't run it.

I have many of the virtual machines found in the museum running on their own emulators, downloaded from a variety of websites. They run fast and are easy to continue developing software for.

James Cook

A While the Virtual OS Museum can be demanding, particularly if you download the full collection (which we advised against in our feature), we wouldn't necessarily say that you need a high-end gaming system to enjoy it. We were able to run it on a six-year-old mini PC with a much more modest spec than you've suggested.

The Virtual OS Museum doesn't list any specific minimum hardware requirements on its website, but performance can depend on a variety of factors – not just memory and processor speed, but also the age and complexity of the operating system you're trying to launch. If you're struggling with some systems, this could indicate a potential compatibility problem rather than a lack of processing power.

In its 'Running on Windows' help page (www.snipca.com/59749), for example, the Virtual OS Museum's creator notes that "if you already have other virtualization software installed, make sure that it is compatible with Windows Hypervisor Platform and doesn't require its own hypervisor/driver". This may be causing the problem. You could also try running the Museum within VirtualBox, as the page suggests.

However, as you say, readers interested in just one or two classic systems should use dedicated emulators, such as 86Box (<https://86box.net>) for vintage PCs or DOSBox (www.dosbox.com) for DOS software.

Jargon Buster

1080p High-definition video: 1920x1080 pixels.

2.5 Gigabit Ethernet Networking standard that provides data-transfer rates of up to 2.5Gbps.

3K Screen resolution of about 3,000 pixels across.

4G/5G Technologies that deliver faster mobile broadband.

4K Video with a resolution of at least 3840x2160 pixels.

Access point Links wireless network users to a wired network.

AMOLED Active-Matrix Organic Light-Emitting Diode. An alternative technology to LCD for creating flat-panel screens. Most commonly used in smartphones, tablets and smartwatches.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen. Traditional PC screens are 4:3. Widescreen displays are 16:9 or 16:10.

Authenticator An app that generates one-time codes for two-factor authentication (2FA).

Bandwidth A measure of how much data can be transferred through a connection at one time.

Beamforming A technique for microphones to pick up on specific sources of sound and reduce background noise.

Benchmarking Comparing products with an accepted standard.

Biometric Using measurable personal characteristics, such as fingerprints, for identification.

BIOS Software built into every PC that connects vital components.

Bootable Describes a device or disc with system files on it so it can be used to start up your computer.

Cache A temporary space for storing information.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot An AI program designed to recreate conversation with humans.

Clean install An operating system installation that overwrites all other content on the hard drive.

Cookie A small text file stored on your computer by a website.

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

CPU Central Processing Unit. Another term for a computer processor.

Dark mode Showing white text on a black background.

DCI-P3 A colour space that has a wider spectrum than sRGB.

DDR4 A type of computer memory.

Diagnostic data Information companies collect about how you use software in order to fix problems and create new features.

Distro A version of the Linux OS and the programs that go with it.

DOS Disk Operating System. DOS was the predecessor to Windows.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

Dual-band router A Wi-Fi router that operates on two bands: 2.4 and 5GHz.

E Ink Electrophoretic ink. A special type of ink used to display content in electronic devices.

Emoji A small graphic that can be inserted into a text or email.

Emulator A program that makes one computer act like another, allowing it to run its software.

End-to-end encryption A way of encrypting messages so only the sender and recipient can read them.

EPUB A file format used by many popular ebook readers.

eSIM A virtual SIM card that's built into a phone, making it easier to change network.

Field of view The amount of space measured in angles that can be seen from the camera lens.

Freemium A business model, especially on the internet, where basic services are provided for free, while more advanced features must be paid for.

FTTC Fibre-to-the-cabinet. A broadband technology that uses fibre-optic cable between a phone exchange and street cabinets before transferring to the normal telephone wires.

FTTP Fibre-to-the-premises. Fibre broadband that goes straight to the doorstep. Faster than FTTC.

Full HD Resolution of 1920x1080 pixels.

Gigabit Ethernet A very fast networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

GPU Graphics Processor Unit. A processor for graphics, videos and visual tasks.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet, either free or for a fee.

IP address Internet Protocol address. A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IP48 Dust protection from objects over 1mm and water immersion up to 1m.

IP67 International Protection marking. The '6' denotes that a device is resistant to dust, general dirt and sand. The '7' indicates that it can be placed underwater for 30 minutes at depths of up to 1m without effect.

IP68 Indicates a device is resistant to dust, general dirt and sand, and can be placed underwater for 30 minutes at depths of up to 1.5m.

IPX4 A rating indicating that a device can withstand a splash of water from any direction for up to five minutes.

ISO file A type of image file that contains data from a CD or DVD.

M.2 A standard specification for internal PC expansion cards and connectors.

mAh Milliamp hours. A unit that measures (electric) power over time. The higher the mAh, the longer a battery will last.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card. Can be converted to SD size using an adapter.

Mirror site A website that contains the same downloadable software as others, so it's available from more than one place.

NFC Near-field communication. A technology that allows two devices to communicate by being touched together or placed near to each other.

OCuLink Connectivity standard that allows high-speed data transfers between devices using PCI Express.

OLED Organic light-emitting diode. A thin-film organic light-emitting diode used in computer displays and television screens.

Optical character recognition Software that converts a picture of text into editable text.

Partition A large hard drive can be split into two or more partitions or 'virtual' drives.

Passkey A method for signing into accounts by typing a one-off code, fingerprint or facial recognition rather than a password.

PCIe Peripheral Component Interconnect Express. A faster version of PCI - a slot on the motherboard for expansion cards, such as for sound and memory.

Phishing A form of internet fraud that tries to trick you into revealing personal details.

PNG Portable Network Graphics. A format for images that shrinks file sizes using compression but without discarding any data.

Power bank A portable, rechargeable battery designed to store electrical energy and charge mobile devices on the go.

PowerShell A Windows tool for automating commands.

ppi Pixels per inch.

QR code Quick Response code. A square barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Random-access memory. The computer's working area, used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

Range extender Device that extends the range of Wi-Fi, especially into weak areas.

RSS Really Simple Syndication. A simple format for automatically distributing news headlines and other content from the web.

RTF Rich Text Format. A file format used to transfer files between different types of word-processing programs. It preserves most of the formatting of a document.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

Secure Boot A security standard designed to make sure your PC avoids malware when booting.

SIM Subscriber Identity Module. The smart card used by all digital mobile phones. The SIM card carries the user's identity and phone number for accessing the network.

Skimming Illegally reading payment details from a phone or card using a reader.

SMS Short Message Service. More commonly called text messaging.

Split tunnelling Lets you choose which apps use a VPN and which use your regular internet connection, improving speed and flexibility.

sRGB A standard RGB colour space for use on monitors.

SSD Solid-state drive. Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts. Faster but more expensive than conventional hard drives.

System image A backup of your operating system drivers, PC's settings, programs and files.

Tag A keyword used to describe a file or web page. Many programs use tags to organise related information quickly.

Temporary file Created by sites and software to store info for a specific purpose, but not meant to be stored permanently.

Tri-band A router that broadcasts on three radio bands – one on 2.4GHz, one on 5GHz and a third on 6GHz.

Two- or multi-factor authentication Systems that use two or more means to identify the user. For example, a code sent to your phone in addition to a password.

UEFI Unified Extensible Firmware Interface. A modern replacement for the BIOS, designed to get a PC into a state where it can launch an operating system.

Ultra-wideband Short-range wireless technology for precise location tracking.

Ultrawide Offering a field of view that's wider than traditional digital cameras.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2/4.0 Faster successors to USB.

USB-C Connector that's reversible.

Virtual machine A software-based computer running inside another computer.

Virtual memory Data that is temporarily moved from RAM to the hard drive to make up for shortages in memory.

VPN Virtual private network. Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

Wi-Fi 6E Wi-Fi 6 extended to include the 6GHz band.

Wi-Fi 7 Faster successor to Wi-Fi 6, with an estimated maximum speed of around 46Gbps. Also known as IEEE 802.11be.

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3		Gig1	£22.99 £26.99 from April 2027 bill	24 Months	1130Mbps avg. speed	N/a	£291.88
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Easy when you **Know How**

Looking for a cheap way to improve his wireless internet connection, **Robert Irvine** tries to...

Boost his Wi-Fi using kitchen foil

Although I've written about computing for over 25 years, I'm prone to making blunders when it comes to my own technology. These usually relate to me trying to save money, then suffering the consequences later.

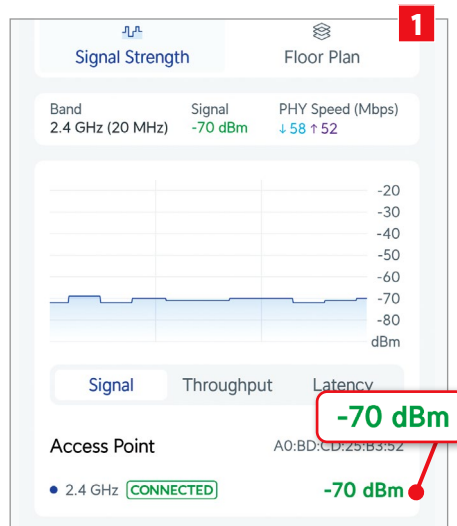
“
As I already had some
kitchen foil, I had
nothing to lose
”

Recently, for example, I managed to negotiate a worse broadband deal when my existing Sky contract ended. I asked for an ultra-fast full-fibre plan but, when told it wasn't available in my area, I settled for the cheapest alternative plan. This turned out to be exactly the same speed – I already had a mere 36Mbps – for an extra £4 a month. And now I'm stuck with it for two years when I could have shopped around for a faster option.

It also means my Wi-Fi isn't going to improve any time soon, forcing me to take matters into my own hands. I'd previously tried using an old phone as a Wi-Fi extender (see Issue 707, page 74),



Robert placed foil behind his router to reflect its signal inwards



The foil slightly boosted the signal strength...

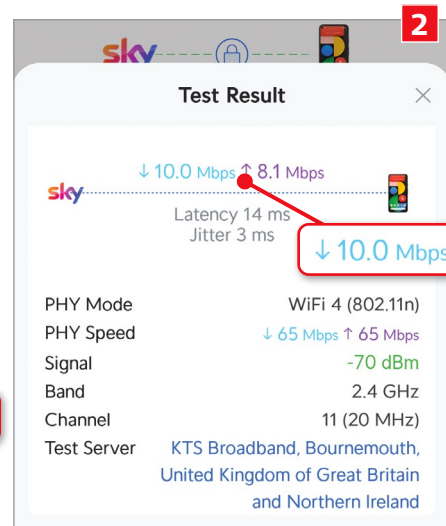
but abandoned that when I needed the device for other purposes (see Issues 735 and 738).

In keeping with my miserly instincts, I decided to try boosting my Wi-Fi signal using aluminium foil. It's a tip that's been circulating online for years, but I'd never tried it myself. And as I already had some foil in my kitchen drawer, I had nothing to lose or spend.

The idea is that the foil reflects the Wi-Fi signal from your router back into your home and away from the wall behind it. My router is in my living room, where the Wi-Fi signal is ample, but in my bedroom down the hall – which the router faces – the wireless connection is always slow.

To test the signal and speed, I installed the brilliant free app Wifiman (www.snipca.com/59947) on my Android phone. There's also an iOS version (www.snipca.com/59948), but it doesn't measure signal strength.

I tapped Wifiman's Signal tab, which told me the Wi-Fi signal in my bedroom was around -72 dBm (decibel-milliwatts). On the Speed tab, I pressed Start Speed Test and Wifiman detected my download speed to be 9.2Mbps. The closer the dBm figure is to zero, the stronger your network signal, so mine was pretty



...and download speed of Robert's Wi-Fi

weak, and the speed was a quarter of what I pay for.

To try and fix this, I unrolled the kitchen foil and cut off a piece about 40cm long. I then placed this behind and tucked under my router with the shiny side facing the room and the non-shiny side against the wall (pictured below left). I curved the foil over at the top to ensure the Wi-Fi signal was reflected back into the living room and towards my bedroom, not to the ceiling.

It looked a bit odd, like when my Dad tried to cut his energy bill by sticking foil behind his radiators. Which is the same concept, when you think about it, and apparently works.

I returned to Wifiman's Signal tab and saw the signal strength was now fluctuating around 70 dBm (see screenshot 1) – a slight improvement. I then ran the speed test again, which reported a higher figure of 10Mbps (see screenshot 2).

So the kitchen-foil trick worked, but didn't hugely improve my Wi-Fi signal and speed. Nonetheless, it gives my connection a small boost – at least until I need the foil to roast a chicken.

✉ Need help boosting your Wi-Fi? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk



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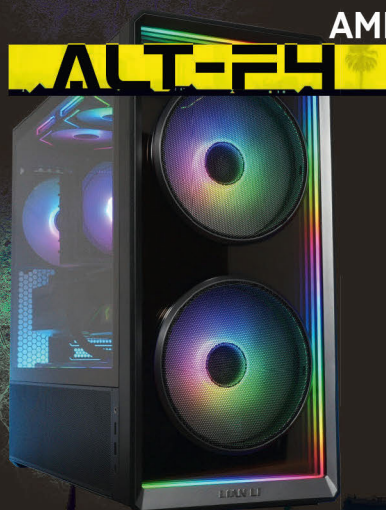
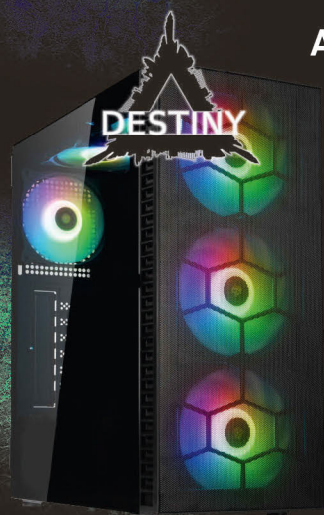
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