



**BUY THIS
MINI PC!**

Best bargain of 2026

**NEVER USE YOUR
REAL EMAIL ADDRESS**

Create aliases to block all spam **p60**

<https://www.freemag.ir>

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Learn something new in every issue

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**FOR PHOTO
BACKUPS**

We've switched
for one
simple
reason

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DON'T BIN YOUR OLD **PHONES**



► The **10 BEST THINGS** you can use them for

- 1** Home security camera
- 2** Wireless webcam
- 3** Car dashcam
- 4** Satnav with free maps
- 5** Portable Wi-Fi hotspot
- 6** Wi-Fi signal extender
- 7** External hard drive
- 8** Media server
- 9** PC remote control
- 10** Games console

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PLUS

**SOMETHING LEAKING
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**BRING OLD SOFTWARE
BACK FROM THE DEAD**

6 classic programs you must revive **p62**



**BUILD THE GAMING PC
YOU'VE ALWAYS WANTED**

www.pcspecialist.co.uk





From the Editor

In Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges' famous short story *The Library of Babel*, he imagines an infinite library containing every book that has ever existed and every book that could possibly exist in future. I'm reminded of that every time I open my office drawer: it seems to contain all possible phones from every manufacturer that has existed and ever could exist.

I know I can turn them into security cameras, hard drives, Wi-Fi hotspots and more, but I've never got round to it. I've got no excuse now though because I've just

read Robert Irvine's superb instructions in his Cover Feature. It's going to be a busy few weeks.

Yes, it's exciting to buy devices and master new features, but that doesn't beat the satisfaction of reviving an old device you thought was beyond saving. I hate chucking out old gadgets. I want to squeeze every inch of use out of them, and I suspect many of you feel the same. Please let me know how you get on with our tips.

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Learn something new in every issue

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DON'T BIN YOUR OLD PHONES

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HOW TO USE SNIPCA URLS

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

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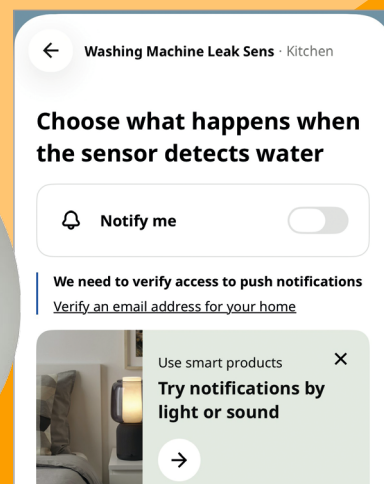


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DON'T BIN YOUR OLD PHONES



**COVER
FEATURE
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▶ The **10 BEST THINGS** you can use them for

Hide your real email address

p60

Think outside
the inbox



Shut down your Windows PC remotely from your phone

You might soon be able to shut down, restart and sleep your Windows PC remotely from your phone.

Microsoft is planning to add these options to its 'Link

to Windows' app, which already lets you lock your PC from your phone. It works on Android only and is free on the Google Play Store (www.snipca.com/60216, pictured).

Developer **code** for the options was spotted by the website Windows Latest. It examined the **APK** file for the 'Link to Windows' app and found text that points to several new remote-control buttons.

As well as Restart, Sleep and 'Shut down', these include 'Update and restart' and 'Update and shut down', suggesting the app will be smart enough to recognise when Windows has a pending update rather than acting like a simple power switch.

The code shows warnings that will appear when you use the new options, asking you to confirm the action.

If you try to restart during

an update, you see the message: "A restart is needed to finish an update on your PC. Any unsaved work in open apps from your PC will be lost. Since you're away, you won't be able to save it from here. Do you want to restart anyway?"

If you send your PC to sleep, you'll be told that this disconnects it from 'Link to Windows', meaning you can't wake it remotely.

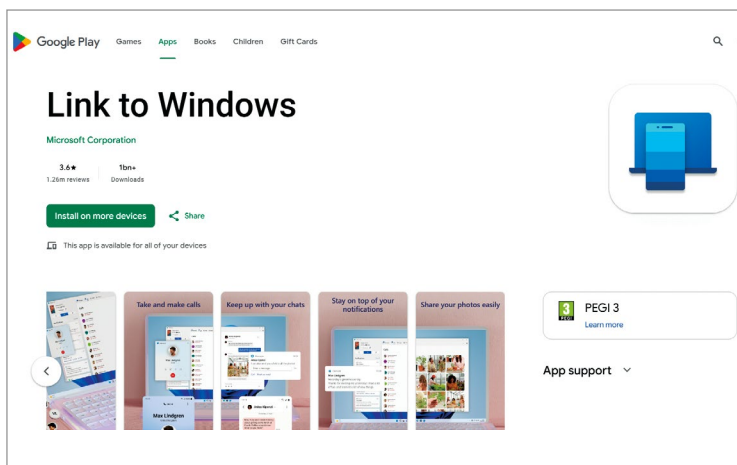
Shutting down your PC

warns that "you may have unsaved data on your device".

The features aren't live yet and can't be screen-captured, but the detailed wording in the app's code suggests they're close to being switched on.

There's no sign of a similar feature for iPhones because Apple prevents apps from controlling a PC's power state.

• **Expand your storage using 'Link to Windows'** – see page 55



WHAT WE THINK

We're impressed enough that restarting and shutting down are being added to 'Link to Windows', but also being able to update your PC before these actions are performed would make this app an essential download. Note that Sleep is the only option that disconnects your phone completely, so it's best used when you know you'll be back at the PC soon. Microsoft usually rolls out 'Link to Windows' features a few months after they first appear in APK files, so there's a good chance they'll show up later this year. Watch this space.

LibreOffice shuns AI tools in its new version

LibreOffice has intentionally left out any "generative AI features" from version 26.8, released on 26 August.

The Document Foundation, which runs LibreOffice, has previously criticised AI tools for sending your data to remote servers to be processed.

In its blog post announcing version 26.8 (www.snipca.com/60215), it said "documents are not transmitted to remote services for processing, and no component of the suite requires network access to function".

It said this is "a deliberate position", as it attempts to pitch itself as a more private alternative to Microsoft Office, which now has several AI features.

LibreOffice 26.8 adds features to all its tools. These include a Draft View to edit documents without distractions like headers and footers, and a Shuffle option to randomise the order of spreadsheet cells in a range.

We'll explain the best new tools in Make Office Better, starting in this issue – see page 47.

LibreOffice 26.8 adds features to all its tools. These include a Draft View to edit documents without distractions like headers and footers, and a Shuffle option to randomise the order of spreadsheet cells in a range.



You'll like this...

A developer has built an entire city using ASCII characters (www.snipca.com/60179)



but not this...

VPN Windscribe has used an AI Adolf Hitler in an advert (www.snipca.com/60200)

Amazon hikes prices of Fire TV Sticks by up to 50%

Amazon has substantially increased the price of its Fire Sticks and blamed the soaring cost of **RAM**.

The Fire TV Stick HD remains the cheapest device, but now costs £59.99, up from £39.99 – a rise of 50 per cent.

The next two cheapest Sticks, the 4K Select and 4K Plus, now cost £64.99 and £79.99 respectively, up from £49.99 and £59.99.

Also more expensive is the Fire TV Stick 4K Max, now priced £99.99 (up from £69.99) while the Fire TV Cube has increased by £60 to

£199.99 (see table below).

Amazon revealed the new prices on its site in August (1 in our screenshot), during a period where the products were heavily discounted (2). This sale has now ended.

Amazon has also hiked the price of its Echo smart speakers and Kindles in the US, with UK increases likely to follow.

An Amazon spokeswoman said the consumer electronics



industry is “facing significant increases in memory and storage component costs” and that the company absorbed these increases “for as long as we could”.

Unprecedented demand from AI data centres has driven RAM prices to new highs in 2026. TV sticks only use 1 to 2GB of RAM, but it’s the same kind that AI companies are buying en masse.

It’s not known whether Amazon’s closest rival Roku will also increase the price of its sticks. Currently its HD stick costs £29.99 (www.snipca.com/60155).

Fire TV Stick price hikes		
Model	Old price	New price
Fire TV Stick HD	£39.99	£59.99
Fire TV Stick 4K Select	£49.99	£64.99
Fire TV Stick 4K Plus	£59.99	£79.99
Fire TV Stick 4K Max	£69.99	£99.99
Fire TV Cube (3rd Gen)	£139.99	£199.99

Major ISPs ‘hide’ their cheaper deals for people on benefits

A report has criticised leading providers for making it hard for people on benefits to find discounted broadband deals they’re entitled to.

These deals, known as social tariffs, are available for those claiming Universal Credit, Pension Credit and some other benefits. Some providers call them ‘essential’ or ‘basic’ broadband.

The study, from comparison and news site Thinkbroadband (www.snipca.com/60171), checked how easy it was to find social tariffs on providers’ websites.

It also assessed them on how clearly they explain prices and contract terms; how fast the service is; and how flexible their

eligibility requirements are.

Now Broadband was the worst performing major provider, scoring a D+ in Thinkbroadband’s ranking (A to E), while BT and Sky both scored C-. Virgin and Vodafone fared better, scoring C and C+ respectively.

Smaller broadband firms, collectively called altnets, performed much better, with four scoring A: B4RN, B4SH, Community Fibre and Hyperoptic.

The report follows the Government’s Telecoms Consumer Charter in February, which requires participating broadband providers to make social tariffs “easy to find and signposted to eligible



customers in communications”.

In April, Ofcom found that only 34 per cent of eligible broadband users knew about social tariffs. It estimates that 532,000 households receiving Universal Credit had signed up for a discounted deal, representing just 8.6 per cent of those eligible.

Visit Ofcom’s site to check current tariffs and whether you’re eligible: www.snipca.com/60172.

IN BRIEF

giffgaff

GIFFGAFF GIVES MORE SIM-ONLY DATA

Mobile network Giffgaff is offering more data on two of its 18-month **SIM-only** plans. Paying £8 a month now gives you 40GB (up from 6GB), while £10 gives you 80GB (up from 25GB). The £10 offer runs until 30 October, while the £8 promotion ends on 4 December. For details visit www.snipca.com/60154.

CHINESE TRAVEL ADAPTER DESTROYED AT BORDER

The Government has warned against using the EGTECH EGC50 travel adapter because it could cause an electric shock. The device, made in China but sold on Amazon UK, uses a plastic earth pin that’s too short to operate the socket’s safety shutters. Border officials intercepted the devices and destroyed them. For details and photos visit www.snipca.com/60174.

TOMORROW'S WORLD

You may have seen a robot beating Usain Bolt’s 100m world record at the World Humanoid Robot Games in Beijing (www.snipca.com/60152), but they were also competing on household chores like folding trousers and loading the washing machine. Not as exciting but certainly more useful: www.snipca.com/60153.



IN BRIEF

AMAZON BLOCKS DRM TOOLS ON KINDLES

Amazon has blocked third-party tools like Calibre that many people were using to remove **DRM** from its Kindle Oasis e-readers (pictured). It comes in the **firmware** update version 5.18.2.1.1, released in August for the final generation of Oasis models, which went on sale in 2019. It means you can no longer convert ebooks for another e-reader.

PROTON CATEGORISES YOUR EMAILS

Proton Mail can now sort emails into six categories: Primary, Social, Promotions, Newsletters, Transactions and Updates. Existing users can choose whether to enable it, while it's switched on by default for new accounts. You can also move wrongly sorted messages between categories. Read more at www.snipca.com/60138, and turn to page 11 for Proton's new username-creation tool.

THE WORLD'S GONE MAD!

This is Brazilian diver Tayane Dalazen being nibbled by a nurse shark. Nasty! But she then uploaded the video to Instagram and got over 550,000 views. Nice! She's one of an increasing number of people getting too close to sharks for social-media likes. But we couldn't resist watching it either – it's at www.snipca.com/60139.



Fake air-conditioning unit sold online powered by PC fan

A cheap air conditioner made by Chinese firm Epicooler (see main photo) is actually just a customised PC fan, according to a German consumer group.

Researchers at Stiftung Warentest, Germany's equivalent to Which?, tested the wall-mounted unit, which is sold online for €163 (around £140).

As well as a PC fan inside (1 in our photo below) they found a small heating element (2, but not the compressor, condenser and other components needed to provide genuine refrigeration (see www.snipca.com/60144 – in German).

They said the unit's light



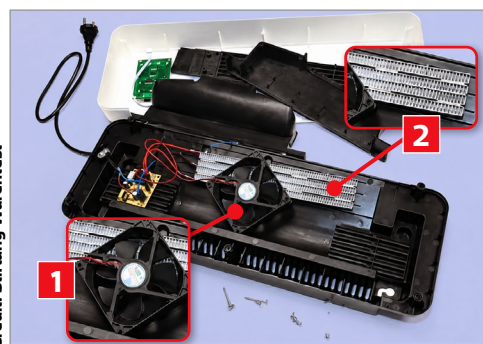
weight was a sign that it didn't work. It weighed less than 3kg – around 10kg lighter than a typical indoor air-conditioning unit.

The unit failed to cool the room when set to Cold Wind mode. More worryingly, the testers had to turn it off when the heating elements became too hot.

Cheap air conditioners have flooded the European market this summer as people look for ways to cope with successive heatwaves, but many are fake imports from China.

Epicooler has promoted its products using AI-generated videos on social media and YouTube.

In July, the UK's Advertising Standards Authority warned about ads for air conditioners that make exaggerated claims such as cooling an entire home within minutes (www.snipca.com/60145).



Credit: Stiftung Warentest

Add theme so new Outlook looks like old

Microsoft is adding a theme to the new Outlook to make it look more like the old 'Classic' version of the email tool.

It changes the icons, fonts and layout to resemble the old Outlook, though none of its features will return.

Microsoft says it will be switched off by default for most users, although some people who have recently moved from the Classic Outlook may get it automatically.

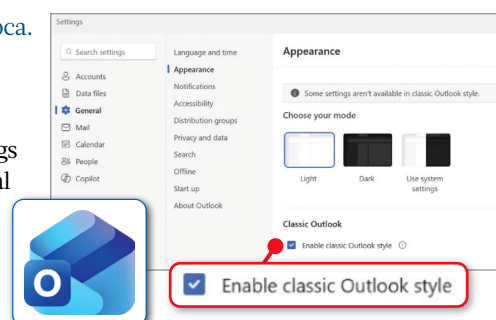
It will also be available online on 'Outlook on the

web' (www.snipca.com/60143).

To apply the theme click the top-right Settings cog then General on the left followed by Appearance.

Now look for the Classic Outlook heading and tick the box next to 'Enable classic Outlook style' (see screenshot).

Microsoft hopes the option will encourage people who have resisted switching to the new Outlook because they



don't like its design. Many users have criticised it for looking more like a web app than a desktop program.

It will first add the option gradually during September before making it more widely available throughout October.

Own a Geekom mini PC? Check for malware now!

Geekom has admitted that a **driver** you could download from its website for six of its mini PCs contained malware capable of stealing passwords and other data.

The **LAN** driver allowed the mini PCs to connect to the internet over a wired **Ethernet** connection. It was made available for Geekom's A7 (pictured), A8, AE7, AE8, AX7 Pro and AX8 Pro models, all released in 2024.

Geekom, based in China, said the malware wasn't part of the Windows operating system installed on the devices, so simply owning one of the affected models doesn't mean your PC is infected.

It added that the page with the driver was no longer accessible via Geekom's site, although links to it were still appearing in search results.

Geekom published an apology on its website (www.snipca.com/60099) and advised removing the driver from your PC, though didn't go into details.

You can check for LAN drivers by searching for and opening Device Manager, then clicking to expand the 'Network adapters' menu.

Look for your Ethernet adapter, usually listed as a Realtek or Ethernet Controller, then double-click it, and open the Driver tab in the box that appears, followed by the Driver Details button.

Now look in the Drivers Files section. If you only have

files installed from **C:\Windows\System32\Drivers**, then you don't have the infected driver.

If you have drivers from other sources, run an antivirus scan using Windows Defender or your third-party program. If it detects malware, follow the instructions to remove it.

The malware was first spotted by tech website VideoCardz. It said it had refused a request from Geekom to take down its original news story about the threat.

For more help email Geekom: support@geekom.co.uk.



IN BRIEF

FIRST IMAGES EMERGE OF LENOVO'S NEO RIVAL

Leaked images appear to show Lenovo's IdeaPad Vibe, its much-rumoured rival to Apple's MacBook Neo laptop. The images, obtained by the website Windows Latest, show models in seven colours including 'sage' green (pictured). It has two ports each for **USB-A** and **USB-C**, while the Neo has just two USB-C. Pricing has yet to be confirmed.



Credit Windows Latest

SELL IKEA FURNITURE SECOND HAND ONLINE

Ikea will soon let UK customers sell second-hand furniture online. The service will go live "later this year", having already launched in some European countries, including Sweden, Spain and Belgium. It lets you sell to other people, making it different to Ikea's Buy Back scheme which gives you credits to spend in store. For details visit www.snipca.com/60098.

NEW £70 EZVIZ DOORBELL HAS 5MP RESOLUTION

EZVIZ has launched a £70 video doorbell that records in five-megapixel resolution, matching models that typically cost twice as much. The CP8 (www.snipca.com/60096, pictured) has a spotlight to provide colour night vision and a **PIR** sensor to detect only humans and cut down on false alarms "triggered by pets, insects, or passing vehicles".



Wetherspoons bans customers playing music on phones

Wetherspoons has banned customers from playing music out loud on phones or taking calls on speaker, saying the noise was driving people "nuts".

The pub chain has asked customers to switch their phones to silent or use earphones when playing music.

Wetherspoons has encouraged staff to use "common sense" when enforcing the ban.

"We are not looking to ask anyone to leave a pub if they go against the ruling, but it is an option for managers if they refuse to do so," it told the BBC.

Tim Martin, who founded Wetherspoons in 1979, said: "In order to avoid customers being driven chicken jalfrezi by a cacophony of sound, we are kindly asking phone users to pipe down."

It follows many surveys showing most people dislike others playing music or taking calls on speaker in public.

In a 2025 poll of 1,000 people from Transport of London, 70 per cent said they found loud phone calls and music a nuisance.



Do you agree with Wetherspoons' decision? Let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

Question of the Fortnight

Why are AI firms buying and destroying rare books?

An ingenious undercover investigation caught Amazon red-handed

Apple's AirTags are typically used to find lost wallets, car keys, handbags and luggage, so hats off to researchers at the website 404 Media who used one to confirm whether Amazon was buying old and rare books just so its AI teams could scan and destroy them.

It's a fascinating and unsettling story that exposes the runaway ambitions of AI companies. And given the money being spent, most tech giants can now be regarded as AI companies, not just those like Anthropic and OpenAI whose main products are **chatbots**.

Based in New York, 404 Media is an independent site that investigates cyber-surveillance, privacy scandals and, increasingly, the darker consequences of AI.

It was looking for a way to confirm rumours that Amazon was buying rare books, and was contacted by an anonymous bookseller in California that said it had received an unusually large order for about 1,000 rare and used books through Biblio – an online marketplace for independent booksellers.

The seller agreed to hide an Apple AirTag, supplied by 404 Media, inside one book. Reporters then followed the tracker as the shipment travelled from California to a warehouse near Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

It stayed there two weeks before being sent to VGT3, an Amazon operation inside its LAS8 warehouse in Las Vegas, where workers cut the



bindings from books and scan their pages for AI training.

This process converts the text into vast datasets containing language, facts and ideas which AI tools can 'learn' in order to improve their responses.

404 Media didn't say which Amazon tool was being fed the data, but the company uses AI across a range of services, including Alexa and Rufus. The logo on the outside of the warehouse is a Tyrannosaurus Rex preparing to eat an open book (pictured below).

404 Media published its story on 17 August (www.snipca.com/60220, behind a paywall), containing a response from Amazon that said it "purchases books through commercial channels

to help develop and improve the products and services our customers use". As vacuous non-denials go, it's one of the most shameless in corporate history.

404 Media fleshed out the story nine days later in an interview with an anonymous worker at VGT3. They said Amazon scans "all kinds of books" from various languages, including historical documents presented to Parliament. Bindings are cut off so books can be scanned rapidly. Pages are then binned rather than preserved.

Amazon isn't alone in destroying books. Earlier this year, court documents revealed that Anthropic, which makes the chatbot Claude, was running Project Panama, with the internal aim to "destructively scan all the books in the world". Chillingly, Anthropic staff were warned: "We don't want it to be known that we are working on this."

The case was brought by a group of authors who accused Anthropic of using their books

THE FACTS

- Investigative journalists used an Apple AirTag to track a shipment of rare books to an Amazon AI department where staff remove their bindings and scan them
- Amazon didn't deny the claim, saying it buys books to "help develop and improve the products and services our customers use"
- Anthropic, which makes the Claude chatbot, runs a project attempting to "destructively scan all the books in the world"

without permission to train Claude. The company agreed to pay a \$1.5bn settlement but Project Panama continues. It's thought Anthropic has scanned up to two million books.

You might think this is a lot of effort to train AI tools. But firms are desperate to leapfrog rivals in the AI goldrush.

Scanning digital books is legally contested because it involves copying copyrighted text. Google, Meta and OpenAI have all been sued for doing this. But legal rulings have permitted converting a lawfully purchased print book into a digital file. And once you own a physical book, you can legally destroy it.

Amazon made its first millions from selling books. It's a bleak irony that it could now make *trillions* from destroying them.



Amazon's page-scanning operation has a book-munching T Rex as its logo

Credit: 404 Media

Protect **your tech**

Scams and threats to avoid, plus new security tools

WATCH OUT FOR...

Scams that know where you went on holiday

What's the threat?

Scammers are using AI to work out where photos posted on social media were taken, and sending **phishing** emails and text messages referring to the location.

In one example noted by antivirus firm McAfee, the scam warns that unusual or suspicious activity related to your bank was detected while you were travelling in that location. It urges you to click a link to verify your account or identity, but this takes you to a fake site that steals your login details.

The scam appears highly convincing because it mentions the specific place you were visiting. McAfee tested over 21,000 travel photos with two freely available AI models, with one identifying the city and country in 91 per cent of images.

AI tools don't need landmarks to identify a location. McAfee found that road names, shop signs and distinctive transport were often enough.

Claude even located a photo as being

taken in the Netherlands just from a close-up of tulips, while ChatGPT identified a sunset in New York state in a photo without any buildings or people (pictured, see www.snipca.com/60103). If the photo contains the name of your hotel, the scam might refer to it even if the AI tool can't work out the location.

Once the scammers have identified a location, they use the name of the social-media account to search for its owner's email address.

How can you stay safe?

Be especially alert in the weeks after you upload photos of any messages that urge



Credit: McAfee

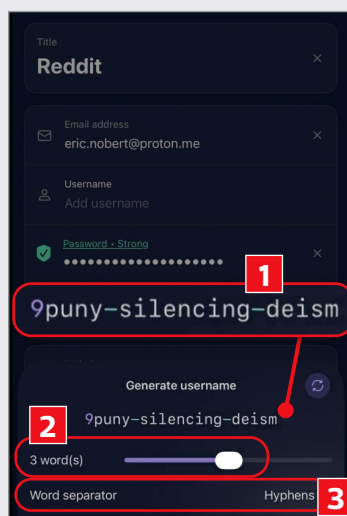
you to click a link based on something unusual happening while you were in a specific location.

You can also prevent scammers from seeing your photos by restricting them to friends. For Facebook follow the instructions at www.snipca.com/60104; for Instagram see www.snipca.com/60105.

New tools | Create unique usernames on Proton Pass iOS

As well as strong passwords, it's important to create unique usernames for your online accounts. This makes it harder for scammers to link your different accounts and target you. Proton Pass recently added a username generator to its iOS app, making it easier to come up with one that fraudsters won't guess.

If you don't use Proton Pass, install it from the Apple App Store (www.snipca.com/60107). Next, open a saved login, then tap Edit followed by 'Generate username' and



you'll see the randomly created username at the bottom (1 in our screenshot). Move the slider to make it longer (2), and choose whether you want hyphens, numbers and other elements (3). Tap 'Save' when done. You can watch a video showing this at www.snipca.com/60108.

Proton has said the username generator will soon be coming to its Android app (www.snipca.com/60109). You can also

create usernames online on Proton's site: www.snipca.com/60106.

ScamWatch

Readers warn readers



Nectar points spent

In July, I received a text message saying I had just used 14,500 Nectar points (amounting to £72.50) at an Argos branch in Glasgow. I live in Greater Manchester, so I thought this was a scam. But the next day I checked my account and 14,500 points had indeed disappeared. I reported this to Nectar and they told me the points would be reinstated on a new card. This took about 12 days. They didn't explain how the scam had worked, so Nectar collectors beware. Report scams to Nectar by email (scams@nectar.com) or check the legitimacy of messages by phoning them on 0344 811 0811.

David Smith



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

Letters

Tell us what's on your mind

The dark side of WhatsApp groups

✉ I read Issue 743's Cover Feature on WhatsApp groups (pictured right) with interest because I use it every day, like many millions must do.

I'll definitely put some of your tips into practice, especially using the web version to make video calls. But I think it has a dark side that has led to me leaving several neighbourhood groups which started off as well intentioned, but soon grew into a place to make snide comments about people who hadn't joined the group.

After some time, the 20 or so people who had used the groups to swap advice and greetings dwindled to two or three who just gossiped or sent stupid jokes. It was like being spammed not by marketing companies but people you'd barely nod to if you saw them on the street. It became so unpleasant that when I left the groups I didn't care if that showed up on the group's page.

Local gossip like this has always existed of course, but before phones it was restricted to whispered comments over the garden fence. Despite the best efforts of these busybodies, it couldn't spread as fast as it can do on WhatsApp.

Frank Hawley

CA SAYS Knowing which WhatsApp groups to join and when to leave them is certainly an unexpected dilemma of modern communications. It would be interesting to know what other readers think. Have you joined too many groups? Do you dislike being pestered to join? If you missed Issue 743's issue, you can buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/60137.

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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



Switching to digital – good and bad...

✉ You recently mentioned an upcoming feature on the copper network switch-off, so my experience may be relevant for those reluctant to move.

I eventually ended up as a satisfied customer after BT gave me a free hybrid phone (with a battery

backup and mobile SIM) to cover outages plus an adapter to connect my answerphone. Broadband has greatly improved with FTTC instead of ADSL, and the new Smart Hub.

On the downside BT and/or Openreach sent many emails and text messages concluding with “you're good to go”, but nobody actually checked that I was. I wasn't actually “good to go” so I had to report a fault then wait five days without a phone or broadband for an Openreach engineer. The wrong copper wires were connected to my FTTC service in the cabinet.

What's more, BT's Digital Voice guides ignore the fact that their Smart Hubs are actually DECT bases. Registering a phone or adapter is a DECT function, not a Digital Voice one. Hence, it's unnecessary for phones that are plugged directly into the hub.

I needed to search the internet to learn about that and the ability to register some ordinary DECT handsets.

Mike Sargent

Cut finger meant I couldn't sign in

✉ In all the recent letters and features about biometrics I've not heard anyone warn about one major failing of fingerprint readers – that they don't cope well when you've cut the finger you sign in with and need to use a plaster. I know some readers let you set up more than one finger to sign in with, but you have to remember to do this to avoid being logged out.

I learnt this the painful way (literally) after cutting my sign-in finger while working in the garden. It bled a fair bit and took longer to heal than I had expected, so I had to wear a plaster for about a week. I went to log in as usual only to realise the reader wouldn't recognise my plaster. I then carefully removed the plaster and tried to sign in, but the scab that had formed obviously prevented the reader from identifying me.

It wasn't until about 10 days had passed that I could sign in using my finger, though I could still log in with my PIN. I was worried that a scar might form a permanent impediment, but this wasn't the case. I imagine other careless gardeners might not be so lucky.

Mike Rimmer

I had doubts about Freely, but I'm glad I switched

✉ Regarding Issue 741's Cover Feature on the future of Freely, I've kept an eye on Freely devices since they appeared on the market, but I couldn't think of any reason why I needed one.

What's the Issue...?

✉ When did you publish tips on sending messages to yourself? It was in 2025 I think.

Dave Butler

CA SAYS Yes – in Issue 706, page 60.

✉ I want to turn my old tablet into a second monitor. Remind me when you explained that.

Tom Norton

CA SAYS In Issue 715, page 74. Read it

and the feature above on our 2025 Back Issue Stick: www.snipca.com/57764.

✉ I've just switched to Windows 11 and want to read your Cover Feature on avoiding mistakes. When was that?

Paula Graham

CA SAYS In Issue 732. Buy a back issue from www.snipca.com/60100.

I have a Humax Freeview recorder and a Roku Express, which together have provided any channel or on demand service that I needed. But I recently discovered that Freely has 35 HD channels – far more than Freeview. I therefore decided to buy yet another set-top box – the Manhattan Aero, which comes with Freely.

Freely has its drawbacks, some of which you mention in your feature (lack of recording; no +1 channels), but it's so nice to be able to watch a sharp picture on channels that are just fuzzy blobs on Freeview. I'm hoping Freely will add a few more in future.

Incidentally, this means that I now have six remote controls for my TV kit, which can get confusing at times.

David Kirk

Why can't AI data centres use tap water?

I read with interest in Issue 742 (page 8) that Water UK expects 19.8 million litres of water will be required daily to cool data centres and meet the Government's target of creating AI growth zones. Presumably Water UK is talking about clean processed water (tap) that is delivered via existing pipes and therefore could create future shortages of drinking tap water to the UK public.

I started my working life in textiles and at that time a lot of mills couldn't or didn't want to rely on tap water (which was vital to the process) being delivered to their premises by an outside company. Therefore, many mill owners built dams that allowed them to be independent of outside water requirements (apart from drinking water).

These dams were built near local water supplies and the water was pumped straight into the mills unprocessed. Could a similar system not be used for AI data centres? I doubt clean processed tap water is required to cool down the equipment.

Also, surely the water could be recycled by pumping it back into the dam, much like a car radiator, which circulates water around the engine to cool it.

Michael Masleczo

I can't believe water companies have said there's not enough water available for AI data centres.



STAR LETTER

You never own downloaded content – it's one big con!

It came as no surprise to me that Google annoyed a customer by deleting *Lord of the Rings* (pictured) from his Play Store library (Issue 743, page 8). It's alarming behaviour that should make everyone realise they never actually *own* digital content they've downloaded. It makes more sense to treat it as a long-term loan.

This will never change until the law does. If I buy a DVD from a shop, it would be illegal for that shop owner to break into my home and take it back just because they had lost the right to sell the physical discs. But Google, Amazon, Apple and the owners of any online store are allowed to do that by remotely wiping content from your PC.

They can do this because the law treats digital content differently to physical media. When you download a film, ebook or album you're technically making a copy of it to save on your PC. At no point does the law say you've bought anything physical – merely data that just happens to form digital content.

This is absurd because it doesn't



really come from legal principles. Instead, it's led by what's technically possible. It's easy for Google or Amazon to remotely delete content from your computer, and therefore work backwards from that to argue for a legal loophole claiming downloads are temporary licences not permanent purchases.

It's all one big con. So far we've only had isolated cases of deleted content, but it's going to spread – just like paying to remove adverts appeared as a marginal business model but is now everywhere. I stopped buying digital content years ago knowing this was coming. My DVDs look great on the shelf too.

Trevor Blakemore



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

Northumbrian water, for example, has the giant Kielder Water reservoir in Northumberland, the largest man-made lake in northern Europe. The North East of England didn't have hosepipe bans during the recent heatwaves. I would suggest that AI companies look at building their water-hungry Data Centres in Northumberland or Durham.

James Thompson

Vodafone do their best but I still have problems

I read your news story in Issue 742 (page 9) on broadband complaints hitting an all-time low. I was surprised they hadn't gone up due to the number of times I've rung Vodafone's customer service to complain about the lack of Wi-Fi signal in my home, and **buffering** when I watch catch-up TV. Vodafone had promised me there'd be no problem with the signal in my small two-bedroom flat



on the Isle of Wight.

Fortunately, Vodafone's assistants are some of the nicest people I have ever spoken to. They're kind, considerate and do their best to fix the problem, giving me a booster for my lounge and repeatedly resetting my router and carrying out other technical fixes at their end.

They do tell me, however, that if I upgrade to a more expensive package, they would be able to fix the problem. I'm reluctant to do so. Since my last communication with them things seem to be working fine, apart from the Bluetooth speaker that I use to listen to my TV constantly crackling and breaking up. I have my fingers crossed.

Paul Johnson



We stand up for your legal rights

Freeview recorder didn't arrive – can I get a refund?

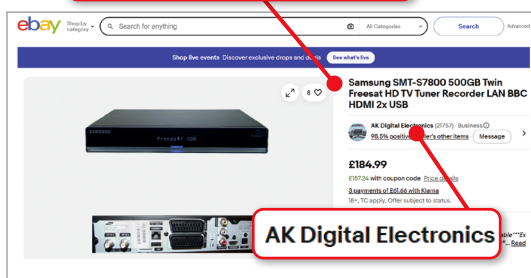
Q In April, I purchased a Samsung SMT-S7800 Freeview recorder for £175.74 from AK Digital Electronics on eBay (www.snipca.com/60161). After five to six weeks it started to overheat, so I stopped using it. I repeatedly tried contacting the company, but got no response. I made a claim through PayPal, but it ruled in favour of the company. EBay won't help because I returned the recorder to the seller but not, it seems, to the right address. Can you help in any way as I can't afford to lose this money?

Colin Gleave

A We'll certainly try, because AK Digital Electronics has treated Colin appallingly. Fewer than six months have passed since purchase, so it's not Colin's responsibility to prove there's an inherent fault. Instead, the company has to prove that there *isn't* one.

To do this it would need to examine the recorder, and this could be Colin's main problem. He decided to return the device

Samsung SMT-S7800



to AK Digital Electronics before it agreed to accept it, which is never advisable. And to complicate matters, he appears to have sent it to the wrong address. That means AK Digital Electronics can tell PayPal that it hasn't received the recorder. This might be why PayPal rejected Colin's claim.

Colin paid for tracked delivery via Royal Mail so he should ask it for evidence of where the recorder was delivered and who signed for it. If this shows it went to AK Digital Electronics, he should write a formal letter to the company providing this proof. If not, then the recorder may have been stolen at the destination it was delivered to. We hope to unravel this mystery soon.

CASE ONGOING

Should I switch to Apple's new insurance?

Q I have AppleCare+ on my Apple devices, but Apple has introduced AppleCare One, which covers several products under one plan. Does switching give me better protection?

Steve Coates

A It depends on what Steve already has covered. AppleCare One includes all the benefits of AppleCare+, plus theft-and-loss cover for eligible devices. It lets you cover up to three of your own devices for £16.99 a month, with additional devices costing £4.99 each. Switching could save Steve money if he has several Apple devices. He should add up what he currently pays for AppleCare+. If that costs more than £16.99 a month, AppleCare One could save him money. If it costs less, switching would cost more, although AppleCare One could provide additional theft-and-loss protection. He should note AppleCare One isn't a family plan: only devices on the same Apple Account as the subscriber can be added. Devices he already owns must also be four years old or newer and in good working condition. Apple explains its different insurance schemes at www.snipca.com/60168.

CASE CLOSED

LEGAL UPDATE

Clearer information on products' lifespan and insurance



Two changes to European and UK law should improve your rights in the coming years.

First, the EU's Empowering Consumers for the Green Transition (ECGT) Directive, which comes into effect on 27 September 2026, will ban companies from misleading consumers about how long products will last or whether they can be repaired.

It will also require companies to reveal where spare parts can be obtained and

outlaw tactics such as encouraging people to replace goods sooner than necessary. For products with digital elements, sellers will also have to state how long the manufacturer guarantees that software updates will be provided.

The Directive won't apply in the UK, but most big brands won't bother creating different rules for different countries. So the clearer repair, durability and update info they have to show in the EU is very likely to appear on



products sold in Britain too.

Meanwhile, the UK's Financial Conduct Authority is reviewing the rules for insurance, which could affect extended warranties sold as

insurance. The shake-up should mean less box-ticking for insurers and clearer, more straightforward paperwork for you — making it easier to see whether an extended warranty gives you any real extra protection or simply mirrors rights you already have by law.

Contact us so we can investigate your case

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

Can a retailer refuse to refund original postage?

Q I cancelled an online order, but it had already been dispatched. I refused delivery as you've always advised in such circumstances, but the retailer won't refund my original postage costs. He said that because I would have had to pay for return costs he was deducting the original postage. Is this right?

Jeremy Higgins

A No, it's not right and from what Jeremy has told us this appears to be a clear breach of the Consumer Contracts Regulations (CCRs). However, it's not uncommon for retailers to try this, so the wording of your

cancellation is crucial. This law gives you the right to cancel most goods bought at a distance – whether online, over the phone or from a catalogue – for any reason and receive a refund, including the original standard delivery charge.

If, like Jeremy, you're cancelling *before* delivery, make it clear in your email that you're exercising your statutory cancellation rights under the CCRs. That makes it clear this is a statutory cancellation, rather than simply a customer refusing to accept a delivery. Once cancelled, the retailer's obligations to reimburse you under the CCRs apply. The retailer can't deduct your original



delivery charge from your refund. You may, however, have to pay the cost of returning the goods yourself under the CCRs. The fact that Jeremy refused delivery doesn't change his right to a refund of the original standard delivery charge.

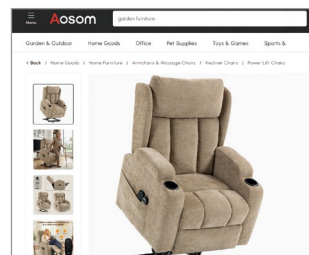
CASE CLOSED

How can I prove I made a purchase?

Q I recently bought a pair of rise-and-recline chairs from Aosom (www.aosom.co.uk) but one is faulty. After two days, the controller box started sparking and generating smoke. When I called the company they claimed there was no record of my purchase from their website. But that's where I bought it, and I can prove it. What should I do now?

Annette Deschenes

A Annette should get back in touch with Aosom and provide all the proof she has of the purchase, as well as any evidence of delivery she might have. Photos of the chairs will help too, as would videos if they can demonstrate the fault. She should send all this by email and say she'll take her case to Trading Standards if she doesn't get a response within seven days. There's little point in Annette attempting to resolve her case over the



phone again.

As with Colin Gleave's case opposite, less than six months have passed since purchase so the onus is on Aosom to prove the chairs aren't faulty. It's allowed to examine the chairs, and can charge

Annette for picking them up if they turn out not to be faulty. Annette wants the chair replaced but Aosom is allowed to attempt a repair. If this fails, it must issue a refund rather than fall back upon a replacement.

CASE ONGOING

CREDIT WHERE IT'S DUE

AMP3 helped me choose right MP3 player

 Having read good things about FiiO's MP3 players from both readers and *Computeractive's* writers, I decided to buy the M21

Digital Audio Player (pictured) from Advanced MP3 Players (AMP3, www.snipca.com/60189).

At £330 it wasn't cheap and I wasn't sure it was exactly what I needed, so I emailed AMP3 a few questions. They replied within an hour with answers



that were easy to understand, making it clear the M21 would work with my MP3 files and promising to help me if there was a problem.

I got lost a couple of times setting it up, but again AMP3 answered my emailed queries promptly – and this was on a bank holiday. It reminds of the kind of human touch you used to get in family-run electronics stores that sadly no longer appear on the high street.

Sam Davis

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

Contact Advanced MP3 Players

- **Email**
sales@advancedmp3players.co.uk
- **Online form**
www.snipca.com/60190
- **Phone** 0343 289 6880

Grow Your Family Tree



Recent updates to one of the best UK sources should boost your research. Follow **Richard Holt's** advice to...

Master the British Newspaper Archive

The British Newspaper Archive (BNA) is a vital tool for all family historians. It contains nearly 107 million pages from over 2,900 titles, dating back to 1699, and has just been updated with an improved search engine and new tools for organising your research.

We'll explain how they work, but read the BNA blog too (www.snipca.com/60110). See an A-Z of all newspapers available at www.snipca.com/60116.

Search by name and/or keyword

The BNA is owned by Findmypast (FMP), so it's free if you subscribe to the latter's Everything package (£169 a year or £24.49 monthly, www.snipca.com/60111). If you have that subscription, search the archive at www.snipca.com/60112.

Alternatively, subscribe directly to the BNA for £120 a year or £16.99 a month (www.snipca.com/60113). You can also pay 50p per page. Before spending anything, though, check the BNA's free content at www.snipca.com/60114.

Whether you search at FMP or BNA, the biggest change is that the search function is now split into Names (specifically for people, 1 in our screenshot above right)

The BNA's search tool is now split into name and keyword options

and Keywords (for everything else – places, events, occupations, organisations and so on 2).

Enter a name and keyword, then click Filters at the top right to narrow results by date of publication, as well as county, title, type of article and more. Click 'Advanced search', also top right, to include or exclude exact phrases, and limit results to specific time periods.

Save clippings as collections

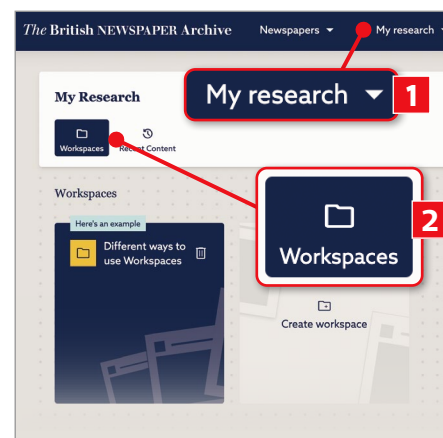
The BNA revamp lets you save an article as a clipping (see screenshot above right). You can then put clippings into Collections based on a subject, person, place or question. These can be kept private or



You can now save newspaper clippings to add to your collections

made public so other users can view them. You can see collections that other people have made at www.snipca.com/60118. Open one and you'll see options to share them at the top right.

These collections can now be stored in Workspaces, which let you build larger research projects over time. To find these, log into the BNA or Findmypast, click 'My research' (1 in our screenshot below) then Workspaces 2.



Access your stored collections by clicking 'My research' then Workspaces

Your Genealogy Problems Solved

I've just discovered a branch of my family tree covers York at the start of the 1900s. Are there any electoral registers that could help flesh out the scant details I have so far. I subscribe to Findmypast if that helps.

Jeremy Clarke

Yes it does – look in Findmypast's 'City of York Electoral Registers 1848-1938'

(www.snipca.com/60102), which has 1.76m records. It will give you names, places, districts and addresses.

Look at the original image in your results for more details, such as the type of property, and whether it was rented or owned.

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

Transform your conservatory in just one day



BEFORE



AFTER



2 FREE PANELS

*QUOTE CA0826

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

WARMER IN WINTER

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

David Birch, Chichester

TRANSFORMED CONSERVATORY

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

Mr and Mrs Davies Somerset

COOLER IN SUMMER

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

Carol Doyle, Surrey

REDUCES ENERGY BILLS

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

Anne Bird, Bristol

QUIETER IN BAD WEATHER

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

Mr & Mrs Bailey-Webb, Warsash

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

Mr & Mrs Barber, Wells



For a free no obligation quote call

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



Terms and Conditions apply. Green Space UK, Crow House, BH24 1PD, Registered No. 8542786, as shown on FCA authorisation, trading as Green Space UK, is a credit broker and is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority. Applies to orders of 8 panels or more. Valid until the end of September 2026. Not to be used in conjunction with any other marketing offer.

Best Free Software

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

PDF TOOL

RevPDF 5.0

www.revpdf.com

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



RevPDF is one of our favourite discoveries of 2026. It's a lightweight alternative to PDFgear (www.pdfgear.com) that works entirely offline and with no annoying AI features.

This new version is RevPDF's biggest update yet, and the first since it featured in our Workshop in Issue 738 (page 38). It adds more features and flexibility to the program, while maintaining its modest download size of 60MB (PDFgear is 135MB).

The additions include new tools for converting PDFs into Microsoft Word format (DOCX) and Excel spreadsheets (XLSX). These complement the existing options for converting images into PDFs and vice versa.

RevPDF has also improved its Compress tool to reduce file size more efficiently. You can choose the level of compression for images in PDFs to either maintain their original resolution, make them as small as possible or strike a sensible balance between quality and size.

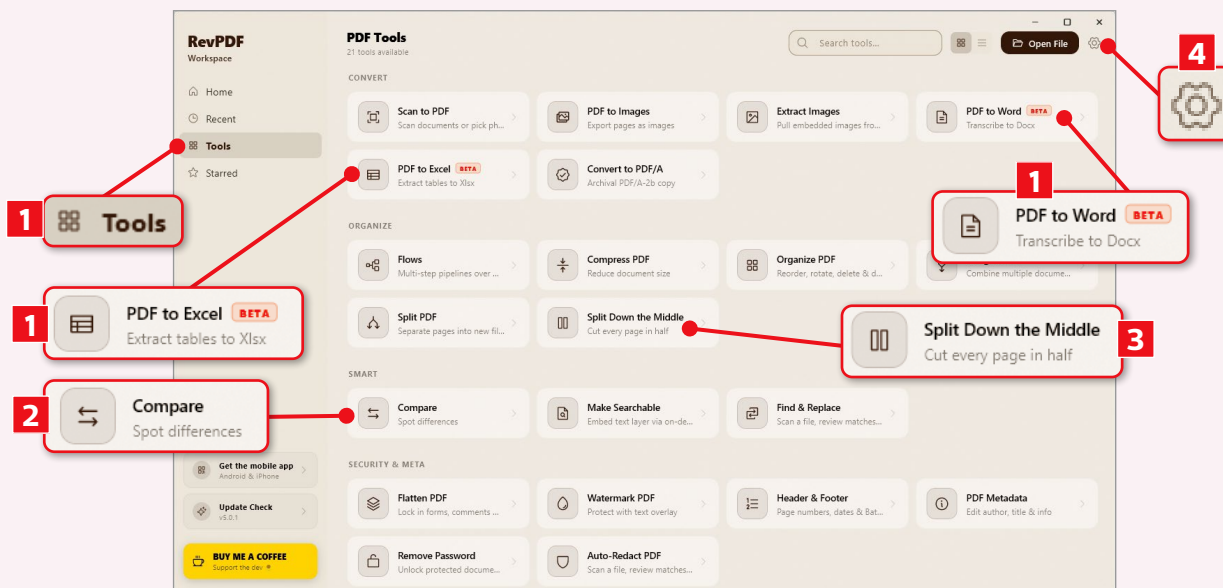
One of the best features in RevPDF is its ability to edit text in PDFs. The updated program makes this even easier, with

options for 'reflowing' paragraphs when you delete text so it doesn't leave a big gap.

However, the most exciting new option in RevPDF 5.0 is the Compare tool. This identifies differences between the old version of a PDF and the current one, so you can instantly review all the changes you've made to the text, images and layout. It displays the two documents side by side and highlights the differences for easy reference. Click a change in the left-hand sidebar to see precisely where it was made.

Other improvements let you add and edit page numbers; split PDFs at a specific position in a page; and create an automated, multi-step workflow of commonly performed actions.

You can download RevPDF from the link above left or install its free app from the Microsoft Store (www.snipca.com/60214). The EXE version may trigger a SmartScreen warning, but it's safe to use so just click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

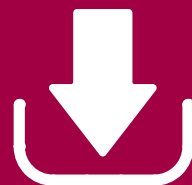


1 RevPDF's Tools tab now gives you access to 21 free tools, including its new 'PDF to Word' and 'PDF to Excel' options. With the latter, you can convert a whole PDF into a spreadsheet or just its tables.

2 Click the new Compare tool to review the differences between two versions of a PDF. Select the old and new files, then click Compare to open a dual-pane viewer that highlights the changes you've made.

3 The updated 'Split Down the Middle' option lets you divide PDFs in two at a selected position. This is useful for splitting scans of documents and books into pages you can edit separately.

4 To switch RevPDF from dark to light mode, as we have, click the Settings cog and choose Appearance. Both modes have a choice of themes, including Coffee (pictured), Modernist and Graphite.



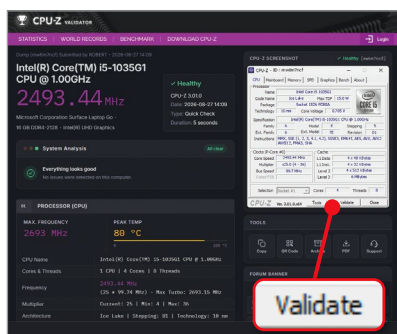
SYSTEM TOOL

CPU-Z 3.01

www.snipca.com/60201

What you need: Windows 8, 10 or 11

CPU-Z is one of the best free tools for viewing information about your PC, including its processor, motherboard and memory. The program's Validate feature makes this technical data easier to understand, and the latest version redesigns and improves the option. It now draws on more than 100 detection points to provide a snapshot of your PC's health, including **drivers**, temperatures, hardware problems, misconfigurations and more. To try it, click the Validate button (see screenshot) followed by Submit. CPU-Z will open a web page showing a system overview. This will reveal if your PC is healthy, identify any issues and tell you the speed of your **CPU**, the remaining life of your **SSD**, your last boot time and lots of other useful info.



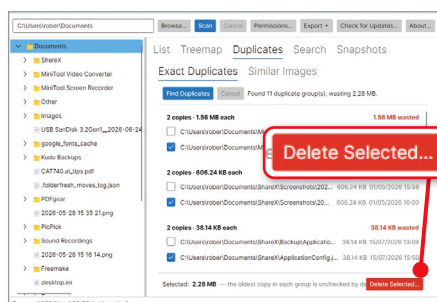
DRIVE-SPACE ANALYSER

DiskGeek 1.0

www.snipca.com/60208

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

If you find WizTree and WinDirStat confusing, new program DiskGeek provides a simpler way to analyse storage usage on your PC. Click the Browse button, select a drive or folder, then click Scan. DiskGeek will list the contents of that location in descending order of size, tell you how many files each folder contains and show the percentage of drive space that folders are consuming. Click 'Treemap' to view this information as colour-coded blocks. You can't delete, move or open any items, but the details are useful for reference. DiskGeek also includes a duplicate cleaner, which *does* remove unwanted files. Click 'Duplicates' followed by Find Duplicates to scan for exact copies of files. Check the results, then click Delete Selected (see screenshot) to remove all duplicates in one go.



SHOULD I PAY FOR...?

Choose the right version of software

AltTabby

www.snipca.com/60211

Price: £7.99 **Free trial:** 30 days

What you need: Windows 10 or 11

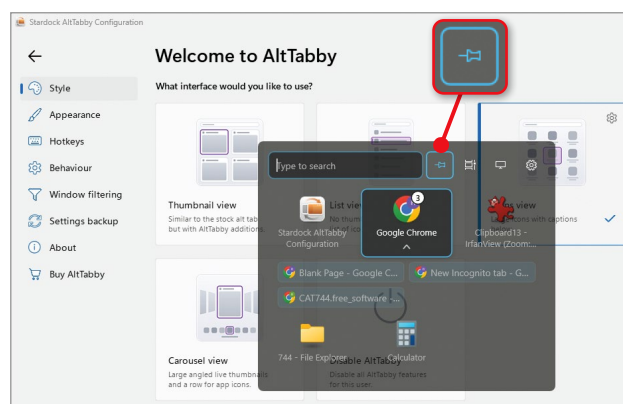
AltTabby is the latest program from Stardock, the company behind Start11 and Fences. It enhances the Alt+Tab feature in Windows to make it easier to switch between open windows.

That may not sound very exciting, especially because PowerToys recently added a similar tool called Window Hopper. But once you try AltTabby (for free), its benefits become apparent.

The Style tab lets you choose between displaying open windows as thumbnails, large or small icons, or as a list or carousel. Cleverly, it groups windows from the same program or app, which is handy if you have multiple File Explorer or browser windows open.

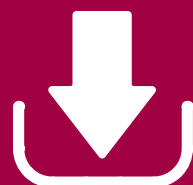
On the Appearance tab, you can customise the design of the Alt+Tab switcher, while the Hotkeys tab lets you disable the Alt+Tab shortcut and use a different key combination. Click the Behaviour tab to specify which monitor the switcher appears on (if you have more than one), and the order of the programs within it – such as most used. The 'Window filtering' tab includes the option to show browser tabs as separate windows.

Unlike the built-in Windows feature, AltTabby has a search box for searching across open windows. You can also pin the switcher (see screenshot) to stop it closing when you release the Alt+Tab keys.



OUR VERDICT: Pay for it

For a one-off payment of £7.99, you can install AltTabby on five PCs, which is pretty good value. If you never use Alt+Tab, it will be less appealing, but most Windows users will like the control it provides over switching windows.



What should I download?

We advise you which software and apps to use

What's the best option for non-destructive image editing?

Q Is there an image editor that specialises in non-destructive editing? I make loads of changes as I edit, so need a free simple program that lets me reverse specific changes without losing subsequent edits.
Harry Sanders

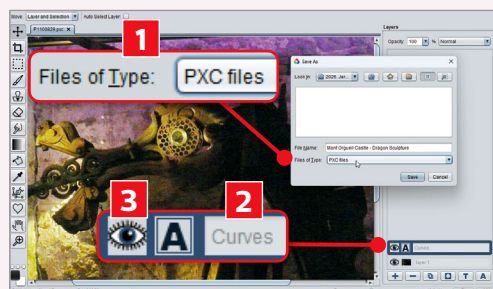
A Try Pixelitor (www.snipca.com/60068), a free program that has its own file format (PXC) for non-destructive editing. Each layer can be individually edited, shown/hidden or removed as you see fit.

After opening Pixelitor for the first time, open the Edit menu and choose Preferences. Select 'Advanced' and tick the 'Enable Experimental Features' box before clicking Close, then clicking OK. Restart Pixelitor.

Now, as an example, open an image that's either too bright or too dark. Next, choose File followed by 'Save as' then select PXC files from the 'Files of Type' dropdown menu (1 in our screenshot) to save the image in a format that preserves all the layers.

Now choose Layer, Adjustment Layer, then New Curves. You'll notice a new Curves layer has been added to the list in the Layers panel on the right (2). Adjust the brightness and contrast by clicking and dragging on the straight line – the image will change as you move it around. The key difference is that when you click OK, you've not made permanent changes to the original image – to see this, just click the eye button next to the Curves layer (3) to hide the layer and you'll see the original image remains untouched underneath.

You can create as many layers as you like to experiment with different effects. When you've finished, choose File, then Export Optimized JPEG to create a copy of the image with those changes applied.

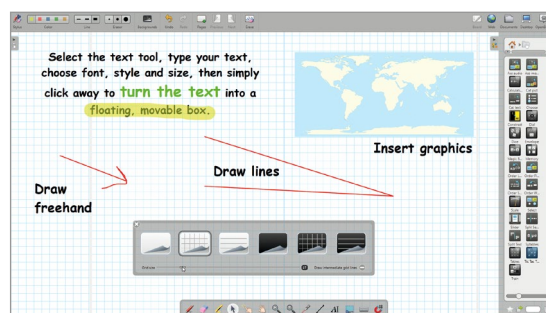


What's the best replacement for Whiteboard?

Q I read with some disappointment that Microsoft is closing down the free version of Whiteboard. I found it a useful sketching tool. What's the best replacement that's preferably free?

Dennis Mills

A If you don't need to collaborate with others on your sketches or sync them online, try the free OpenBoard (www.snipca.com/60069), which works for Linux, macOS and Windows. It offers all the core drawing tools you need as shown in our screenshot. As well as on PCs, it works with drawing tablets and pens for easier note-taking. Finished notes can then be printed or exported.

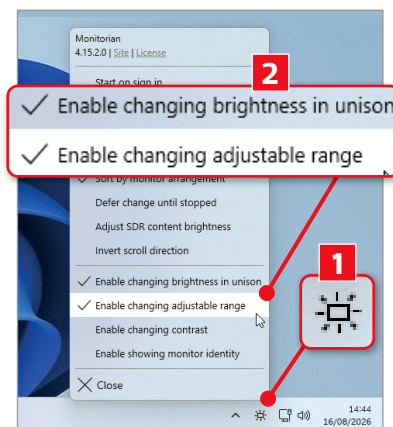


Can I set the same brightness level on different monitors?

Q I use two PC monitors in my home office, but one is always brighter than the other. Is there a program that can set the brightness level so they're equally bright?

Paul Thomson

A You can do this using Monitorian (www.snipca.com/60070), which sits in the system tray. Right-click its icon (1 in our screenshot) then select both 'Enable changing brightness in unison' and 'Enable changing adjustable range' (2). Once that's done, click the system-tray icon to open the slideable brightness controls.



Named & Shamed



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

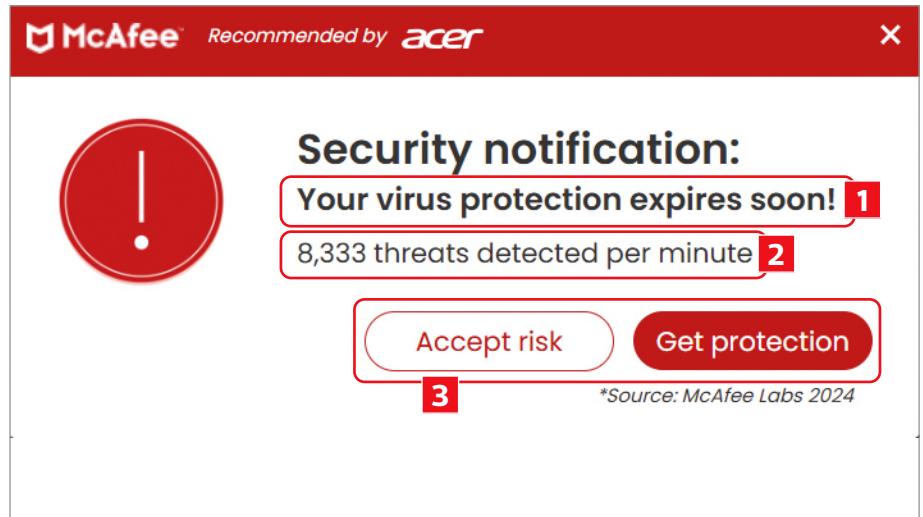
SOFTWARE WARNING!

McAfee's 'scareware' security pop-ups

Just when I thought it was safe to boot my PC again, I was spammed once more by McAfee's security alerts.



You might recall in Issue 742 I slammed LG for allowing McAfee ads to appear on its monitors when they were first plugged in. Well, last month I was reviewing the Acer Revo RB102 mini PC (pictured below) when up popped this warning claiming my "virus protection expires soon" (1 in our screenshot right) and that



Keumars thought it was safe to turn on the Acer Revo RB102 mini PC...

...but was instantly spammed by alarmist pop-ups from McAfee

it had detected 8,333 threats per minute (2).

Such scare tactics don't fool me, but they might do others less desensitised to alarmist alerts. It gave me two choices: 'Accept risk' or 'Get protection' (3). Note how loaded that first term is. If you decline McAfee you're 'accepting' the risk of malware – so it'll be *your* fault if hackers wreck your machine and steal every password you've ever created.

Both Acer and McAfee are to blame, and they can get away with it because such ads are hard to regulate. I'm not a fan of antivirus being preinstalled on PCs, but if it must happen companies should at least stop spamming users with such 'scareware' alerts. They wouldn't last five minutes as a TV or radio advert, but tech companies treat our desktops as fair game.

WHAT ARE THEY TALKING ABOUT?

WHAT THEY SAY

Mark Zuckerberg, Meta boss

"There is a dilemma that once AI systems can autonomously improve themselves, any lab that doesn't let their AI system direct a substantial amount of compute capacity towards recursive self-improvement will inherently fall behind. For example, if a self-improving AI system focused on optimizing its compute efficiency, it could theoretically invent ways to squeeze 100x or more intelligence out of each gigawatt."

WHAT THEY MEAN

I've been replaced by jargon-spewing AI but no one has noticed.

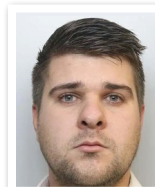


KEUMARS' VILLAIN OF THE FORTNIGHT

Joseph Gibson

We all know dating sites are rife with lying Lotharios, but Joseph Gibson set new standards in deception. The 35-year-old from Denbighshire roamed Tinder claiming he had served in the armed forces, owned luxury yachts and cars, and was worth £400m. So far, so much the delusions of a pathetic chancer.

But more abhorrently Gibson also said he had cancer and needed money for treatment, even posting photos apparently showing him



having a blood transfusion.

Between them his four victims – three women and one man – sent him £68,000. His most outlandish scam targeted a retired superyacht captain

by claiming he sold a weapons programme for the US government.

Before sentencing he vowed to repay £40,000 to his victims, but could only rustle up £15,000. Unimpressed, a judge at Brison Crown Court sentenced him to three years and two months in prison.



MINI PC | £399 from Amazon www.snipca.com/60079

Beelink EQi Wildcat Lake

Hello, good buy

The Beelink EQi Wildcat Lake is a mini PC with modest ambitions. It's not pretending to be a gaming machine or powerhouse that will run AI-enhanced creative apps. Instead, it's a simple, tiny machine primed for mainstream office apps, browsing and streaming. With superb connectivity and snappy performance, that's all it needs to be.

The design isn't particularly inspiring, but the dark-grey plastics and rounded corners should blend into almost any background, helped by the modest 126x126mm footprint and 44mm height. The 85W power supply is built in, and there's plenty of ventilation through the base, helping noise levels to stay barely noticeable in normal use.

“Our new favourite mini PC is perfectly tuned for the work it's designed to do”

The ports are where things get interesting. The front (see main photo) houses a single **USB 3.2** port, a matching **USB-C** port and a 3.5mm audio jack, so nothing too unusual there. Around the back, though, you'll find two **Thunderbolt 4** ports, two **USB 2.0** ports, an **HDMI** output, a **2.5 Gigabit Ethernet** port and a 10 Gigabit **Ethernet** port (all pictured below). Thunderbolt 4 ports are unusual on a budget mini PC, while 10 Gigabit



Ethernet ports are even rarer. You could easily repurpose the EQi as a compact server, and it's brilliant for moving large media files around a wired network. If you prefer wireless networking, you still have Wi-Fi 6E built in.

It's easy to get inside through the base, held in place by four small cross-head screws. There you'll find two **M.2** 2280 slots ready to accommodate up to 4TB of storage, with both empty on arrival – Beelink has already soldered on a 512GB **UFS 3.1** drive. On our review model, the 16GB of **LPDDR5 RAM** comes fixed to the motherboard and can't be upgraded, but 24GB and 32GB versions with upgradable DIMMs are available from Beelink direct (£461 and £513 respectively when importing from the US: www.snipca.com/60081).

This EQi uses one of Intel's new Wildcat Lake processors – the Core 3 304. It's a slightly unusual five-core processor, teaming one **Performance core** running at up to 4.3GHz with four Low Power **Efficiency cores** running at up to 3.3GHz, and it's designed for basic, energy-efficient laptops. It's no surprise to see that the EQi's test scores put it behind our previous favourite mini PC – the

SPECIFICATIONS

5-core Intel Core 3 304 processor • 16GB DDR5 RAM • Intel Graphics • 512GB UFS 3.1 storage • Wi-Fi 6E • Bluetooth 5.2 • 2x Thunderbolt 4 ports • 1x USB-C 3.2 port • 1x USB 3.2 port • 2x USB 2.0 ports • 1x HDMI 2.0 port • 1x 2.5 Gigabit Ethernet port • 1x 10 Gigabit Ethernet port • 1x 3.5mm audio socket • Windows 11 Pro • 44x126x126mm (HxWxD) • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/60079

GMKtec NucBox K17, with its eight-core Core Ultra 5 226V.

Those scores were still pretty good, however, and in daily office work the EQi feels surprisingly nippy and responsive. The UFS 3.1 storage isn't as fast as an **SSD**, but it didn't feel slow when we edited images in Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop.

What's more, you could install an M.2 SSD later, when prices drop, and enjoy a small speed boost. Just be aware that gaming's off the menu – the integrated Intel **GPU** simply doesn't have the power – while the onboard **NPU** doesn't meet the specification to run **Copilot+** AI apps.

This isn't the mightiest mini PC or the most upgradable, but it's perfectly tuned for the work it's designed to do. It's also exceptional value and deserves its place as our new favourite mini PC.

VERDICT A great-value mini PC with impressive performance levels for everyday office programs and fantastic connectivity

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

GMKtec NucBox K17
£520 Spending more will get you a faster CPU and GPU, giving you a more versatile mini PC overall



SMARTPHONE | £1,149 from Amazon www.snipca.com/60128

Samsung Galaxy Z Flip8

Flip? Flop!

This year's update of Samsung's Flip phone is one of the sleekest foldable models we've come across. It's slim, at just over 6mm thick (unfolded), and looks great in any of its pink, graphite (pictured), clay and mint colour options. The outer screen now supports more apps and basic actions, while opening up the inner screen reveals a brighter 6.9in **AMOLED** panel than last year's model, reaching a dazzling peak of 2150cd/m² with **HDR** content. Although reflections can be a problem, its colour accuracy is fantastic.

“No new features and costs £100 more than its predecessor”

The design is brilliant for photography or filming. Open the screen halfway and you can prop the phone up on any flat surface to take your shot, or hold it sideways and use it one-handed like a small old-fashioned camcorder. You can preview the frame in the outer

FlexWindow screen, while a new Horizontal Lock feature removes any jitters while you're recording video to achieve smooth, professional-looking clips.

The 50-megapixel main camera takes excellent photos – clear, with plenty of detail and a natural colour balance – and you can get better shots in near-darkness than you could with the Z Flip7, including of the night sky.

The biggest change is the switch from Samsung's Exynos processors to Qualcomm's flagship Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5. In our tests, this was noticeably faster than the Z Flip7, particularly with 3D graphics.



The Z Flip8 also improves on battery life, albeit by just 30 minutes, reaching 12 hours 52 minutes when browsing the web. It's a shame that charging has barely moved on since last year. It remains capped at 25W for wired charging, and we reached 59 per cent after 30 minutes compared with 55 per cent from the Z Flip7.

There are some software updates, including new AI features plus enhancements to the 'Now brief' and 'Now nudge' tools, which summarise key news and information or give you shortcuts to relevant apps based on what you're doing on screen. However, there's nothing you could call a breakthrough feature, and any significant leap forward is hard to see.

This raises questions when the Z Flip8 costs £100 more than the Z Flip7 did at launch, which itself had a launch price tag £50 higher than its predecessor. This is a solid upgrade, but when the prices keep rising, couldn't we expect a bit more?

SPECIFICATIONS

Octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 processor • 12GB RAM • 4in 948x1048-pixel resolution AMOLED cover screen • 6.9in 1080x2520-pixel resolution AMOLED folding screen • 256GB/512GB storage • 50-megapixel rear main camera • 12-megapixel rear ultrawide camera • 10-megapixel front camera • IP48 water resistance • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 6.0 • Android 16 • 167x75x6mm (HxWxD, unfolded) • 180g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/60128

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 Some useful updates to the processor, camera and screen can't make up for a lack of exciting new features



ALTERNATIVE

Motorola Razr 70

£800 It lags behind on camera quality, AI features and refinements, but it's a slick and speedy flip phone for less money



TABLET | £599 from RedMagic www.snipca.com/60129

RedMagic Astra 2

Stream engine

Having made a name for itself with high-performance gaming phones, Chinese brand RedMagic is now attempting to do the same for tablets. Its main focus is on speed by combining Qualcomm's top-of-the-range Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 processor, a liquid-cooling system – the first of its kind in a tablet – and a 185Hz maximum refresh rate on its 9in OLED screen.

“Blistering speed leaves the competition in its wake”

The design is fairly understated when compared with RedMagic's gaudy gaming phones. It's a neat, trim mini-tablet with a solid aluminium body in black or white, just 6.9g thick and weighing 363g. It feels substantial, yet is perfectly manageable when held in your hands. The only real gaming flourish is a strip of glass on the rear, which gives a glimpse of the tablet's innards, along with an RGB-lit screen that mimics the new cooling system.

Meanwhile, RedMagic has included a second USB-C port on the longer edge, giving you more options when the first is being used for charging.

The 9in screen is small by typical tablet standards, but feels big enough for playing games or watching movies, while keeping the device incredibly portable. The 2400x1504-pixel resolution ensures that everything looks pin-sharp. In our tests the brightness level reached 1,100cd/m² with normal SDR content and a dazzling 1,800cd/m² with HDR. The picture also benefits from vibrant colours and perfect blacks, plus a 16:10 aspect ratio that's great for both browsing and streaming.

It's a shame RedMagic has tinkered with Google's Android OS. As a result the interface is bogged down with superfluous widgets, bloatware and even the odd bit of untranslated Chinese text. The only real positive is the Game Space

UI: a dedicated area for games, featuring tools for optimising performance and boosting resolution.

The 13-megapixel rear camera and 9-megapixel front camera don't amount to much, with only the former capable of capturing passable photos.

The Astra 2's biggest selling point is its blistering performance levels. The Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 chip is the fastest on the market, and with 12GB or 16GB of RAM (£679), this tablet leaves the competition floundering in its wake.

The cooling system keeps the chip from throttling performance under stress, ensuring that the Astra 2 stays faster for longer than premium tablets like the Samsung Galaxy Tab S11 Ultra. The difference was clear in our benchmark tests. And when playing some of the most demanding current titles, it ran smoothly at Ultra quality with a 60fps maximum frame rate, or at High quality with 120fps.

The 8300mAh battery got us through a full working day of constant use, though

SPECIFICATIONS

Octa-core Snapdragon 8 Elite Gen 5 processor • 12GB/16GB RAM • 256GB/512GB storage • 9.06in 2400x1504-pixel 185Hz OLED screen • 13-megapixel rear camera • 9-megapixel front camera • Wi-Fi 7 • Bluetooth 6 • RedMagicOS 11.5 based on Android 16 • 134x207x6.9mm (HxWxD) • 363g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/60129



that dropped to a few hours of intensive gaming action. Luckily, with 75W wired charging, you can get back up to 65 per cent charged in 30 minutes or a full charge in less than an hour, though no charger is supplied in the box.

This isn't the ideal tablet for everyone, and if you're mostly interested in browsing, social media, video streaming and some light office work, our current favourite tablet – the Honor MagicPad 4 (see page 30) – gives you a bigger screen and superior software. But if you value superb performance levels, portability and an eye-catching OLED screen, the Astra 2 is a real contender, beating big-brand models that cost nearly twice as much.

VERDICT The fastest Android tablet we've tested, with unmatched performance levels, decent build quality and a stunning OLED screen

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Honor MagicPad 4
£599 It lacks the Astra 2's speeds, but it offers more versatility and has a larger 12.3in OLED screen



SECURITY CAMERA | £260 from Amazon www.snipca.com/60180

Reolink OMVI 3i Wi-Fi

Double checks

Many Wi-Fi security cameras struggle to deliver both sharp, close-up footage of potential intruders and a wide-angle view. Chinese manufacturer Reolink's new OMVI 3i Wi-Fi model gets around this by combining a dual-lens, wide-angle camera with a secondary 4K pan, tilt and zoom (PTZ) camera for those zoomed-in shots.

“It captured subjects no matter how hard they tried to sneak out of range”

The OMVI is IP66 weatherproof for permanent outdoor installation. It's pretty hefty and conspicuous, too, thanks to the dual-camera setup and motorised pan and tilt. That said, it's one of the easiest wired security cameras to install that we've ever tested, provided you have a power socket within five metres of your intended location and can drill a hole in the wall. The actual setup and connection to your home Wi-Fi network is even easier, happening almost instantly once you scan the QR code in the Reolink app.

The clever bit is how the two cameras work together. The upper panoramic camera provides a constant big-picture view while the lower PTZ camera locks on to and follows any person, vehicle or animal in the frame – and keeps them centre stage. The footage is exceptionally sharp and well-defined, capturing all the features on a face when you zoom in, and if the built-in spotlights are too small for night vision at long distances,

SPECIFICATIONS

10-megapixel dual-lens panoramic camera, 5120x1920-pixel resolution • 8-megapixel pan-tilt camera, 3840x2160-pixel resolution • 180-degree horizontal, 65-degree vertical field of view • Motion detection • Spotlight-assisted colour and infrared night vision • Two-way audio • Compatible with Google Assistant • Dual-band Wi-Fi 6 • 12V DC power (adapter included) • 202x151x125mm (HxWxD) • Two-year warranty www.snipca.com/60180



the infrared vision covers you for up to 30 metres.

In our tests, we were impressed with the tracking, which captured our subjects no matter how hard they tried to sneak in and out of range, even identifying them when they crept behind trees.

Meanwhile, the AI-enhanced detection recognised people, vehicles, packages and animals, sending a series of intrusion and loitering alerts. Wi-Fi 6 connectivity makes the camera incredibly responsive, while the built-in microphone captures clear audio, even when the subject isn't nearby.

Footage is recorded to a microSD card or the optional Reolink Home Hub (£110 from www.snipca.com/60181), so there's no need to splash out on Reolink's online-storage subscriptions, starting at £3.59 a month. In fact, the only disappointment is that while the Reolink app is pretty comprehensive, it's also confusing to navigate. If you can handle that, this is one of the most accomplished security cameras we've tested to date.

VERDICT Superb video quality, expansive coverage and impressive subject tracking make this one of the best Wi-Fi security cameras we've tested

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE Arlo Pro 6

£130 It has no clever dual camera setup, but offers clear 2K footage, intelligent tracking and convenient battery power



BEST REFURBISHED PRODUCTS

iPad Air



What should you look out for?

Apple's iPad Air gives you more performance than the basic model without the premium pricing of the iPad Pro. The 2022 and 2024 versions have powerful M1 and M2 processors and fantastic high-resolution screens. Apple typically supports updates for six to eight years, so they'll remain useful for a good while yet.

What are the drawbacks?

Unless the batteries have been replaced you might find you're getting less than the 10 hours you would have expected at launch. Look for screen cracks and scratches too. We'd recommend avoiding older models, as they may be coming to the end of Apple's generous support periods and have more limited processing power and RAM.

What are the best options?

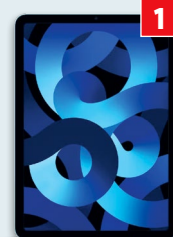
Newer M3 models tend to retain their value fairly well, but there are savings to be made on the M1 and M2 devices. We've seen the 2022 iPad Air 11in for around £311 on Back Market (www.snipca.com/60206, pictured 1) with the 2024 version priced £450

(www.snipca.com/60184).

Amazon Resale sometimes stocks the 2022 model too, with prices currently creeping under £310 (www.snipca.com/60185).

There are also good deals on the 13in model. We spotted this 2024 model for £559 at MusicMaggie (www.snipca.com/60186,

pictured 2), while Back Market offers roughly the same price (www.snipca.com/60187).



LAPTOP | £1,560 from Dell www.snipca.com/60210

Alienware 15

Foul play

The new Alienware 15 is as close as Dell's gaming brand gets to a budget laptop, with prices starting at £949. However, that only buys you a model with an RTX 3050 GPU – 2022 technology in a 2026 laptop – and just 8GB of RAM. We'd steer you up the range to our review model, which has 16GB RAM and an RTX 5060 graphics card and is a better option for the latest games.

It's slim by gaming laptop standards – 23mm thick when closed – and relatively light at 2.2kg. The design sticks to Alienware's established style, with every hinge and panel gently curved, and it's only the plastic construction that shows any compromise on cost.

There's plenty of connectivity options, though, including a fast USB-C 3.2 Gen 2 port, an HDMI output and a Gigabit Ethernet socket, though the choice of Wi-Fi 6 and Bluetooth 5.2 for your wireless networking and peripherals isn't

exactly bang up to date.

We're not hugely taken with the keyboard, which is quiet but rather spongy, while the trackpad has a strange, semi-abrasive finish that's not particularly pleasant to slide your fingers across. Plus, while the screen has its good points, including a squarer 16:10 aspect ratio and a 1920x1200-pixel resolution, it doesn't deliver the kind of vibrant colour and contrast we'd expect from a high-quality IPS display. Still, the 165Hz refresh rate is perfect for gaming, provided the hardware is up to the task.

And it should be, with the RTX 5060 graphics card and 16GB of RAM. You won't have any problems hitting 60fps frame rates in the latest titles at High to Ultra settings with ray tracing turned off, and there's scope to go much higher using Nvidia DLSS 4 upscaling and frame-generation technology – or by turning those ray tracing features back on. In our tests, we saw great results in the game Cyberpunk 2077. The Alienware 15 also performed well in our office productivity and 3D-rendering tests, so its uses go beyond gaming.

Performance is good, then, but for this money we'd expect more up-to-date connectivity, a better keyboard and a



superior screen. Worse still, the 512GB SSD gives you just 332GB to work with once Windows 11 and Dell's apps are accounted for. The Alienware 15 has the bones of a good gaming laptop, but in its current state it's not particularly great value.

VERDICT Superb gaming performance, but the disappointing screen and dated wireless connectivity should be much better at this price



ALTERNATIVE

HP Omen Slim 16
£1,599 Offers a similar specification with more RAM and storage, as well as a bigger, brighter screen



SPECIFICATIONS

Eight-core AMD Ryzen 7 260 processor • 16GB RAM • Nvidia RTX 5060 graphics • 15.3in 1920x1200-pixel 165Hz IPS screen • 512GB SSD • 2x USB 3.2 Gen 1 ports • 1x USB-C 3.2 Gen 1 port • 1x USB-C 3.2 Gen 2 port • 1x HDMI port • 1x 3.5mm audio jack • 1x Gigabit Ethernet port • Wi-Fi 6 • Bluetooth 5.2 • Windows 11 Home • 23x349x250mm (HxWxD) • 2.25Kg • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/60210

WHAT SHOULD I BUY?

We solve your buying dilemmas

How can I move files quicker between my two computers?

Q I spend a lot of time editing photos and 4K videos, both on my Acer laptop and my desktop PC. I've always used a USB stick to copy files over from one to the other – they're a bit big to do this over Wi-Fi. However, it's a slow process and requires an adapter for my laptop. Also, I keep running out of space. Can you recommend a better option?

Graham Collins



A We can. You could use a portable SSD, like the SanDisk Extreme Portable SSD (pictured left). It comes with a USB-C cable and a USB-A adapter, so it should work across both systems. It costs around £150 for the 500GB version (www.snipca.com/60212), which should be big enough for your needs. Better still, you could try the Addlink P50 (www.snipca.com/60217, pictured

right). This little unit might look like a USB stick, but it's actually a super-fast SSD, with 500GB and 1TB versions selling for £99 and £156. It will copy your image files and video files in no time, and has USB-C and USB-A connections to cover both your laptop and your PC.



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

R7 RTX 5070

LUMIA VANGUARD

This Year's Gaming PC. Last Year's Prices

CPU: AMD Ryzen 7 9700X 8 Core

GPU: NVIDIA RTX 5070 12GB

RAM: 32GB DDR5 6000MTs

SSD: 2TB M.2 NVMe SSD

CASE: Antec CX700 ARGB WHITE

The R7 RTX 5070 Lumia Vanguard strikes the perfect balance between price and performance, delivering exceptional gaming power, premium build quality and outstanding long-term value.

£1,650.00* inc VAT

computer monitor and peripherals for illustrative purposes only



"A great-value gaming PC today with the potential to become even more powerful in the future."

TIM DANTON, PC PRO JUNE 2026



HAVEN EMBER PRO SERIES

CPU: AMD Ryzen 5 9600X 6 Core / Ryzen 7 9700X 8 Core

GPU: AMD RX 9060 XT 16GB / NVIDIA RTX 5070 12GB

RAM: 32GB DDR5 6000MTs

SSD: 2TB M.2 NVMe SSD

CASE: Jonsbo V12 Micro-ATX

From **£1,499.00*** inc VAT



W2F AMD R8845 16GB 1TB Mini PC

CPU: AMD 8845HS onboard

GPU: Integrated Radeon 780M

RAM: 16GB DDR5 5600MTs

SSD: 1TB M.2 NVMe SSD

£899.00* inc VAT

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Reviews

EARBUDS | £80 at Amazon www.snipca.com/60115

Baseus Bowie MC2

Open champion

The audio quality and battery life of these clip-on earbuds match some of the best open-ear buds currently available, including the £129 Shokz OpenDots Air (reviewed in Issue 740).

The buds weigh just 5.1g each, with the speaker fitting inside your ear and the module with the battery and wireless connectivity clipping on to the outside. Each speaker unit has an ear cushion which stops it rubbing, and together with the pliable arch connecting the two parts it makes this set incredibly comfortable to wear. It's just a shame the cushion tends to pick up dirt, while the touch



controls are hard to press accurately while on the go.

Both earbuds use the pebble-style case (pictured left) for charging, and each can last for up to 11 hours 30 minutes from one charge, while the case offers roughly 55 to 60 hours. That's way ahead of most budget rivals. The companion app includes an **equaliser** with eight presets and a custom mode, plus a low-latency mode for games and video streaming.

The app also has a bass boost, helping the Bowie MC2 produce some of the best bass we've heard from a set of open-ear buds. In our tests we could hear what was going on around us, but the music output still burst with energy and detail. No open-ear buds deliver hi-fi audio quality, but when these sound this good and last this long, why pay more?

SPECIFICATIONS

55-hour battery life with case • Bluetooth 6.0 • IP67 water resistance • 4x mics with noise cancellation • AAC and SBC support • 5.1g per bud • 52g charging case • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/60115



VERDICT Up there with the most comfortable and best-sounding open-ear buds we've tested, while undercutting most on price

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

Nothing Ear (a) £50
If you'd rather block outside noise, these earbuds give you superb sound and **ANC** at a bargain price



SPEAKER | £160 from Harman Kardon www.snipca.com/60117

Harman Kardon Luna 2

Sound design

Harman Kardon's latest Bluetooth speaker is almost as much about the design as it is the sound. The pill-shaped, pencil-case-sized Luna 2 is one of the most elegant speakers we've seen, with shiny accents around the anodised aluminium grille and a grippy sloped, rubber enclosure.

It's **IP67** dust- and water-resistant, and looks impressive in any of its black, sand (pictured) or ice-mint finishes. A glowing light ring around the base moves in accordance with the music, and also visualises volume adjustments.

SPECIFICATIONS

40W speaker • 1x 62x82mm woofer • 1x 20mm tweeter • Passive radiator • 12-hour battery life • Bluetooth 5.4 • USB-C • IP67 dust and water resistance • 84x216x81mm (HxWxD) • 740g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/60117

It's a nice touch that avoids being a garish distraction.

The Luna 2 has some great features. You can synchronise playback with other speakers that support **Auracast**, meaning two Luna 2 speakers will pair automatically in a stereo setup when in close proximity.

The app lets you change the speed, colour theme and brightness of the light ring and tune the sound. In our tests, the claimed 12-hour battery life held up in real-world use, though JBL's Charge 6 speaker can go double that.

Crucially, audio quality maintains these high standards. Vocals are faithfully reproduced and project well. Instruments have weight and feel dynamic, and feel clearly separated in the mix.

The treble frequencies are bright and

edgy, and while the Charge 6 has a bigger and fuller bass sound, the Luna 2 never sounds flat.

In short, the Luna 2 looks superb and sounds great, especially in the evening with the lights turned low.

VERDICT This is one of the most stylish speakers around and sounds great, even if battery life is average

★★★★★

ALTERNATIVE

JBL Charge 6 £129 Powerful portable audio with lots of energy, strong features and a robust design



TIME-LAPSE CAMERA | £123 from Amazon www.snipca.com/60219

Atli Eon

One day at a time



This tiny, app-controlled camera is designed to do one thing: make time-lapse photography easy. Unlike more expensive rivals it's not designed to be screwed into walls and left for months on end. For a start, it isn't weatherproof and Chinese firm Atli doesn't include a waterproof case. Yet with a manual-focus lens, a tripod mount and comprehensive handling through the app, it gives you a surprising amount of control while staying affordable.

“It offers bright, clear video with vibrant colours and plenty of detail”

In size and shape it resembles an **action camera** with a big round lens stuck on the front. There's no screen and the only physical switch or button is the power button on the top. However, you can twist the lens for manual focusing, letting you get a sharp image of your subject as long as it's at least 7cm away. It turns with a smooth, well-regulated action, and allows the Eon to cover anything from the growth of a houseplant to the view outside your window.

The 7cm minimum range even opens up some interesting potential for time-lapse **macro** shots. A tripod screw thread on the base makes it easier to set it up in a secure position, while the battery lasts for up to five days in power-saving mode, with the option to extend that through a **USB-C** power bank or charger.

The app's interface is simple and well-designed, with time-lapse, stills and straight video-capture modes. It's not ideal for photos, because you need to

juggle the camera and your phone to take them, and the images are just about acceptable rather than brilliant.

However, there are plenty of options for customising time-lapse video, including profiles for different conditions such as 'sun' and 'cloudy'; full manual controls for shutter speed, **aperture** and **white balance**; and settings to capture your time-lapse as a series of photos or as a **Full HD** video clip.

Whatever settings you choose, there's a limit to what you can expect from a small 1/3in sensor, especially when it comes to dynamic range. In sunny conditions you'll get blown-out skies and highlights, while harsh, directional sunlight can cause unsightly lens flare. Sadly, there's no way to attach a hood.

In the right conditions, though, you'll get bright, clear video with vibrant colours and plenty of detail. You could probably get better photos and video from the average smartphone, but would you want to leave it in one spot for five days at a time, and would the battery keep it going for that long? Plus, once you've got a handle on the basics, you can use the manual controls to improve your footage. As long as you don't expect perfection, the Eon makes time-lapse photography simple, accessible and fun.

VERDICT Don't expect stunning movie-like visuals, but this time-lapse camera is easy to use and delivers impressive results



ALTERNATIVE DJI Osmo Action 6
£369 More expensive, but can handle time-lapse, sports and action video, as well as **vlogging** and more



SPECIFICATIONS

1/3in OmniVision CMOS sensor • 1920x1080-pixel video resolution • 2688x1520-pixel stills resolution • f/2.8 fixed lens, 7cm to infinity range • MicroSD card slot • USB-C connector • 54x70x50mm (HxWxD) • 125g • One-year warranty www.snipca.com/60219

DO I REALLY NEED...

A laptop with 72GB of RAM?

What is it?

The Element 16 (E26) is a laptop made by German firm Schenker that can host a staggering 72GB of RAM.



What does it do?

This mighty 16in machine comes with 8GB of RAM fitted, plus the option to add an extra 64GB into the single **SODIMM** slot. You can choose between eight-core Core Ultra 5 and 16-core Core Ultra 7 Panther Lake processors. It also comes with a 2560x1600-pixel **IPS** screen.

What's the catch?

The 72GB configuration isn't actually available at the time of writing, and with a 40GB version already costing €1,478 (£1,278) from www.snipca.com/60221, it won't be cheap.

So can I do without it?

It might come in handy for running your own version of ChatGPT, though the rest of the system isn't really powerful enough, and you typically only need 16GB for most software.

NEXT ISSUE

On Sale **Weds 23 Sept**



Lenovo Yoga Mini PC
Why be square when you can go in circles?

Google Pixel 11
Great camera, but is that it?



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

LAPTOP

PRICE
DROP

MSI Prestige A16 AI+ (2026)
£1,063 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 Erazor Bandit P20 Powerful PC for gaming and editing videos, with 16GB RAM, 8GB Nvidia graphics card and 1TB SSD. £999 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

PRICE
DROP

Honor MagicPad4
£560 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. £560 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. £322 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[★]

UPGRADE YOUR LIFE

Q New tech |



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

Our expert reviews will guide you through.



Buy It

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

MINI PC

NEW ENTRY

BeelinkEQi Wildcat Lake
£399 from www.snipca.com/60079
Tested Issue 744



An absolute bargain, this works well with most software, particularly office tools and image editing. Has all the ports you'll need, including two Thunderbolt 4 and both 2.5 and 10 Gigabit Ethernet.

ALTERNATIVE GMKtec NucBox K17

A highly capable machine with 16GB RAM, a 1TB SSD and plenty of ports. Great value for money. **£520** from www.snipca.com/59685

EBOOK READER

Amazon Kindle Paperwhite
£160 from www.snipca.com/60039
Tested Issue 698

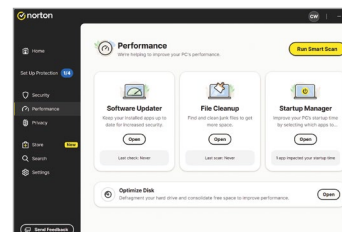


The sixth version of the Paperwhite has a larger screen (7in), faster page turns and longer battery life (12 weeks – up from 10). Its glare-free finish means you can easily read it in bright sunlight, and its 300ppi resolution makes text a joy to read.

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

Philips 27E1N1600AE
£170 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

Corsair MP600 Pro LPX 1TB
£280 from www.snipca.com/60182
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. **£150** from www.snipca.com/60046

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

COMPETITION

Win 1 of 2 ACEMAGIC AM18 mini PCs

ACEMAGIC



Powered by AMD's Ryzen 5 six-core 7640HS processor, ACEMAGIC's AM18 mini PC delivers powerful performance for work, creative tasks and entertainment.

It has AMD Radeon 760M RDNA 3 graphics, guaranteeing smooth graphics for gaming, content creation and multimedia software. Combined with high-frequency DDR5 memory, it provides fantastic response times and enhanced visual experiences.

The 16GB RAM can be upgraded

to 96GB, while dual M.2 2280 NVMe SSD slots support up to 4TB storage. Advanced connectivity includes dual 2.5Gbps LAN, USB 4.0, HDMI 2.1, DisplayPort 2.0, and OCuLink to expand the GPU. Six modes control the dazzling lighting effects, while Wi-Fi 6 delivers top speeds of 2.4Gbps. It runs Windows 11 and supports Bluetooth 5.2.

To enter this competition, answer the question at www.snipca.com/60095 and submit your details by midnight Tuesday 22 September. Good luck!

ACEMAGIC is currently selling the AM18 at a sale price of £399, down from £799. *Computeractive* readers can get a further discount of £10 by entering the code **ACEAM18MZ** when buying on ACEMAGIC's site: www.snipca.com/60094.

PRINTER

HP OfficeJet Pro 9135e

£190 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

Amazon Ember 4-Series 55in

£340 from www.snipca.com/59846

Tested Issue 742



A superb bargain, assuming Amazon keeps the price around £350. Screen produces a striking image and three HDMI ports let you add soundbars, Blu-ray players and gaming consoles. Has Freely and loads of streaming 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

£160 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. £134 from www.snipca.com/60052

Computer
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Workshops & Tips

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

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PLUS

44 Phone & Tablet Tips
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HOW TO... Set up Ikea's smart-home kit to monitor your home

by Nik Rawlinson

What you need: Ikea 'Smart home' app; Dirigera/Matter hub; thermometer; water sensor
Time required: Two hours



Ikea might not be the first name that comes to mind when you think of smart homes, but it's far from a newcomer. In 2016, it launched smart lighting kit, which used its own Tradfri smart technology, then later branched out into speakers and wired-up furniture. But its latest kit uses the universal smart-home standard Matter, letting you mix and match it with products from different manufacturers.

This means that if you buy a hub from one manufacturer – like Ikea – you can pair it with Ikea lights just as easily as you could with other Matter-compatible lightbulbs, doorbells, heating controls, security cameras, and so on.

For the time being, the hub also works with existing Tradfri kit, though Ikea warns that “as new features,

standards, and safety improvements are added, in time older products may no longer be supported by the Dirigera hub” (www.snipca.com/60072).

Ikea announced its Matter-based products in November last year. Now it's well established, we've got our hands on three members of the family: the Dirigera hub (£70 from www.snipca.com/60073, pictured 1) – which lets you work with Ikea and other Matter devices;

the Timmerflotte thermometer and humidity sensor (£5 from www.snipca.com/60074 2), and the Klippbok water leak sensor (£7 from www.snipca.com/60075 3). While Dirigera is mains-powered via USB-C (with a plug and cable included), the other two devices each require a pair of AAA batteries that you'll have to supply yourself.

You may not need a Dirigera hub if you already have a compatible Amazon Echo or Eero device, because some can act as Matter hubs. Visit www.snipca.com/59923, scroll to 'Compatible Amazon Echo and eero devices' and tap 'Matter-enabled device list' to check whether yours is supported.



We bought Ikea's Dirigera hub, Timmerflotte thermometer and Klippbok water leak sensor

1

Set up your hub

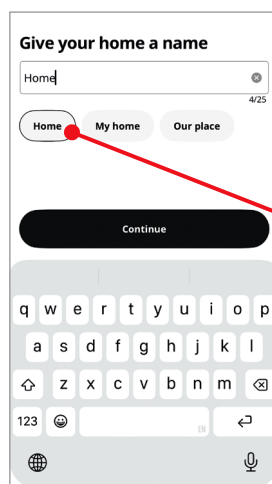
Connect the Dirigera hub to both power and an Ethernet network connection – not Wi-Fi. The light circle on the top of the device will slowly fill up as it boots and, when complete, will pulse. If you see a flashing dot rather than a pulsing ring, it means your hub can't connect to the internet. Check the Ethernet connection and,

if necessary, reboot it with a different Ethernet cable connected

Now install the free Ikea 'Home smart' app for iOS (www.snipca.com/59933) or Android (www.snipca.com/59934), and tap 'Add a hub now' on the first two screens. Now tap 'Get started', tap through the three screens of instructions, then tap 'My hub is ready'. Allow the app to use Bluetooth to search for devices on

your local network. This will significantly simplify the process of setting up smart-home products later on.

The app will immediately check whether the hub's firmware is up to date. If it finds a newer version available, it will download it and apply it to the hub. It did this in our case, so unless your device left the factory with a later version installed, expect the same. The download only took



You need to give your home a name to help identify it

How I use smart-home devices

My home is entirely kitted out with smart lighting, plugs and heating controls. Now that Ikea is rolling out a range of very cheap smart-home products, I can easily see my collection growing over the next few months – especially as the outhouse I mention in this feature is a new addition that's going to need kitting out.

Nik Rawlinson



How do you use smart-home devices?
Please let us know: letters@computeractive.co.uk

about a minute on our device, and the installation took roughly four minutes. It then rebooted, so the whole process was completed in under 10 minutes.

When it's rebooted, you'll see an instruction to press the 'Action' button on the back of the hub. You then need to name your network of smart products. One of the suggested names is Home, which we're going to use (see screenshot above). To do the same, tap Home, or type something else you prefer.

Next, tap 'Continue', then add some rooms to your home, which you'll use later to tell it where your smart products are located. The app makes several suggestions, like 'living room', bedroom and kitchen. Tap the boxes beside as many as you need followed by Done. If you have any rooms that don't appear, tap '+ New room' at the bottom of the list, give the room a name and an icon, then tap Continue.

By setting up a series of rooms, you can identify different instances of the same kind of smart-home device. So, if you had a thermometer in both the bedroom and the living room, or a water-leak sensor in both the kitchen and the bathroom, you'd be able to tell them apart. You're now ready to add your first device.

2

Set up the thermometer

Insert a flathead screwdriver into the notch on the back of the Timmerflotte thermometer and humidity sensor, then gently prise off the back plate (as pictured above right). Insert two AAA batteries. While there, note that there's a switch for Celsius and Fahrenheit. It will be set to Celsius ('C') upon arrival, so if you prefer Fahrenheit, flip it across. Once done, reattach the back plate.



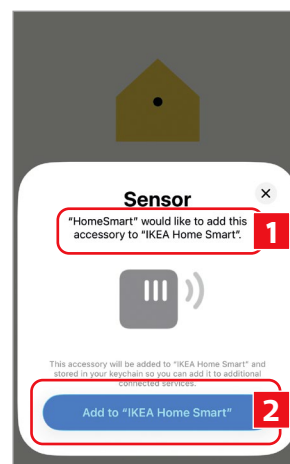
Use a flathead screwdriver to prise the back off the thermometer

The whole device is one big button. So, when you want a reading, press the front and it will first show the temperature, then the humidity. You can carry on using it like this for as long as you want, but if you want it to be 'smart', you need to set it up in the Ikea 'Home Smart' app.

Keep your phone and the device close and launch the app. It should spot your thermometer over Bluetooth and offer to add it to your network. Tap 'Add to home', followed by 'Scan the Matter QR Code' then flip over the thermometer and use the app to scan the Matter QR code on the back plate.

If you're having trouble scanning it, tap 'Enter the code instead' and type the 11-digit code that appears beside it. When the app has connected to the thermometer it will display a bouncing ball in a yellow house with the message 'Looking good so far'. This may stay on screen for as long as a minute, but be patient: it's working in the background.

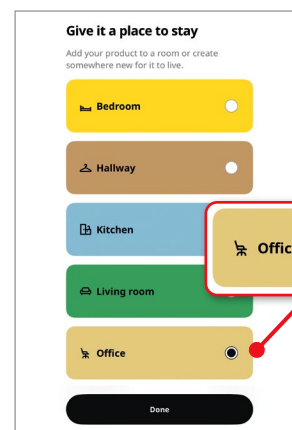
Eventually, it will pop up an alert to say that 'HomeSmart would like to add this accessory to IKEA Home Smart' (1 in our screenshot above right). Tap the 'Add to "IKEA Home Smart"' button (2) and it will spend another minute or so adding the sensor to your home network. When it's



You need to add your device to Ikea's 'Home smart' app

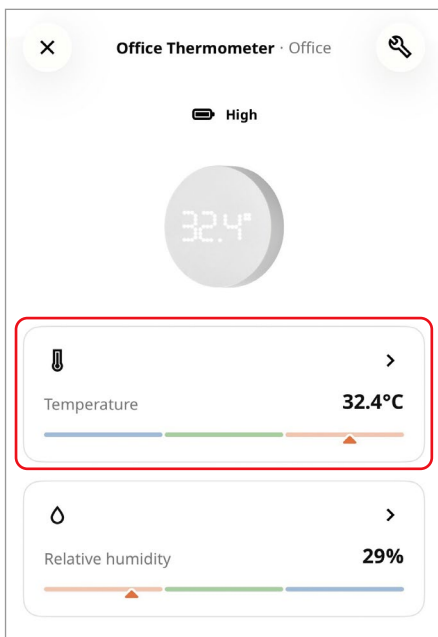
done this, it will ask you to give the device a name.

Tap 'Continue' and it will notify you that the sensor has been added to IKEA HomeSmart. Tap Done, then Continue, then tap in the box beside the room in which you'll be using it (see screenshot below). This is where defining rooms comes in handy: you could set up multiple sensors, including one in a greenhouse or shed if you're taking care of frost-sensitive plants, and view them all in Ikea's app, clearly delineated by location. Tap Done to complete the process.



Each device needs to be assigned to a room in your home

Set up Ikea's smart-home kit to monitor your home



Tap the temperature for more details

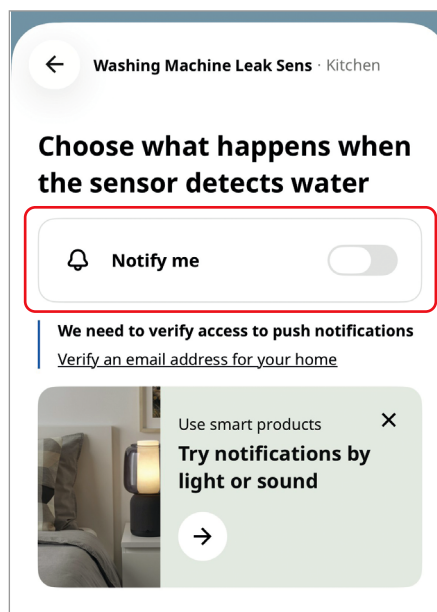
You can see the temperature in the Ikea app where it will be displayed in the block representing the room in which you've positioned it. Tap this room, then tap the sensor for more details. Tap the temperature block, which shows 32.4°C in the screenshot above, to display a graph of temperature changes over time. As we've just set up the sensor ourselves there's no point showing you our graph: it's empty.

3 Set up the water-leak sensor

Now that you've worked through the process once, you should feel comfortable adding other devices to your network. The Klippbok water-leakage sensor also requires a pair of AAA batteries, which you can insert by gently prising off the back plate. Again, Ikea's app should detect the sensor when it has power. This time, the QR code you need to scan (and the 11-digit numerical code you could use in its place if you prefer) are located on the side of the sensor.

Work through the same process as outlined above to add the sensor to your smart home. When you've finished, turn it upside down and you'll notice two metal contacts (pictured right) for detecting water leaks.

Just as the Timmerflotte thermometer will work as a standalone device if you don't add it to the app and display the temperature whenever you press its front, so the water-leak sensor will sound an alarm when it detects water, even if not



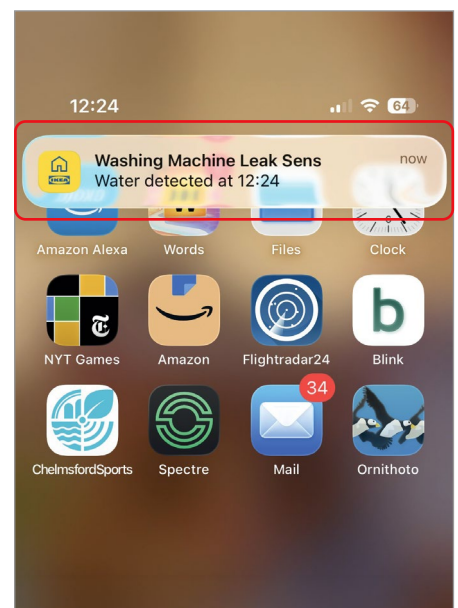
Turn on notifications so you're alerted to a leak even if you're not at home

connected to the app. However, it won't be able to warn you about the leak on your phone, which means you might be unaware of a problem for hours if you're away from home.

In the app, tap the name of the room to which you've assigned the leak sensor, then tap the sensor. Now tap 'When water is detected', followed by 'Verify an email address for your home'. Enter your email address and tap 'Verify email'. Go to your inbox, open the email from Ikea and click 'Tap to open the link'. Back in the Ikea app, turn on the slider beside 'Notify me' (see screenshot above) and if you see a pop-up asking you to permit notifications, tap Allow.



Two metal contacts on the underside of the sensor detect water



The water-leakage sensor has sent an alert to our phone

Now, to test the sensor, make a shallow puddle of water on a plate and place the device on top of it. Do not submerge it or make the puddle deep enough to reach the battery compartment door. The water will complete a circuit between the two sensing pins and the sensor itself will sound the alarm while a notification pops up on your phone (see screenshot above). Remove the sensor and dry the pins. Position it where it will live long term.

4 Move your hub to the right position

Earlier, we mentioned Matter, which you can think of as the language these devices use to communicate. They do this by connecting directly to the hub, rather than going via your home network, using one of two different networking technologies: Thread or Zigbee. It's therefore important to make sure that the hub is as close as possible to the centre of your collection of smart-home devices to ensure even coverage.

We set up and tested the devices in our office, which is at the front of our house, but we want to place the temperature sensor in an outhouse at the back of the garden. Because of the thick insulation in the house's walls, we therefore moved the Dirigera hub to the back of our lounge, facing the garden. This helped to extend its reach towards the outhouse. You might not need to take quite such drastic action, but it's worth trying several locations in your home if you're not initially seeing the kind of result you'd expect.

Stop using Google for photo backups

What you need: Free Mega account

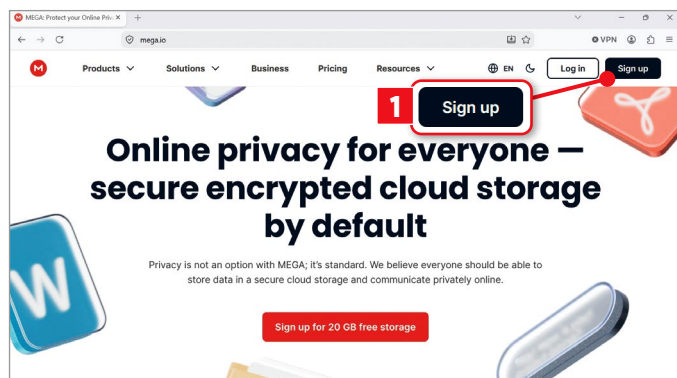
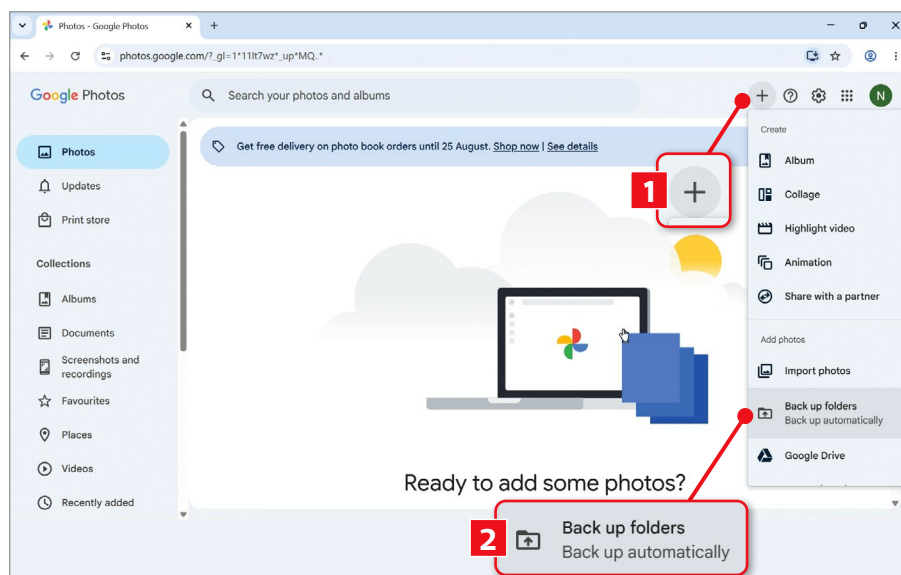
Time required: 30 minutes

On 10 August, Google Drive stopped synchronising your photos to the cloud. Any snaps already in your Drive storage will stay there, but Google Drive for Windows no longer backs up to Google Photos. This means any photos you save to your PC from that date are at risk of being lost unless you've made

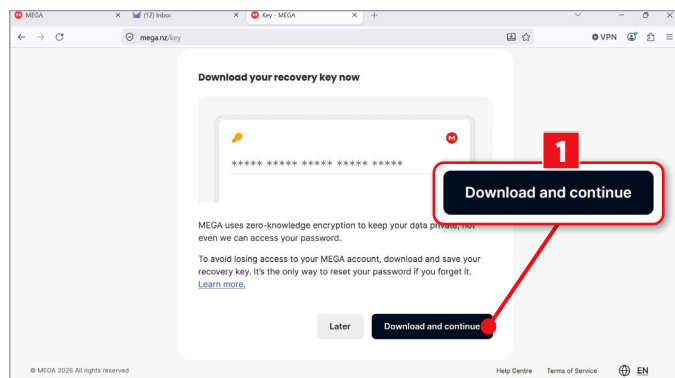
alternative arrangements for backing them up. Thankfully, there are a couple of workarounds you can use. Which one is right for you depends on whether you want to continue using Google, or you're happy to sync your photos to another service. Here, we explain your options and what you need to do.



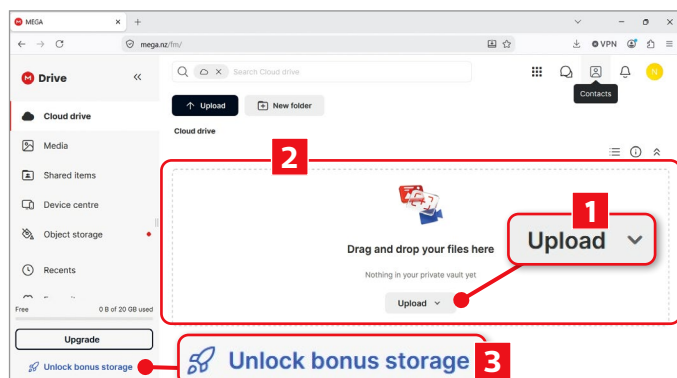
STEP 1 If you prefer to stay with Google, use the Google Photos progressive web app by visiting <https://photos.google.com> in Chrome or another Chromium browser (we tested it using Firefox, and the backup option wasn't available) and clicking Visit Google Photos. Log in with your Google credentials, then click '+'¹ followed by 'Back up folders'². Click your Pictures folder in the sidebar of the window that opens, followed by Select Folder. When a pop-up appears prompting you to 'Allow this site to view and copy files?', click Allow. Google Photos will then automatically back up your Pictures folder whenever this web page is open in Chrome.



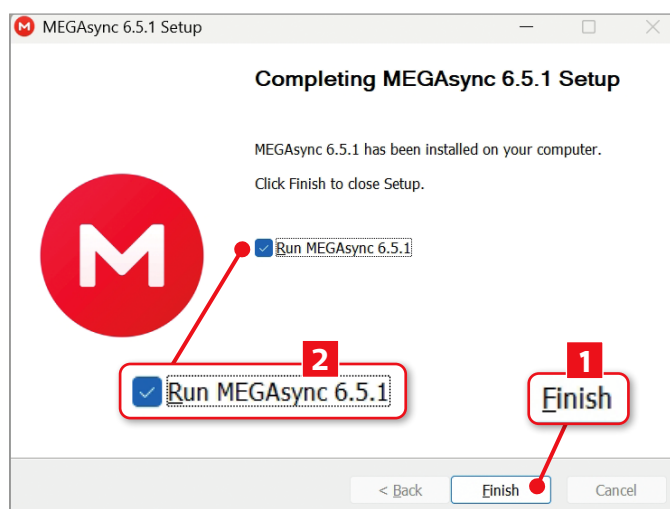
STEP 2 If you're happy to use a service other than Google, we recommend Mega, which is a New Zealand-based cloud-storage service that offers 20GB of free drive space. Visit www.mega.io and click 'Sign up'¹. Provide your first name, email address and a password, then click the 'Sign up' button. Mega will send you a confirmation email. Open it and click the 'Activate account' button. Log in using the password you provided.



STEP 3 Mega encrypts all of your data and even the company's staff can't recover your login details. You therefore need to download a **recovery key** that will let you log in should you ever forget your password. Click 'Download and continue'¹ and save the text file that downloads somewhere safe (not in your Mega cloud storage). As soon as it's downloaded, you'll be shown a list of pricing tiers. You can close this window if you're happy to stick with the free 20GB plan.

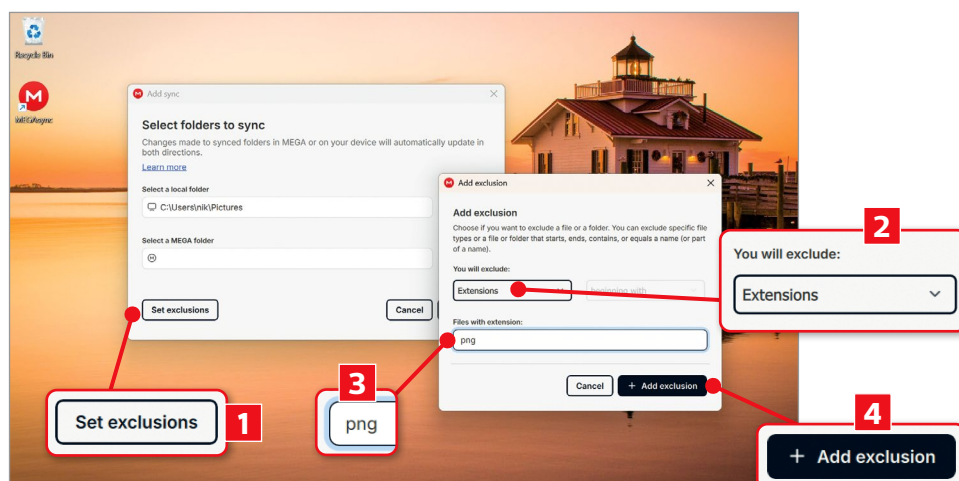
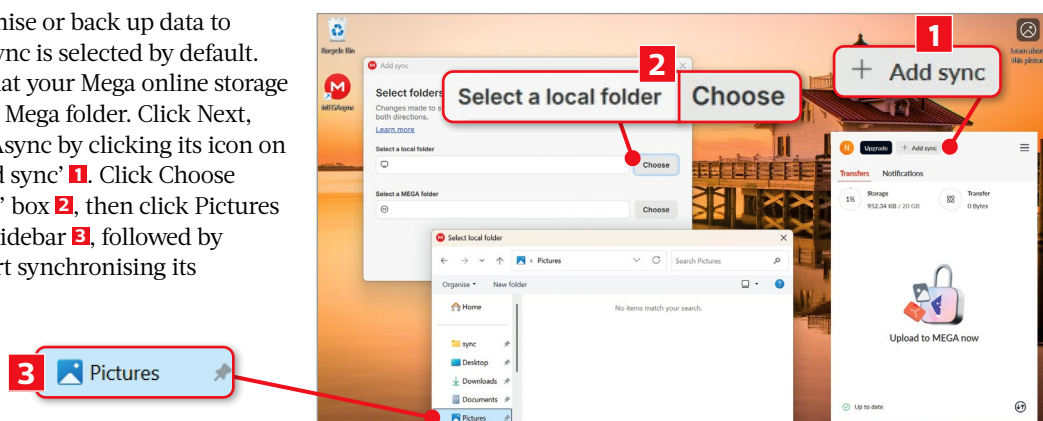


STEP 4 You can upload files to your Mega cloud storage by clicking Upload **1** or dragging and dropping them into the dotted frame on your Mega dashboard **2**. However, it's more convenient to use the Mega desktop app, which manages uploads in the background. Doing this within the first year after signing up will also add a further 5GB of free storage to your account. Click 'Unlock bonus storage' **3** followed by the green Install button below 'Install the MEGA Desktop App'.



STEP 5 Double-click the 'MEGAsyncSetup.exe' file in your Downloads folder. When prompted to allow it to make changes to your device, click Yes, then OK on the language screen. Click through the onscreen instructions and when it's completed click Finish **1**, ensuring the box beside 'Run MEGAsync 6.5.1' is ticked **2** to launch the program. Log into your Mega account using the same credentials you used in the browser, then give your device a name (it will suggest one, which you can use if you prefer). This helps you distinguish between uploads from different PCs if you install it on several.

STEP 6 You can now synchronise or back up data to your Mega account. Sync is selected by default. Leave this as it is so that your Mega online storage will always replicate your local Mega folder. Click Next, followed by Done. Open MEGAsync by clicking its icon on your desktop, then click '+ Add sync' **1**. Click Choose beside the 'Select a local folder' box **2**, then click Pictures in the Windows File Explorer sidebar **3**, followed by Select Folder. Click Sync to start synchronising its contents to the server.



STEP 7 Everything you add to your Pictures folder will now be sent to a Pictures folder on your Mega online storage, including photos and screenshots. The latter are saved in PNG format, so if you only want to store photos online, you can use this extension to filter them out. Click 'Set exclusions' **1**, then use the first dropdown menu to select Extensions **2**, type png **3** in the 'Files with extension' box, then click '+ Add exclusion' **4**. You should now only see photos in your synchronised folder.

Readers' Tips

TIP OF THE FORTNIGHT

Jump straight to sites with DuckDuckGo's bangs

I've been using DuckDuckGo ever since *Computeractive* introduced me to it, probably back in the 2010s some time. Issue 742's Cover Feature was a handy nudge to use more of its new tools, but don't forget about its famous 'bangs' which take you straight to a site. It's perfect when you don't want to type (or can't remember) a URL.

My favourites include **!metoffice**, which takes you to the official site for the Met Office, and **!bbci**, which

opens BBC iPlayer. Just type these into DuckDuckGo's address bar then press Enter.

I also love how it takes you straight to a type of product and a price range on Amazon. For example, typing **!a laptop £400** (1) in our screenshot) takes you to laptops on Amazon at around that price (2). You'll find all 13,000 bangs at www.snipca.com/60086.

Lisa White



Lisa wins a copy of our 2025 Back Issue Stick

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

SECURITY

Buy a fingerprint reader for passkeys

Following recent tips and features about **passkeys**, the only way I could use them to access my PC was typing a PIN – until I bought the Vbestlife fingerprint reader (www.snipca.com/60090, pictured below). As I wear spectacles, facial recognition doesn't work well enough, but fingerprints provide unique access and verification. The Vbestlife reader works on Windows 10 and 11, and allows up to 10 fingerprints to be added.

I have the advantage that my PC has a USB port within reach, rather than around the back of the monitor. But all is not lost for



those who need something else. Some fingerprint readers have cables to ensure the device is always within easy reach.

Rob Barnes

GENEALOGY

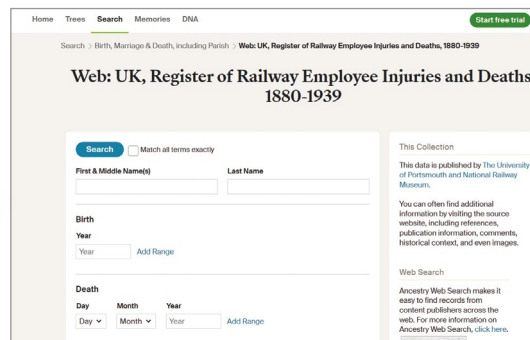
Download injury and death records

In addition to the railway employment records you mentioned in Issue 742's Grow Your Family Tree (page 16),

you can search Ancestry's collection 'UK, Register of Railway Employee Injuries and Deaths, 1880-1939' (www.snipca.com/59833, pictured below left).

If you're not an Ancestry member, you can download this data as a free spreadsheet from the Railway Work, Life & Death project – visit www.snipca.com/59834 and scroll to the bottom.

Derek Steadman



SOFTWARE

Monitor your PC's performance with FreeMeter

I downloaded Kudu 1.46 (www.snipca.com/59897)

as you recommended in Issue 742's Best Free Software (page 18). What a brilliant program! It combines features of other programs I use and others I've

Why I stopped using...

Fixed broadband

Openreach were going to run broadband cables from the pavement on top of the soil behind bushes in my garden up to the house where they would tack the cable to the brickwork around my front door.

And what I use instead...

On other nearby properties the cables are exposed, and most often

where Openreach drills through the wall, they spall off the surface then plaster silicone sealant over it. It's really shoddy, so I'd like to thank *Computeractive* readers for suggesting **mobile broadband** instead.

I bought a second-hand Zyxel NR5103e router (pictured) from eBay for around £80 (www.snipca.com/60083) and an

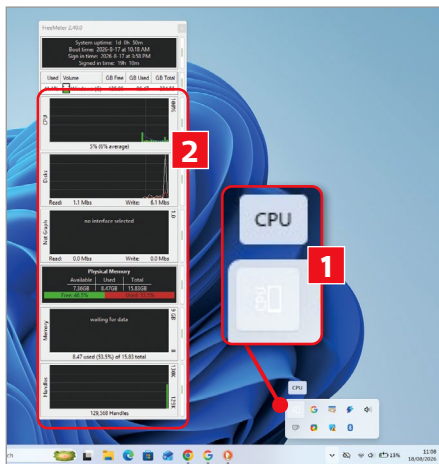


unlimited data **SIM** from Talkmobile for £16 a month. I now get between 150 and 350Mbps from a nearby mast using just **4G LTE**.

Previously, I was paying Plusnet £32 a month for just 35Mbps. So, I now get 10 times the speed for half the cost. I'm a very happy bunny.

Andrew Romaine

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



now uninstalled.

Kudu's Performance Monitor tool prompted me to recommend another free program that I've been using for years on all my systems, and which I don't recall seeing mentioned in *Computeractive*: FreeMeter (www.freemeter.us).

Once set up, its icon sits in your system tray and shows items such as CPU, disk and network usage. Clicking its icon (1 in our screenshot above) brings up a series of graphs (2). As an example, it will sometimes show a lot of network and CPU activity, and this alerts me to a windows update taking place.

There's a professional version for under \$10 (about £7.40), which unlocks some extras, but the free version does all I need. It's safe to use, so if Windows shows a warning during installation, click 'More info' then 'Run anyway'.

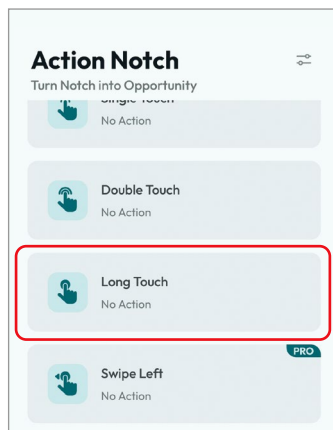
Bob Farish

APP

Take screenshots with your phone's camera hole

✓ In Issue 742's Reader Support (page 71) John Davies asked how he can take screenshots using his phone's menu button. May I suggest an excellent app I've been using on my Android phone for a while. It's called Action Notch (www.snipca.com/60085) and it turns your front camera hole into a shortcut button for flashlight, music and more.

I've found that using the Long Touch option (see screenshot right) works perfectly well on my current



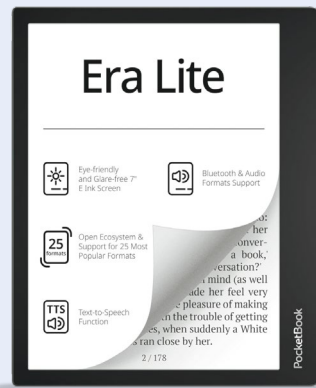
Reader recommends...

PocketBook Era Lite ebook reader

£177 from Amazon www.snipca.com/60088

✓ I was interested in Issue 737's feature on the best Kindle alternatives (page 60) and decided to buy the PocketBook Era Lite. I borrow a lot of books from my local library using Libby/OverDrive (www.snipca.com/59095), so the Era Lite's compatibility with this service was essential.

I've had plenty of chances to read it in bright sunshine this summer and the screen has never had too much glare. There's lots of contrast to pick



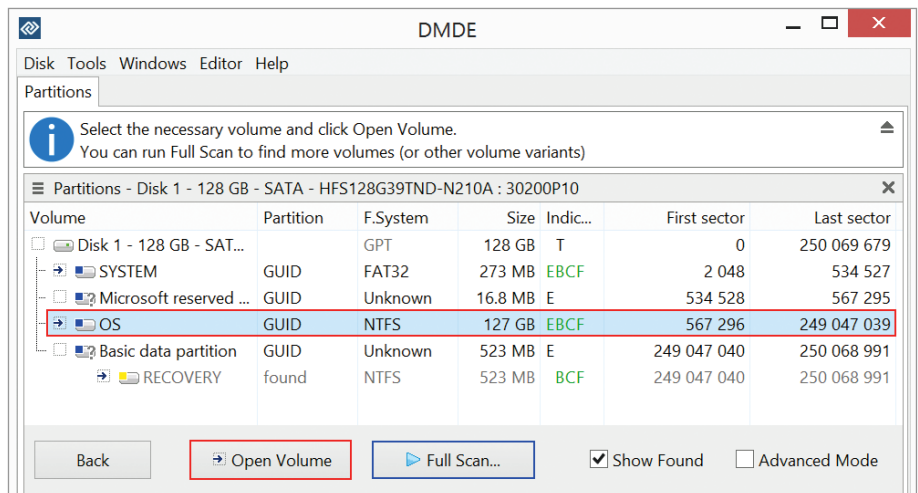
out every particular word. At seven inches it's just the right size, and the buttons on the side make it easy to turn pages. I disable the touchscreen while reading to avoid unwanted page turns. This is easy to do in settings.

I can't say it feels as premium as some Amazon Kindles I've handled in the past, but

it's a decent quality for under £200.

Tony Bruce

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



Samsung S26+ phone and also on previous Samsung models.

Brian Windsor

SOFTWARE

Recover lost photos from an SD card

✓ After a recent trip to my mother's home my old SD card in my SLR camera packed up. I searched online for a solution and found version 4.4.4 of DMDE (www.snipca.com/60084, pictured above) – there are versions for Windows,

macOS and Linux. The free version found all my lost photos and restored them. All I have to do now is bin my old SD card. Terrific.

Andrew Kadir-Buxton

VPN

Watch French TV in the UK

✓ Following Issue 739's Cover Feature on the best VPNs to use, next time you might consider Privado (<https://privadovpn.com>). I've used it for some years mainly to watch French TV in the UK. It seems to work well and, with an annual subscription, costs about £1 a month.

Nigel Barraclough

EDGE

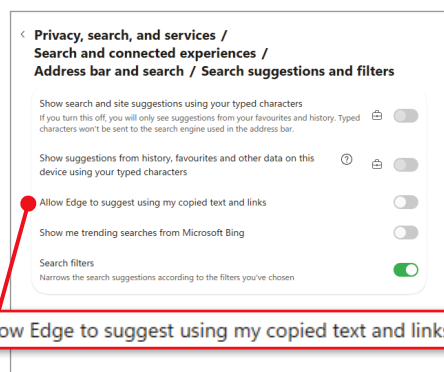
Turn off 'clipboard suggestions'

Edge 151, released in August, brings 'clipboard suggestions' to the address bar. This allows the browser to read links and text you've copied to your clipboard, and display them as 'suggestions' in the address bar's dropdown menu, like it does with search queries.

It saves time by letting you click the suggestion to search for it, rather than paste the text or URL and press Enter. But it also compromises your privacy when you don't want Edge to read what's in your clipboard.

To disable the feature, click the browser's three-dot menu button and choose Settings, then 'Privacy, search, and services'. Click 'Search and connected experiences', followed by 'Address bar and search' and select 'Search suggestions and filters'.

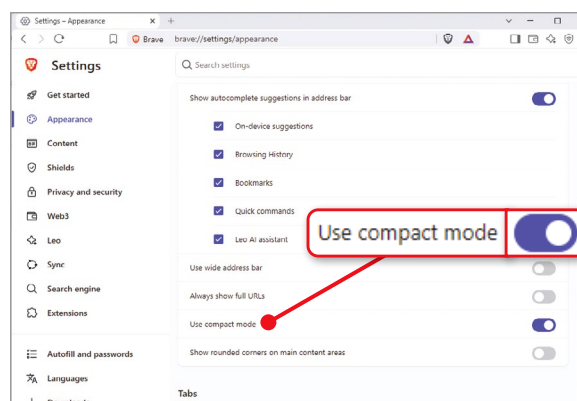
Finally, turn off the slider next to 'Allow Edge to suggest using my copied text and links' (see screenshot below).



BRAVE

Switch to compact mode

Brave has introduced a 'compact mode', which streamlines its interface to provide more space for web pages. It's particularly useful for users with smaller screens and means you



CHROMIUM

Block cookie-consent banners



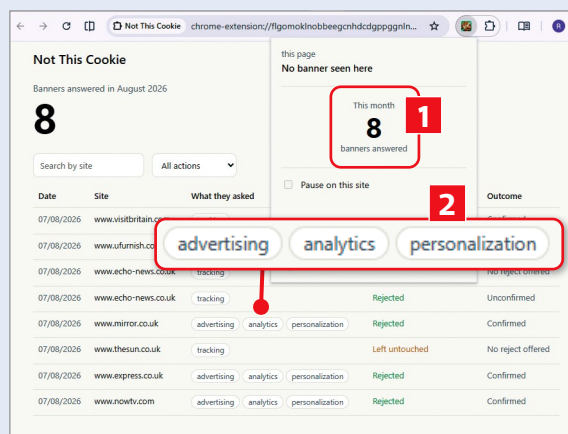
The new extension Not This Cookie (www.snipca.com/59983) fills the void left by the no-longer-updated tool 'I don't care about cookies'. It hides cookie-consent banners on websites by saying 'no' to all non-essential tracking.

This saves you clicking the 'reject' option yourself, which many banners make hard to find. However, the extension can't block pop-ups on

newspaper websites that force you to choose between accepting all cookies or paying for a subscription.

When you install Not This Cookie, choose 'Reject all tracking'. It will then work in the background, automatically declining data collection and closing cookie-consent banners (when a 'reject' option is available).

Click its toolbar button to see how many banners have been 'answered' this month (1 in our screenshot).



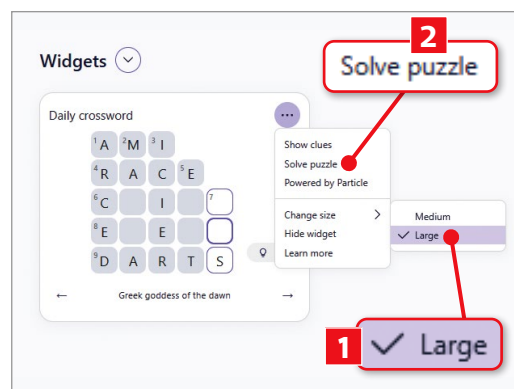
Select 'Open dashboard' for details of the websites that displayed them, and what they asked for – such as advertising, analytics and/or personalisation (2).

Because Not This Cookie is a new extension, you may be warned that it's 'not trusted by Enhanced Safe Browsing'. It's safe to use, so click 'Continue to install'.

can view more of a page without needing to scroll down.

To activate the new feature, click Brave's three-line menu button and choose Settings, followed by Appearance. Switch on 'Use compact mode' (see screenshot below left) and the tab bar, address bar and toolbars will shrink.

It doesn't make a huge difference on larger monitors, but maximises your browsing space on a laptop.



FIREFOX

Do a crossword on your New Tab page

Firefox has added a 'Daily crossword' widget to its New Tab page, to give you a fun new challenge every day. It uses AI-powered news reader Particle (www.snipca.com/59982) to generate puzzles based on recently summarised articles.

Click the Play button, then select a square in the

crossword to read the clue for that entry. Click twice to switch from 'across' to 'down'. If you get stuck, click the lightbulb icon for a second clue.

To make the crossword bigger, click the three-dot icon in its top-right corner and choose 'Change size' then Large (1 in our screenshot above). Select 'Solve puzzle' (2) to reveal the answers.

If you don't see the crossword on your New Tab page, go to Firefox's Settings and click 'Home and startup'. Ensure 'Widgets' is switched on, then tick Crossword.

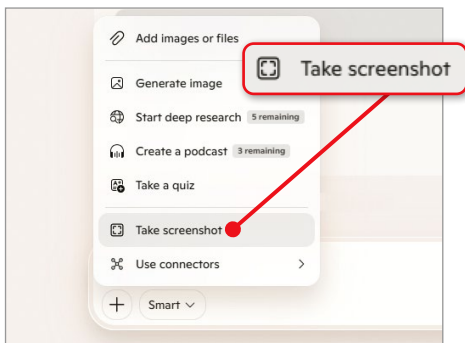
COPILOT

Capture and analyse screenshots

The Copilot app for Windows has a new option for capturing screenshots. This lets you ask the AI tool for information about content you're viewing, without having to take a screenshot yourself then upload the file.

To try it, click the plus-sign button in Copilot's message box and choose 'Take screenshot' (see screenshot below). Drag the crosshairs icon to select the content you want to analyse, such as an image, section of text or Windows settings page.

You can optionally annotate the screenshot by highlighting specific elements and adding text and numbers. Click the tick button to add the screenshot to your chat and ask Copilot whatever you need to know.



PROTON LUMO

Visualise data as graphs and charts

Proton's privacy-focused AI assistant is continuing to expand its capabilities. Lumo can now create graphs, charts and other 'custom visuals' from data you provide.

Upload a document or spreadsheet containing data and either tell Lumo how to visualise the information or let it

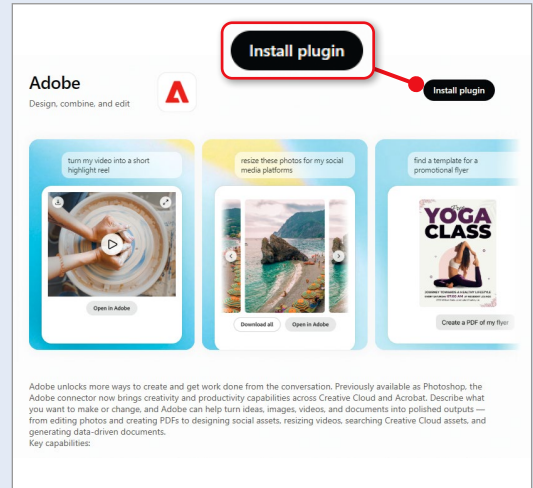
CHATGPT

Create and edit content using Adobe

Adobe has introduced a new **plug-in** for ChatGPT, which lets you use more than 70 of its tools in your chats. It replaces the existing Adobe plug-in and incorporates features from Adobe Express, Photoshop, Firefly, Acrobat and more.

The new tools are free to use, but some require an Adobe account and advanced features are limited to a paid-for subscription. They include tasks like removing backgrounds from photos, applying effects and fixes to images, creating flyers from templates, converting documents to PDF and editing (but not generating) videos.

To install the new plug-in, click Plugins in ChatGPT's left-hand sidebar and search for **Adobe**. Click 'Install plugin' (see screenshot) then 'Sign in with Adobe'. If you don't have or want



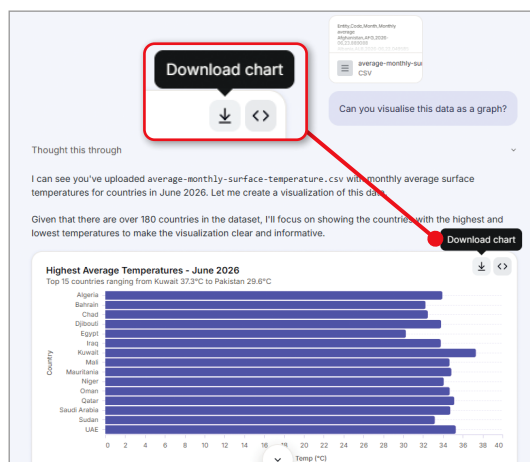
an Adobe account, click 'Continue as a guest'; otherwise sign into or up for a free account.

Click 'Try in chat' to get started. You can access the plug-in by typing **@Adobe** in a chat, or by clicking the plus-sign button and selecting Adobe there.

decide for you. The AI tool will then generate the visual directly in your chat, where you can click or tap the 'Download chart' button (see screenshot below left) to save it to your PC or phone.

Lumo will also summarise the data, offer 'key observations' such as peak and average figures, and identify notable trends. All files you upload are protected by Proton's standard

end-to-end encryption.

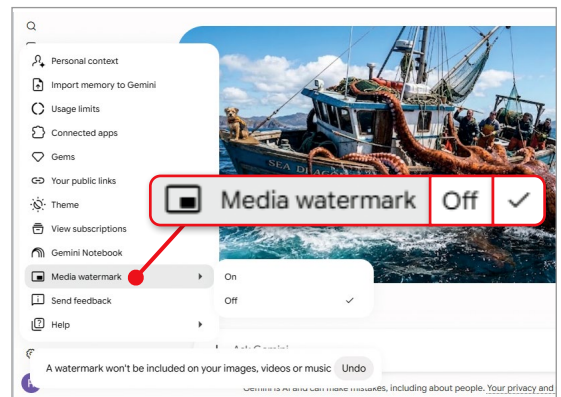


GEMINI

Hide the watermark on AI images

When you ask Gemini to create an image from a text prompt, or edit an existing photo, it places a watermark of its logo in the bottom-right corner. Although this lets other people know the content is AI-generated (or enhanced), it can be annoying when using images in creative projects.

To fix this problem, Google has



added the option to turn off the watermark for images you create and edit in Gemini. This saves you having to use an image editor to crop out or conceal the Gemini logo.

On the Gemini website, click the Settings cog in the bottom-left corner and choose Off next to 'Media watermark' (see screenshot above). In the mobile apps, tap your profile name, then Settings and switch off 'Show watermark'.

Note that Gemini still embeds a hidden SynthID watermark in images, videos and audio files, to confirm they're AI-generated.

ANDROID

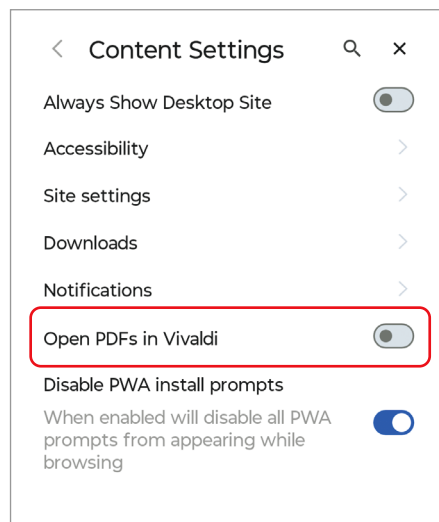
Control how Vivaldi opens PDFs



In Issue 739 (page 45), we wrote about Vivaldi's new PDF viewer. This is built into its Android app (www.snipca.com/60080) and opens PDF files directly in the browser.

Although this is convenient, you may prefer to use a separate app to read PDFs, which gives you more features and flexibility than Vivaldi's built-in tool. In response to such feedback, Vivaldi has now added the option to disable its PDF viewer.

To do so, tap the 'V' menu button and choose Settings, then Content Settings. Switch off the 'Open PDFs in Vivaldi' option (see screenshot below). Now when you tap a link to a PDF, you'll be prompted to choose your preferred PDF app, rather than the file opening in a new tab.



Another new option in Vivaldi for Android lets you change the colour of the app's icon on your home screen. Simply tap 'App Icon' in Settings and choose your favourite design.

iOS

Block online adverts in Firefox

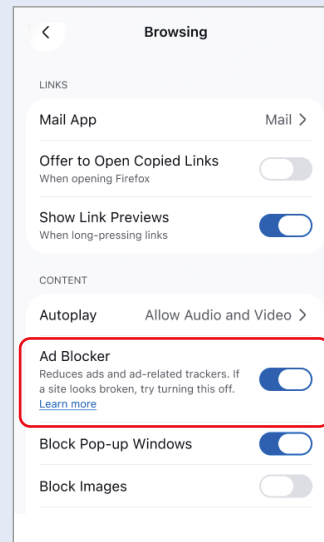


Firefox for iOS (www.snipca.com/60082) now has a built-in ad blocker.

This uses a filter list based on EasyList (the default for most ad-blocking tools) to block many adverts before they load.

That includes ads displayed by websites, third-party advertising networks, ad-related trackers and pop-ups and overlays. However, Firefox won't block ads in search results from Google, Bing and DuckDuckGo, or sponsored content on its own Home and New Tab pages.

Additionally, Mozilla says: "Because websites use different advertising



technologies, some ads may still appear."

The new ad blocker is disabled by default, but easy to turn on. Tap the browser's three-dot menu button and choose Settings, then Browsing. Switch on Ad Blocker (see screenshot) to start filtering ads.

You can allow ads for specific websites by tapping the menu button then Ad Blocker and turning off the option. Mozilla

is rolling out the ad blocker gradually so you may not see it yet – ensure Firefox is kept up to date on your iPhone or iPad.

ANDROID

Increase text size in Opera



Version 100 of Opera for Android (www.snipca.com/60089) adds a handy 'page zoom' feature. This makes it easier to enlarge text on web pages without distorting the content.

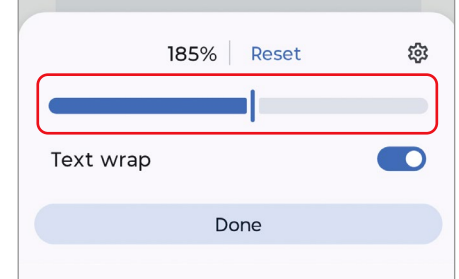
When viewing a page, tap the three-dot menu button in the top-right corner of the browser and choose 'Zoom level'. Drag the slider (see screenshot right) to increase the size of the text to your preferred level, then press Done.

To set a default zoom level for all websites, tap your profile icon then the

Settings cog and select Appearance, then Accessibility. Set the 'Default web page zoom level' to the optimum percentage.

To celebrate reaching its 100th release, Opera has also added a mini game called Jump. Access this from your Start page and at opera://jump; you can also play it when you lose your internet signal.

Text resizing is now a full-fledged page zoom feature. Set custom zoom levels for individual websites, or change your default in the settings.



BEST APP FOR

Planning bus journeys

Transit

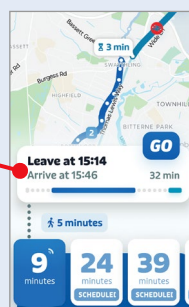
Free with in-app purchases

Android www.snipca.com/60092

iOS www.snipca.com/60093

Transit offers a smart way to plan bus journeys in over 1,230 towns and cities worldwide. Let it detect your location and it will show you the nearest stops and departure times. Tell it where you want to go and Transit will provide details of the fastest journey, arrival time, when you should leave and all the stops along the way. Its clear presentation makes its information easy to digest – get more features in its Royale version for £23.99 per year.

Leave at 15:14
Arrive at 15:46

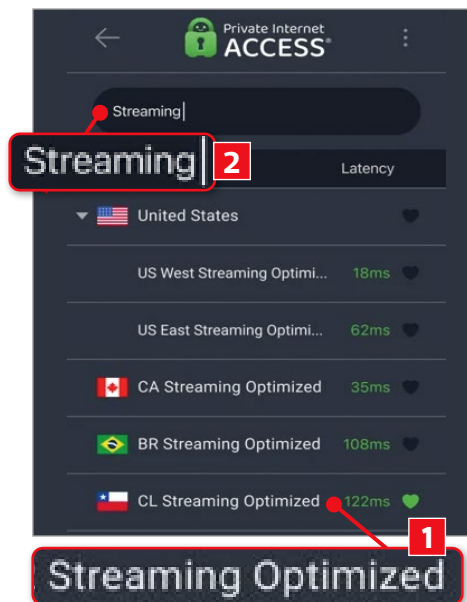


PRIVATE INTERNET ACCESS

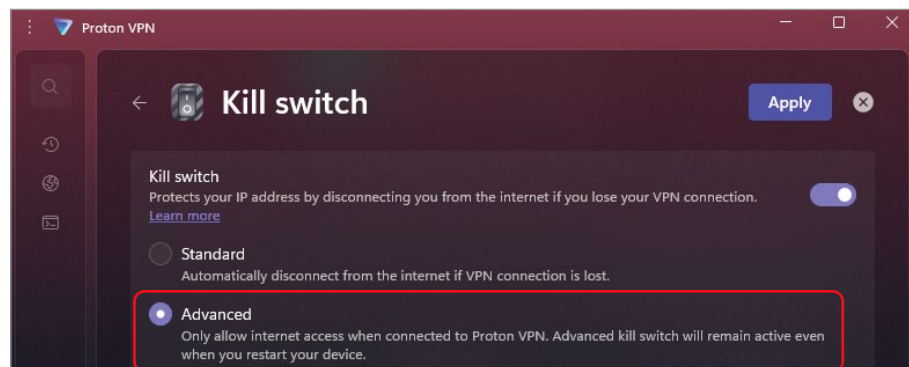
Stream more reliably in more countries

Private Internet Access (PIA, www.snipca.com/60178) has made it easier to watch TV shows and films on overseas streaming services. It has expanded its network of streaming-optimised servers from 13 countries to 35, spanning Europe, the Americas, Asia Pacific, Africa and the Middle East.

Although PIA already has servers in those areas, the new options (labelled Streaming Optimized – 1 in our screenshot below) provide a more reliable experience when you watch geo-restricted online content. These servers are constantly monitored and tested with a wide range of streaming services, to ensure they're not blocked.



To find the Streaming Optimized servers in PIA's desktop and mobile apps, open the location list and search for **Streaming** 2. Select a country or a location within one to stream content from that region. Streaming-optimised servers are available with all PIA plans.



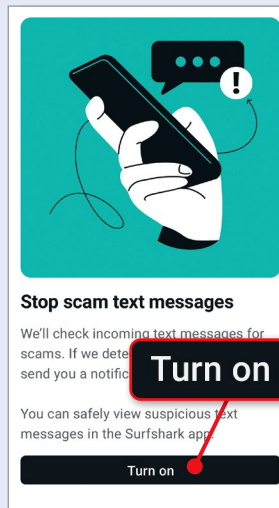
SURFSHARK

Block scam text messages

Surfshark now protects your phone from scam text messages. It identifies and intercepts messages that contain dangerous URLs, suspicious sender numbers and fraudulent content, so you don't inadvertently open them.

To enable this protection in the Surfshark app for Android (www.snipca.com/60077), tap the Products tab and select 'Text message protection'. Press 'Turn on' (see screenshot) and allow Surfshark to access your text messages and contacts. Also permit it to notify you about scam messages.

When you receive a suspicious text,



tap to open it safely in the Surfshark app. You can then delete it from there so it doesn't appear in your main inbox.

In the Surfshark app for iOS (www.snipca.com/60078), tap the Antiscam tab and turn on 'Text message protection'. Open the Settings app on your iPhone and select Messages, then Screen Unknown Senders.

Tap 'Text Message Filter' and select Surfshark. Scam

messages will now be automatically sent to the Spam folder.

Text-message protection is available in Surfshark's One and One+ plans, but not its cheapest Starter subscription.

PROTON VPN

Activate the Advanced kill switch

Proton VPN has an 'advanced' version of its **kill switch** that ensures your connection is always encrypted and protected. Whereas the standard kill switch blocks all network traffic when you disconnect from a VPN server, the advanced version prevents your device from connecting to the internet unless it's connected to a VPN server.

To activate the feature in Proton VPN's Windows app, click 'Kill switch' in the right-hand panel on the home screen. Turn on 'Kill switch', choose Advanced (see screenshot below) and click Apply. If you're not already connected to a VPN server, your PC will be disconnected from

the internet until you are.

Proton is currently testing the Advanced kill switch in the **beta** version of its iOS app. It says the feature isn't necessary in its Android app, because the standard kill switch has the options 'Always-on VPN' and 'Block connections without a VPN'.

DEAL OF THE FORTNIGHT

Save 50% on Norton VPN

Norton VPN is offering

Computeractive

readers a discount of 50 per cent on its VPN Standard plan. You'll pay just £29.99 for the first year, which works out at £2.50 a month. Your subscription renews at £59.99 for subsequent years, but you can cancel at any time.

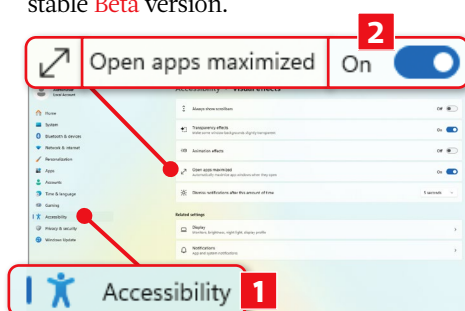
To claim the offer, visit www.snipca.com/60170 or scan the QR code. The discount will be applied automatically at checkout.



WINDOWS INSIDER

Make apps open full-screen automatically

Microsoft is adding the option to make Windows open apps full screen automatically so you don't have to do it yourself. Press Windows key+I to open Settings then click Accessibility (1 in our screenshot below) followed by 'Visual effects' and turn on the 'Open apps maximized' slider (2). It's part of the Windows Insider build released on 21 August, with the number 26340.9233 for the Experimental version and 26220.9223 for the more stable Beta version.

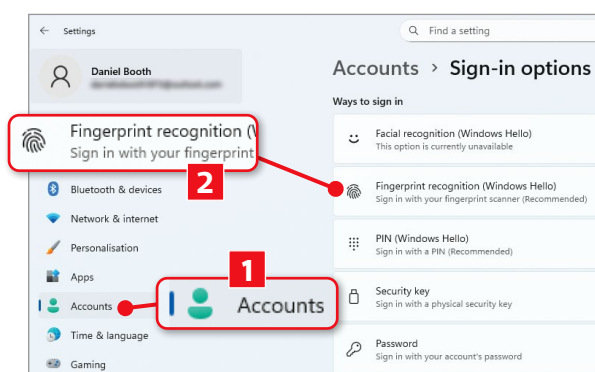


WINDOWS 11

Use third-party fingerprint readers

Last month's Patch Tuesday update, released on 12 August, lets you sign into Windows using a third-party fingerprint reader without having to turn off Enhanced Sign-in Security (ESS). ESS is Windows' more secure way of storing and processing your fingerprint, so your biometric data is protected by the PC's security hardware rather than being exposed to Windows or other software. This change means you can use an external reader without losing that extra protection.

Connect a supported fingerprint reader, press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click Accounts (1 in our screenshot below) followed by 'Sign-in options' then 'Fingerprint recognition' (2) and follow the

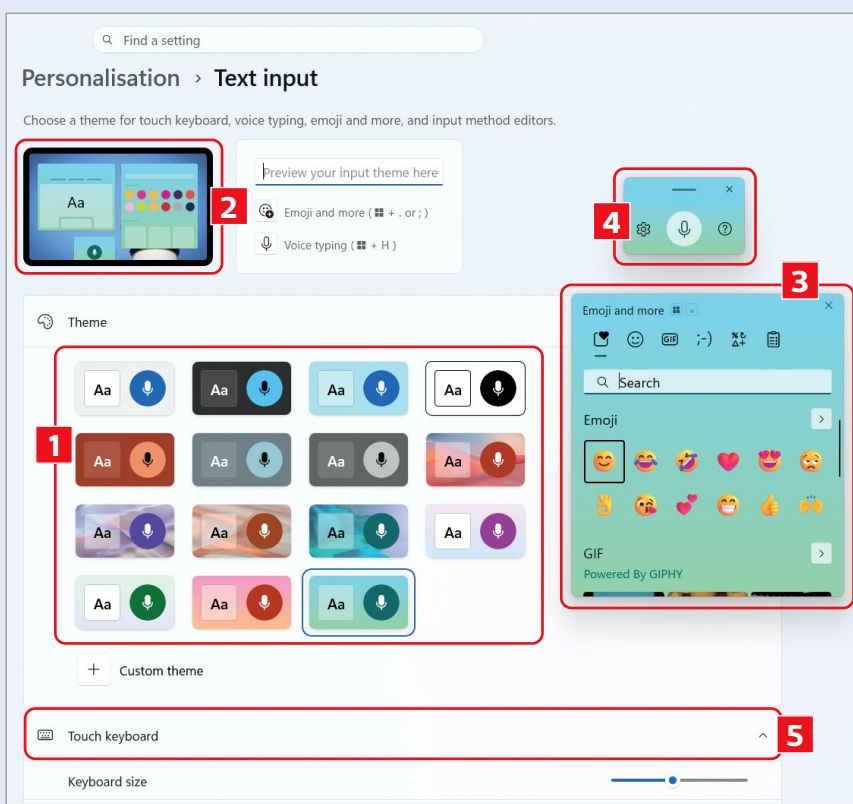


WINDOWS 11

Change your touch keyboard's theme

Windows lets you change how the touch keyboard, emoji panel and voice-typing pop-ups look, so they better suit your taste. Press Windows key+I to open Settings, then click Personalisation on the left followed by 'Text input' on the right. Now click one of the theme boxes (1 in our screenshot) and you'll see it appear at the top of the page (2).

You can now press Windows key+. (full stop) or ; (semi colon) to see how the emoji panel looks with your selected theme (3). Also press Windows key+H to see how the voice-typing box looks (4). To see what the touch keyboard looks like, open the 'Touch keyboard' menu (5 then click 'Open keyboard' to the right of 'View your changes'.

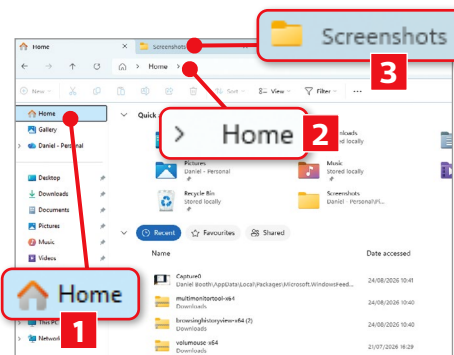


prompts to set up your fingerprint. To check whether your reader supports ESS, look under 'Additional settings' on the 'Sign-in options' page.

WINDOWS 11

Middle-click to open File Explorer tabs

Also new in August's Patch Tuesday update is the option to middle-click to open a folder in a new tab directly from File Explorer's Home page (1 in our screenshot above right) or the address bar (2). Previously, middle-click only



worked in the left-hand navigation pane. This change makes tabbed browsing feel far more consistent across File Explorer. Here, we've middle-clicked the Screenshots folder and it's appeared as a tab (3).

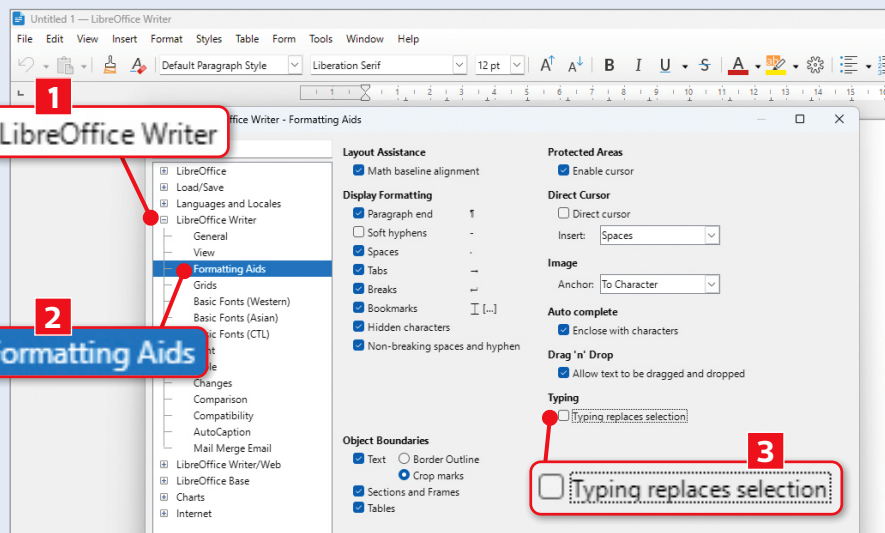
LIBREOFFICE WRITER

Stop your typing from overwriting selected text

LibreOffice 26.8, released on 26 August, adds a setting that controls whether typing replaces highlighted text. It's turned on by default, meaning that if you select a word or sentence and press any key, Writer deletes the selection and inserts your new text. This is how most editors work, but it can cause accidental data loss in long documents if you press a key unintentionally.

To change this, click Tools at the top, then Options (or press Alt+F12). Now click LibreOffice Writer (1 in our screenshot), followed by Formatting Aids (2). Look for the 'Typing replaces selection' box (3) and untick it. Click OK to save the change. Anything you now type will instead be inserted after the selection, keeping the original text intact.

If you already use LibreOffice, it



should prompt you to download the new version. If you don't see this, click Help at the top of LibreOffice's main page then 'Check for updates'. Alternatively,

download LibreOffice 26.8 directly from www.snipca.com/60207. We'll cover all of its best new features and settings over the next few months.

ONLYOFFICE

Add properties to documents and more



By default, OnlyOffice lets you add the following properties to documents, forms, presentations and spreadsheets – author, title, tags, subject and comment. You can't remove these, but you can add more. To do this, click File top right, then Info (1 in our screenshot below). Now click the tiny 'Add property' link (2) and fill in the title of your new property (3), its type (text, number, date or yes/no) (4) and the value (5), which is the actual information you want to store. Click OK to confirm and it'll appear at the bottom of the existing properties (6).

In our example we've added a property

called 'Version number', chosen 'text' as the type and given the value as 1.0.

MICROSOFT EXCEL

Remove and keep rows using DROP and TAKE

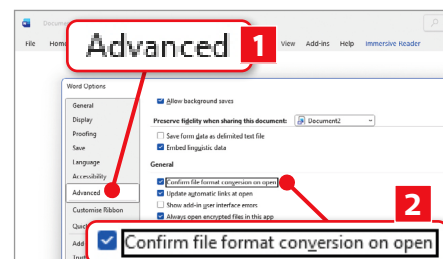
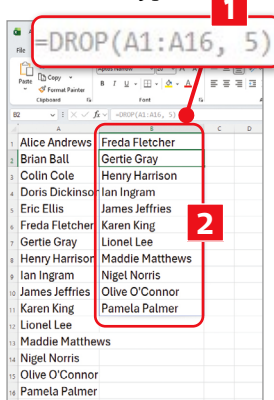


Excel 2024 added the DROP function to remove rows from the top or bottom of a spreadsheet,

and TAKE to keep rows. In our example, we want to remove the top five rows of names from A1 to A16, so we type

`=DROP(A1:A16, 5)` (1 in our screenshot right) in the cell where we want the new, trimmed list to appear (B1 in our case).

Doing this produces a newly trimmed column of 11 names in B1 to B11 (2). To remove the bottom five rows, type `=DROP(A1:A16, -5)` instead (note the minus sign). The TAKE command works in reverse. So, to keep only the first five rows, type `=TAKE(A1:A16, 5)`. To keep only the last five rows, use `=TAKE(A1:A16, -5)`.



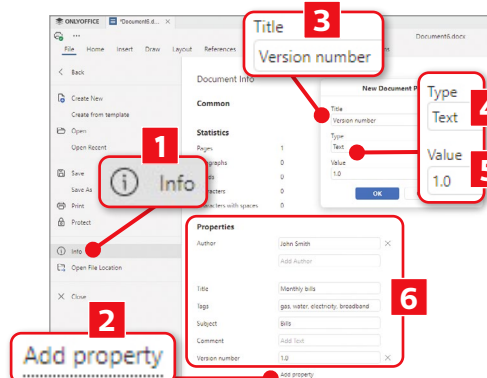
MICROSOFT WORD

Confirm file conversions when you open documents

Word normally opens non-Word documents (like text files, HTML pages or old WordPerfect documents) without asking how you want them converted. If you work with older or unusual formats, this can cause problems such as incorrect text encoding or layout changes.

To make Word ask first, click File at the top left, then Options at the bottom of the menu. Now click Advanced (1 in our screenshot above) then scroll down to the General section and tick 'Confirm file format conversion on open' (2).

Now, when you open a non-Word file, Word will show a small box asking which conversion to use. If you only ever open modern Word documents, you can leave this option unticked. Click OK to finalise the change.



In The Club



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

Create a YouTube channel for your club

Depending on the type of club you run, it's quite likely you'll end up generating a fair amount of video content over time – filmed events, talks, demonstrations and so on. But it's easy for these to end up getting lost among the chatter in busy messaging feeds or even landlocked on your phone or computer's storage, where nobody will ever see them.

A better idea is to give your videos a permanent home online, where everyone can find and view them. By creating a YouTube channel for your club, members can catch up with anything they've missed, and potential new members can discover what your club gets up to. All you need is a Google account.

Name your channel and add images

Visit www.youtube.com and sign in with your Google account. Click your user icon (1 in our screenshot below) and select 'Create a channel'. In the window that opens, type your club's name (2). A Handle (a unique, short identifier) will be generated automatically (3), but you can customise this. You can also click 'Select picture' (4) and choose a photo or image you'd like to use for your channel's icon. When you're happy, click 'Create channel' (5).

Your channel's page will appear. Before you upload anything, click 'Customize

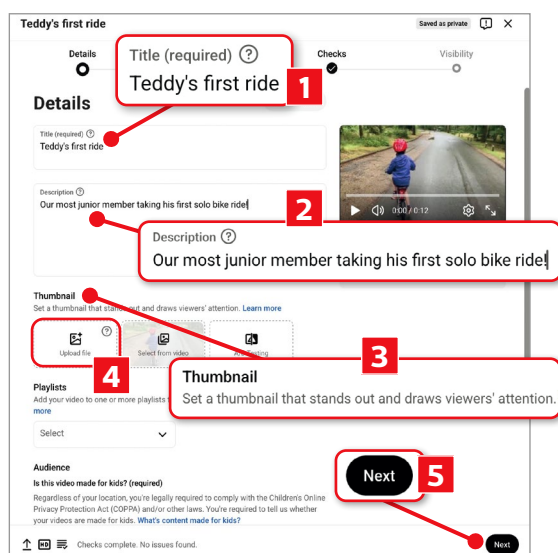
channel' to make sure the settings are all as you'd like them. If you already selected a picture, this will appear here – you can change or remove it as needed. You can also upload a banner image, which will appear across the top of your channel's page.

Scroll down and you'll find a Description box – type in a short note about your club and its activities here. Beneath this, you'll find your channel's URL, which you can copy for your records, and an 'Add link' button to add a link to your club's website. Once done, click the top-right Publish button.

Upload and share a video

Click the Create button in the top right, then select 'Upload videos'. Now drag and drop your video into your browser window, or click 'Select files' and browse your PC for the clip you want. YouTube will begin processing the video. As it does so, you'll be able to customise the Details page, entering a title (1 in our screenshot above) and description (2).

The Thumbnail (3) will represent your video in search listings, so make it as eye-catching as possible. You can use a separate image you've created for this (click 'Upload file' (4) or just click



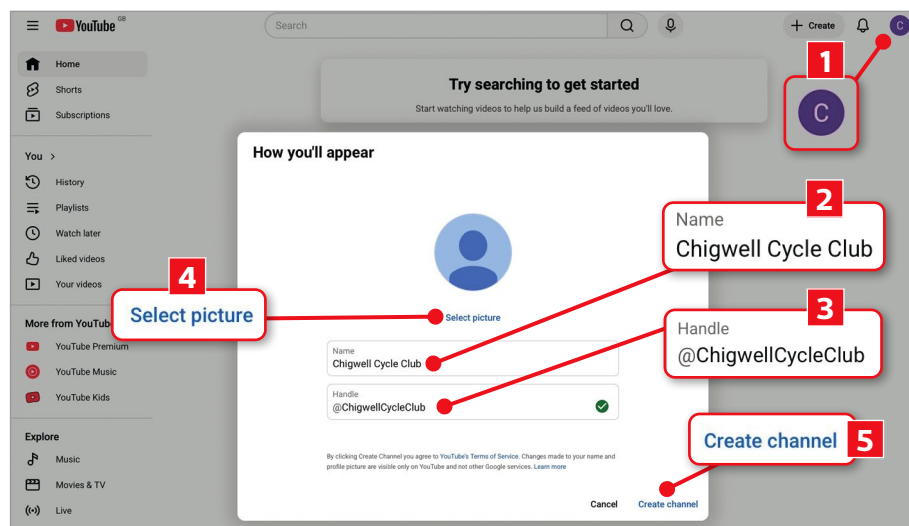
Add your video's title and description when you upload it

'Select from video' and choose one of the images offered.

Scroll down and select the 'No, it's not made for kids' option, then click Next (5). You'll be presented with the 'Video elements' page, which lets you promote content during your videos – ignore this for now. Click 'Next' again and you'll get to the Checks screen, where you'll see whether any copyright issues or similar have been identified. In most cases, you should just be able to click Next again.

Finally, on the Visibility screen you can choose whether your video will be Private (so only people you choose can watch it), Unlisted (so it won't appear in searches but anyone with a link can view it) or Public (so anyone can discover and watch it). Make your selection, then click Publish – or click Schedule if you want the video to go live on a specific date.

You'll be given the option to share your video via various social-media links, or you can click the copy icon next to the video link to post your video's URL into a group email or a message in your club's WhatsApp group. You can also click 'Your channel' on the left, then click the three vertical dots under your video and select Share at any time.



Give your channel a name and add a photo or image

What's All the Fuss About...

WMIC

Microsoft is removing a command that has served us well for 25 years

What is it?

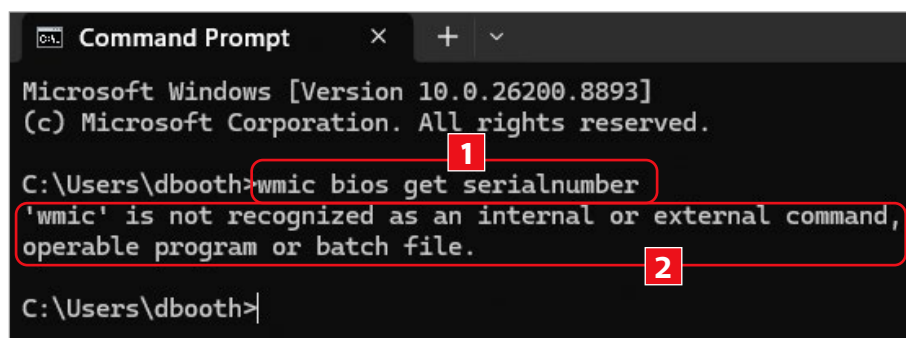
Windows Management Instrumentation Command-line. Introduced in Windows XP in 2001, it's a tool that lets you run commands in **Command Prompt** to give you information about your computer's hardware and software. Historically, Microsoft has made this info hard to find elsewhere in Windows. We've included them as tips in the magazine many times over the years. In fact, a quick search of our back issues shows we've mentioned it 19 times since 2020.

What kind of commands can you type?

The most popular is probably **wmic bios get serialnumber** (1 in our screenshot above right) which reveals your computer's serial number as stored in the **BIOS**. Try it now, though, and you might get an error message saying it's not recognised (2).

Oh. How come?

Because Microsoft has been phasing out WMIC since 2021. It was removed from computers that upgraded to Windows 11 22H2, released last autumn, though it could be reinstated as an optional feature (officially called a 'Feature on Demand', see www.snipca.com/60126). But in August Microsoft announced it's being axed for good as part of an Insider Preview Build (www.snipca.com/60121). This will delete the 'wmic.exe' file from computers. It means within months it's likely to disappear



```
Microsoft Windows [Version 10.0.26200.8893]
(c) Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

C:\Users\dbooth>wmic bios get serialnumber
'wmic' is not recognized as an internal or external command,
operable program or batch file.

C:\Users\dbooth>
```

from all Windows computers – 10 and 11 – never to return.

Why is Microsoft scrapping it?

It says WMIC is old, unsafe and unnecessary. Hackers have been using it for years to hide malware they've installed on computers, making it hard for antivirus tools to detect. The problem is that WMIC is a LOLBIN (Living Off the Land Binary), meaning it's a built-in tool with an **executable file** that can be abused by attackers. It's particularly effective at disabling security tools and deleting shadow copies – backups that recover files – during **ransomware** attacks.

So its replacement is safer?

Actually, no. WMIC's replacement, which are **PowerShell's** cmdlets, can also be abused by hackers. But they can perform more actions, such as sort, filter and combine information. PowerShell can perform most of the tasks Command

Prompt can, though it uses different commands.

How do I launch it again?

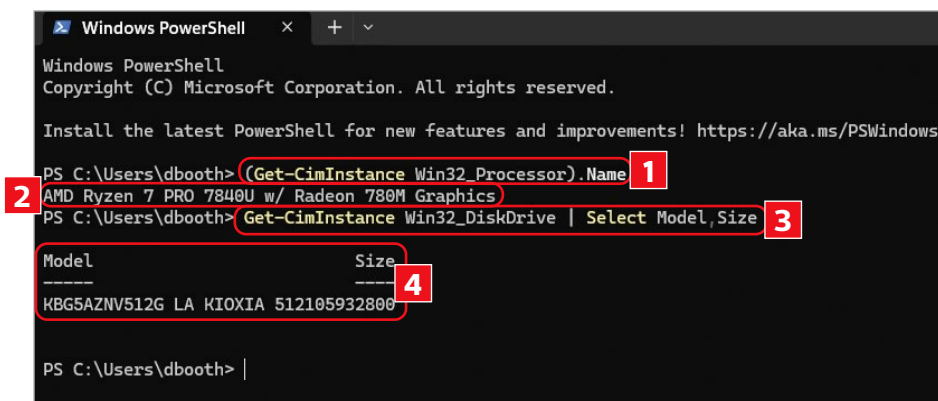
In several ways. You can search for it on your PC, press Windows key+R then type **powershell**, or press Windows key+X and click Terminal. It looks virtually identical to Command Prompt. And it performs the same WMIC tasks, though you'll need to type different commands. For example, instead of **wmic bios get serialnumber** type **(Get-CimInstance Win32_BIOS).SerialNumber**.

Are all the cmdlets that long to type?

Yes. They're much longer than commands in Command Prompt because they're more complex. We've put 10 of the most popular former-WMIC cmdlets on our Pastebin page (www.snipca.com/60124), from where you can copy and paste into PowerShell. As examples, number three in the list **(Get-CimInstance Win32_Processor).Name** (1 in our screenshot left) shows our computer's processor (2), while number eight **Get-CimInstance Win32_DiskDrive | Select Model,Size** (3) shows our hard drive (4).

So do I need to worry about WMIC's demise?

No, but don't be surprised if old WMIC commands produce error messages from now on. You'll have to learn the cmdlets instead. We'll include plenty in Make Windows Better (page 46) in future. Hopefully Microsoft will take the hint from the section's name.



```
Windows PowerShell
Copyright (C) Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Install the latest PowerShell for new features and improvements! https://aka.ms/PSWindows

PS C:\Users\dbooth>(Get-CimInstance Win32_Processor).Name
AMD Ryzen 7 PRO 7840U w/ Radeon 780M Graphics
PS C:\Users\dbooth>Get-CimInstance Win32_DiskDrive | Select Model,Size

Model                               Size
-----
KBG5AZNV512G LA KIOXIA 512105932800
```

PowerShell cmdlets are longer than WMIC commands but produce the same information

DON'T BIN YOUR OLD PHONES

Dust off your old Android phones and iPhones, and give them a new lease of life. Robert Irvine reveals the 10 best ways to reuse them



According to recent research, most people in the UK upgrade their smartphones every two to three years (www.snipca.com/60169). That usually happens either when our mobile contract ends, the phone stops working properly or we find

a good deal on a new device.

Upgrading leaves us with the dilemma of what to do with our old phones. Unless they're newer iPhones, Google Pixels or high-end Samsung Galaxy models, they're unlikely to fetch much money from trade-in services. So most get

consigned to a drawer or thrown in with other WEEE (waste electrical and electronic equipment) to be recycled.

Either option is a waste of a good device, because there are lots of useful things you can do with a spare smartphone. Here, we reveal the top 10 best new uses for your old Android phones and iPhones. These will give them a second life and save you money on additional gadgets.

As long as you can still connect your old phone to your Wi-Fi network, you don't need to insert a SIM card or activate an eSIM (with one exception – see page 53). And provided you're signed into your Google or Apple account, you can install the apps we recommend from the Google Play Store and Apple App Store.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Turn old phones into security cameras and webcams
- Create a dashcam and satnav to use when driving and walking
- Set up a Wi-Fi hotspot and boost your internet signal
- Use a phone's storage to back up files from your PC
- Control your PC by using your phone as a mouse and remote
- Stream music and videos, and play retro games

MORE MAGAZINES: XSAVA.XYZ

1 SET UP A HOME SECURITY CAMERA

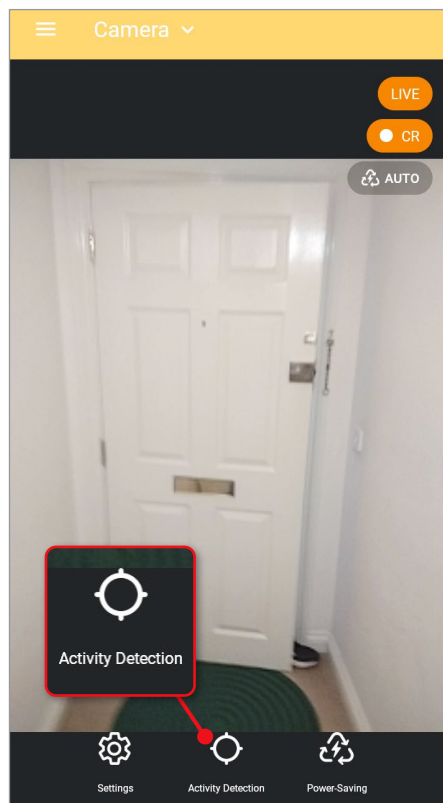
Rather than buy a new security camera from a brand such as Blink, TP-Link or Eufy, you can use an old phone to keep an eye on your home. Not only will this save you money, but it gives you total freedom over how you use and where you place the 'camera', and the surveillance software you install.

As well as streaming and recording video of intruders, a security-camera phone can monitor your pet while you're away, a baby or vulnerable relative, or wildlife in your garden. Unlike most indoor security cameras, you don't need to connect your phone to the mains, so it will keep working during power cuts (until its battery needs recharging).

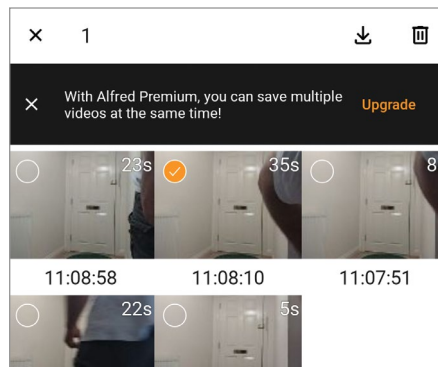
Install surveillance apps on your phones

The best - and most popular - software for turning an old phone into a security camera is AlfredCamera (www.snipca.com/60119). It's available for Android and iOS, and is free to use on two devices in addition to your main one (though you can only stream one at a time for free).

Install the AlfredCamera app on your current phone and your old one. On the former, sign up for a free account and tap 'Add a Camera' followed by Mobile



Enable 'Activity Detection' so AlfredCamera can monitor your home



In AlfredCamera's free plan you need to download event videos

Device. Connect your old phone either by signing into your new account in the app or by scanning a QR code.

Once you've granted the required permissions, you'll see a live feed from the rear camera of your old phone in the AlfredCamera app on your current one. You can now position your new security camera wherever you want and start exploring AlfredCamera's features.

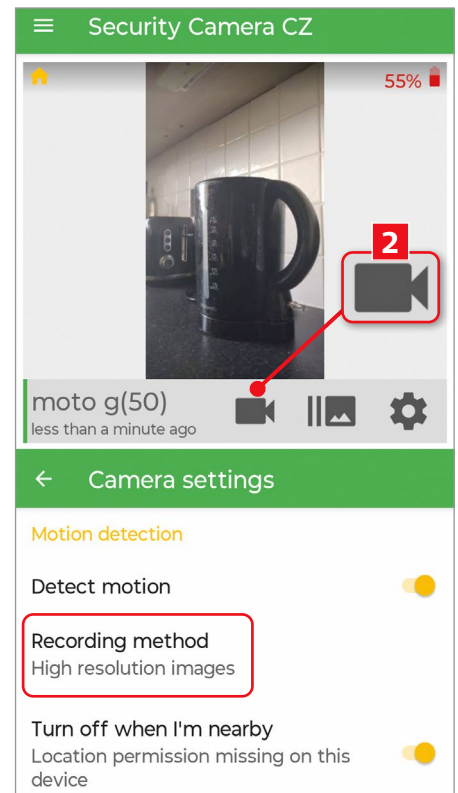
The most important is Activity Detection, which you enable in the app on your old phone (see screenshot below left). This alerts you when motion is detected and records video (with sound) of up to 30 seconds. To watch these clips, tap Events on the Camera tab and download them to your current phone (see screenshot above) - in-app playback is now a Premium feature (see below).

Other useful options include Talk, which lets you speak through your old phone from your current one; Low Light, which optimises the camera when the room gets dark; and Wake Up Camera, which reactivates the camera if the app is closed or your old phone goes offline.

The biggest frustration with AlfredCamera is that many of its features are now limited to its Premium plans. These cost from £6.99 per month or £42 per year, and include HD video quality, 4x zoom, up to eight hours of continuous recording and playback, cloud storage and live streaming of four cameras (Premium Plus supports unlimited devices). The free version should satisfy your surveillance requirements, but you'll have to put up with ads and upgrade prompts.

Get more security features for free

If those restrictions put you off AlfredCamera, Security Camera CZ (www.snipca.com/60120) offers many



Security Camera CZ can capture hi-res images or videos of events

of the same features for free. Install its app on your current and old Android phones (it's not available for iOS), set the former as the monitor and the latter as the camera, and grant the necessary permissions. Security Camera CZ will link the devices and let you start monitoring straight away.

It's not as slick as AlfredCamera and its ads are huge and annoying (pay £8.49 per year to remove them). But Security Camera CZ offers HD resolution, 8x zoom and can save your recordings to Google Drive. You can capture either high-resolution images or short videos of detected events (1 in our screenshot above), limit the areas and times that motion detection applies to, and record manually at the tap of a button 2. There's no limit to how many old phones you can use as cameras, but live video streams are restricted to 10 minutes (you can restart the feed when you hit the limit).

Like AlfredCamera, Security Camera CZ works over the internet rather than your Wi-Fi network, so you can watch your home from wherever you are. It also has a web monitor (www.snipca.com/60130) that lets you view your old phone's camera in your desktop browser, or in a browser on your iPhone or iPad.

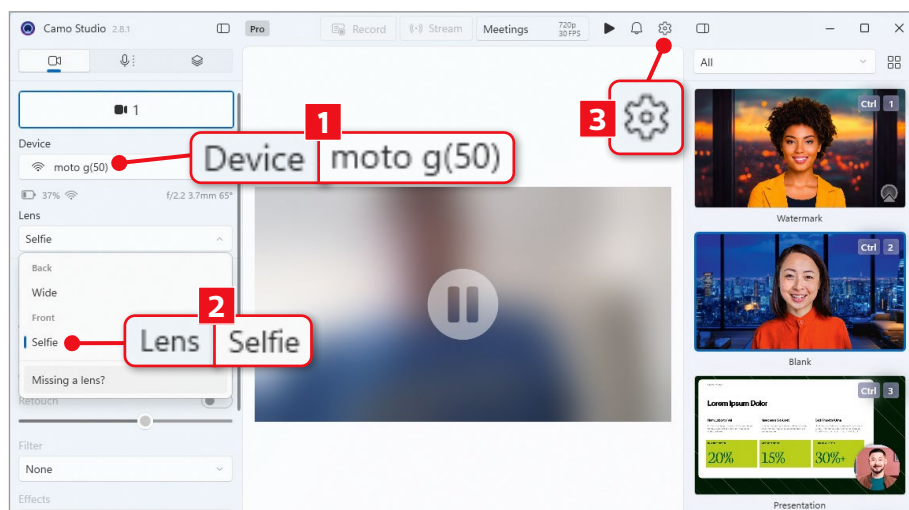
2 USE YOUR OLD PHONE AS A WEBCAM

Reusing an old phone as a webcam can provide better picture and sound quality than your current camera, especially if the latter is built into your laptop. It also gives you the flexibility to move around during PC video calls, without the interruptions that occur in video chats on your main phone.

The best tool for this purpose is Camo (www.camo.com), which – unlike rival apps – offers HD resolution with no ads or watermarks. Install its Camo Studio software on your PC and its Camo Camera app on your old Android phone (www.snipca.com/60122) or iPhone (www.snipca.com/60123).

In the mobile app, grant Camo permission to access your camera and microphone, and follow the setup instructions. In the desktop app, select your phone in the Device dropdown menu (1 in our screenshot) to stream video from its rear camera – choose Selfie in the Lens menu (2) to switch to the front one.

To use your new webcam in video-calling services such as Zoom, Microsoft



Camo turns your old phone into a wireless, high-resolution webcam

Teams and WhatsApp Desktop and Web, click the Settings cog in Camo Studio (3) and choose Add-ons. Next, select 'Compatibility add-on' and click Install. Set 'Camo' as the default camera and microphone source for video chats, to stream video and audio from your old phone.

Alternatively, try DroidCam (www.snipca.com/60131), which works in a similar way to Camo but through simpler desktop software. Its Android and iOS apps are free to use, but video streams with a higher resolution than 480p are watermarked unless you pay £13.49 for a Pro subscription.

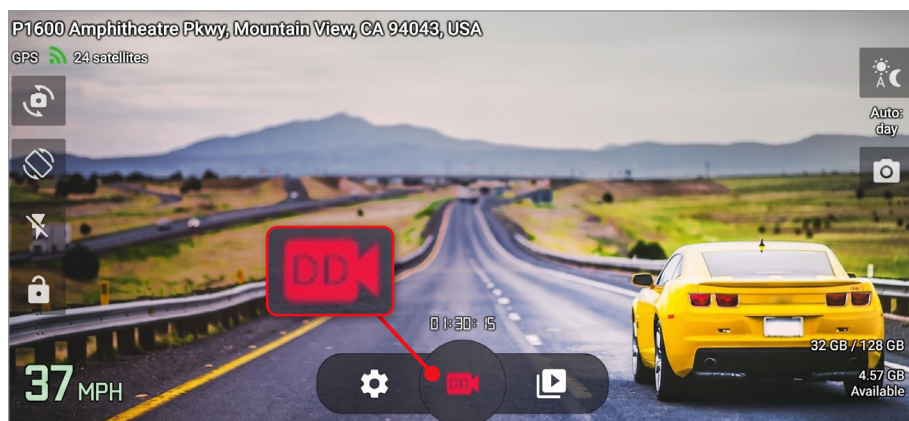
3 TURN AN OLD PHONE INTO A DASHCAM

Save money on an expensive dashcam by mounting an old phone on your windscreen or dashboard of the car. This will capture footage of what's in front of you, to give you video evidence of driving incidents and accidents.

You need a dashcam app that records videos on a loop, preferably to a **microSD card**; automatically switches to night mode when it gets dark; and begins recording when you start your car. Ideally, it should also embed **GPS** coordinates, your current speed and your vehicle's registration number in the videos it records, as well as a **timestamp**.

The excellent Android app Droid Dashcam (www.snipca.com/60125, pictured) ticks all those boxes and more. It captures video at up to **1080p** (Full HD) and can be set to start when your phone is connected to a charger, AUX port or your car's Bluetooth system, plus you can start recording manually by tapping the camcorder button (see screenshot).

By default, Droid Dashcam saves videos every five minutes, but you can reduce or increase the frequency, from every minute to every two hours. It lets you choose where to store the footage,



Record the road ahead by installing Droid Dashcam on an old phone

including to a microSD card, automatically deletes the oldest videos when you run out of space, and can optionally back up recordings to Google Photos.

Droid Dashcam is free (pay £3.69 to remove ads) and easy to use, with a choice of orientations, viewing angles and battery-management options. It can also be set to run in the background, though this isn't necessary when using an old phone solely as a dashcam.

Our top free pick for iPhones is Dashcam Recorder (www.snipca.com/60127). This

records video of up to 15 minutes, at up to **4K** on supported devices, and uses **HEVC** compression to reduce file sizes. It embeds all the essential GPS data, which you either hide or display as a watermark, and starts automatically alongside your car.

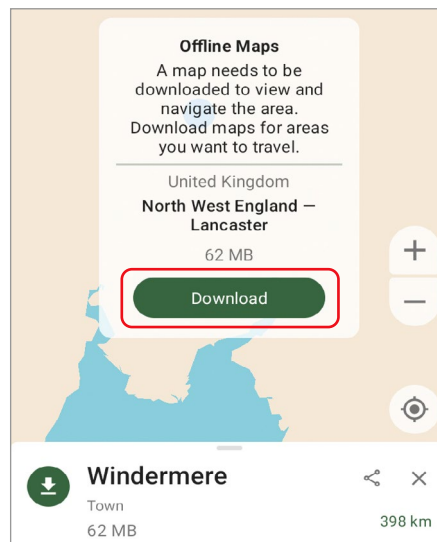
Bear in mind that a constantly recording phone will get hot. Try to keep yours out of direct sunlight (such as below the rear-view mirror using an adhesive or magnetic mount), leave its screen off and set a battery-charging limit in the app.

4 CREATE A FREE SATNAV DEVICE

You can turn virtually any old phone into a satnav without inserting a SIM card. Nearly all Android phones and iPhones from the past 15 years have GPS, so they can determine your location using satellite signals – without requiring mobile data.

Download maps to your phone before you leave home, or while connected to a Wi-Fi hotspot. Then, when you open the mapping app on the move, your device's GPS will pinpoint where you are so the app can display the relevant navigational data. With an offline map you can plan journeys, get turn-by-turn directions and find local amenities. However, you won't be able to view live traffic information, check public-transport times or see alternative routes based on current conditions.

Google Maps and Apple Maps let you download maps of selected areas, but there are plenty of alternatives if you want your old phone to rely less on their ecosystems. Our current favourite is CoMaps (Android www.snipca.com/60133, iOS www.snipca.com/60134), a community-run fork of the popular app Organic Maps (www.snipca.com/60176), with an emphasis on privacy. It's completely free, with no ads,

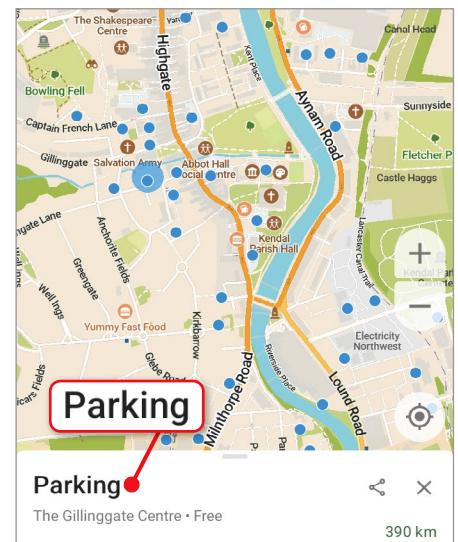


CoMaps lets you download maps to your old phone to explore offline

hidden trackers or in-app purchases, and you don't need to sign up for an account.

To turn your old phone into a satnav using CoMaps, either zoom into the area you plan to visit or search for a particular place. Tap the Download button (see screenshot above) to save a map for the relevant region to explore offline.

You can plan driving, cycling and walking routes; find places to eat, stay,



Find amenities including parking, petrol stations and more

shop and visit; and locate petrol stations, parking (see screenshot above), cash machines, toilets and much more – all without an internet signal.

Unlike many navigation apps, CoMaps doesn't limit how many maps you can download. To conserve storage on your old phone, go into the app's 'Data management' settings and choose 'SD card' under 'Save maps to'.

5 SET UP A PORTABLE WI-FI HOTSPOT

Turning your old phone into a Wi-Fi hotspot – or portable router – allows you to get other devices online when there's no internet available. It saves using your main phone for this purpose, which will slow your browsing, eat through your data allowance and drain the battery.

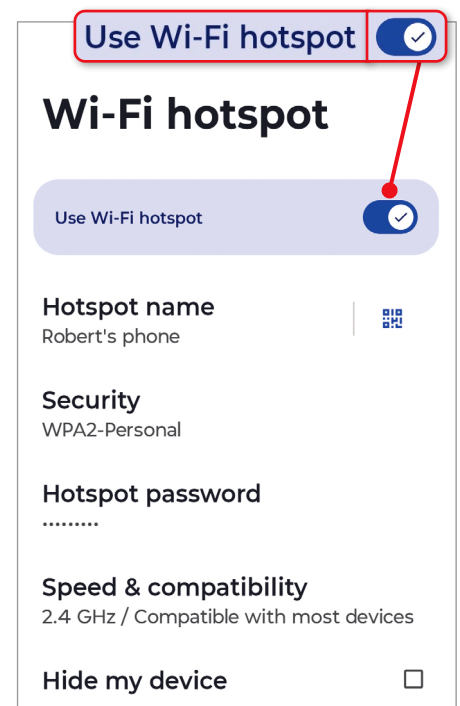
Because the hotspot shares your mobile signal through the phone's Wi-Fi transmitter, this trick *does* require a SIM card or eSIM. You can buy a 5GB SIM specifically for the hotspot for as little as £5 a month. GoCompare's SIM-Only deals section lists plans at that price from Lebara, Talkmobile and Spusu (www.snipca.com/60135), and even unlimited-data plans are generally priced around £15.

Opt for a one-month rolling plan to avoid being tied to a lengthy contract, or buy a pay-as-you-go SIM from Giffgaff (www.snipca.com/60136). Ensure you choose a new number (which you may never use for calls and texts) rather than transfer your current one.

Once you've set up the new SIM (or eSIM) in your old phone, you can create your Wi-Fi hotspot. On an Android device, open Settings and choose 'Network & Internet' or Connections (on Samsung Galaxy phones) then 'Hotspot & tethering' or 'Mobile Hotspot and Tethering'. Switch on 'Use Wi-Fi hotspot' (see screenshot) or 'Mobile hotspot' and give it a name and password, so other devices can find and connect to it. You can turn the hotspot on and off from the Quick Settings panel (swipe down from the top of your screen).

On an iPhone, open Settings and tap Personal Hotspot (tap Mobile Service to find this on older devices). Switch on 'Allow Others to Join' and note the password for your hotspot.

Android phones can warn you when your SIM nears a specified data-usage limit. Tap 'Mobile data' in 'Network & Internet' settings and choose 'Data warning and limit' to set the threshold.



Turn your phone into a hotspot to get other devices online

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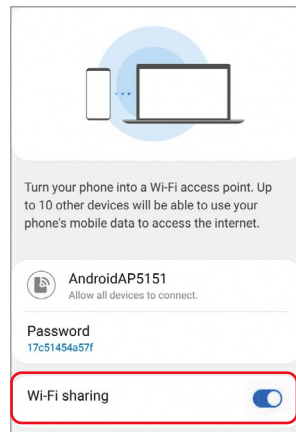
6 EXTEND YOUR WI-FI WITH AN OLD PHONE

If there are areas in your home where the Wi-Fi signal is weak, using your old phone as a hotspot (seen page 53) could theoretically help. Place the phone between your router and the Wi-Fi 'blackspot' and it will repeat the wireless signal to devices connected to its hotspot.

In practice, this doesn't work on most phones because they're unable to simultaneously receive and rebroadcast the Wi-Fi signal. Samsung Galaxy devices are a notable exception because they have a feature called Wi-Fi Sharing. This receives the Wi-Fi signal from your router and creates its own network for devices further away.

To activate the option on an old Galaxy phone (not all models have it), set up a mobile hotspot as described on page 53. Switch on 'Wi-Fi sharing' (see screenshot above right – this may be under Advanced) and connect devices that are far from your router to the hotspot instead of your home network.

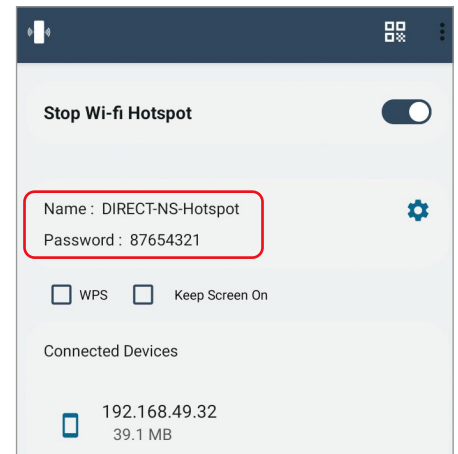
To do this on other brands of Android phone (it's not possible on iPhones), install the free app NetShare (www.snipca.com).



You can use an old Samsung Galaxy phone to extend your Wi-Fi signal

[com/60140](http://www.snipca.com/60140)). Switch on its 'Start Wi-fi Hotspot' option and note the network name (DIRECT-NS-Hotspot) and password (see screenshot above right).

To connect a PC or laptop to this hotspot, you need to configure a proxy server. Open the Settings app in Windows, click 'Network & Internet' then Proxy and switch on 'Use a proxy server'. Enter the IP address and port number provided in the NetShare app, then click Save. This will let you connect to the



NetShare creates a Wi-Fi hotspot on other Android phones

Wi-Fi hotspot by entering the password.

To connect another Android phone or a tablet to NetShare, install its app on that device. On an iPhone or iPad, you'll need to set up a proxy server (see www.snipca.com/60141). Sadly, unlike Samsung's Wi-Fi Sharing, you can't connect a smart TV, streaming stick or other device to the hotspot without configurable proxy settings.

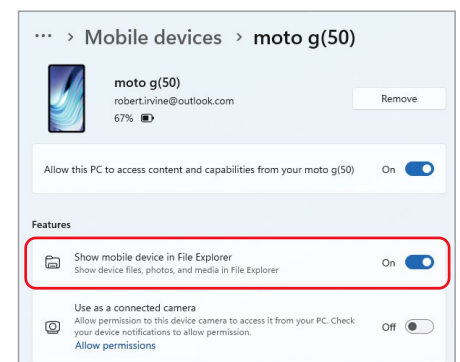
7 EXPAND YOUR STORAGE WITH AN OLD PHONE

Although phones don't usually have as much storage as PCs, any extra space is always welcome. Copying files to an old phone also gives you a portable backup, without needing to upload them to an online storage service.

It's technically possible to use a phone as a NAS, but it's fiddly to set up – usually requiring **rooting** – and needs the device to be constantly plugged into mains power, which can cause its battery to swell. A better option is to make your

phone accessible in File Explorer, so you can copy files to and from it as you would with an external hard drive.

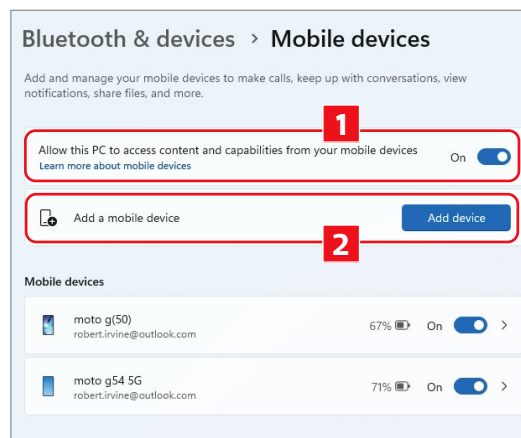
The simplest way to do this is by using Phone Link in Windows 11. Install the 'Link to Windows' app on your old Android phone – it must be running Android 10 or later (the iOS version doesn't support the feature). Open the Settings app in Windows 11 and select 'Bluetooth & devices' then 'Mobile devices'. Switch on 'Allow this PC to



Ensure your old phone shows as a drive in File Explorer

Your phone will now appear in File Explorer – if it doesn't, select it on the 'Mobile devices' screen and switch on 'Show mobile device in File Explorer' (see screenshot above right). You can browse its internal storage, drag files and folders from your PC, create new folders and delete unwanted items.

You never need to open the (often intrusive) Phone Link app – it just needs to be installed on your PC. Note that File Explorer doesn't show your phone's storage capacity, so check that in the device's Storage settings.



Link your phone to your PC to use it as an external hard drive

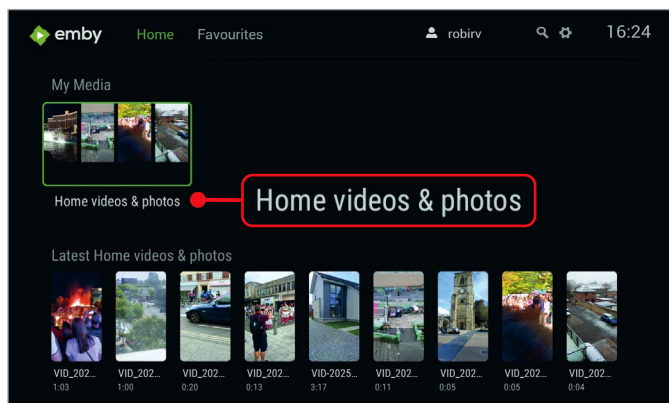
8 TURN YOUR PHONE INTO A MEDIA SERVER

An old phone with ample storage – or a microSD card inserted – is ideal to use as a portable media server. Load it with music, videos and photos to play and view those files on a PC, smart TV or streaming stick, whether you're at home or away.

The best free service for turning your phone into a media server is Emby (www.snipca.com/60146). The better-known alternatives Plex and Jellyfin don't have server software for mobile devices, only 'client' apps that stream from another server. Download the Emby server for Android (www.snipca.com/60147) – sadly, Apple's restrictions mean the iPhone app is client-only – and install it from the **APK** file.

Grant the app permission to access your phone's storage, then tap 'Open in browser' to launch Emby Server's setup screen and sign up for a free account. Press 'New Library' and select the files you want to host on your Emby media server. You can specify the content type, such as Movies, Music, TV shows and 'Home videos & photos' (see screenshot above right).

Files play and display directly in your media server and can be added to collections and playlists. Create additional libraries by going to Emby's Settings and

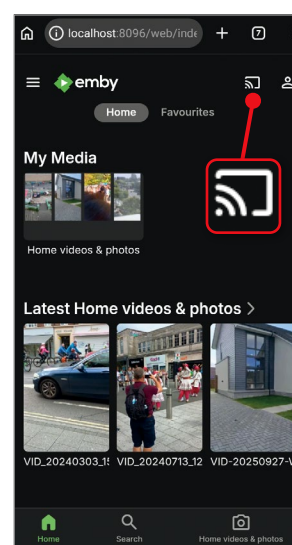


Run an Emby server on your phone to stream content to other devices

tapping Library, then New Library.

To access your Emby library on another device, install its app for desktop, mobile and most streaming platforms (www.snipca.com/60148). In our screenshot above, we're viewing home videos stored on our phone in the Emby app for Android/Google TV. The mobile server also has a Cast button (see screenshot right) that lets you **cast** content to compatible TVs and streaming sticks.

Alternatively, enter the server's IP address in your web browser. To find this, tap your profile icon in Emby Server, select Manage Emby Server and note the address next to 'Home (LAN) access'. There's also an address for remote access, if your router supports **port forwarding**.



Cast your Emby library to a compatible smart TV or streaming stick

9 CONTROL YOUR PC WITH YOUR PHONE

In our 'Bin your TV remote' feature in Issue 742 (page 60), we explained how you can use your phone as a virtual remote for your smart TV or streaming stick. You can also turn an old device into a remote for your PC, to either supplement or replace your standard keyboard and mouse (if either stops working).

A virtual PC remote lets you control your computer from across the room and is easier to use than a laptop trackpad. It can also be quickly recharged without you needing to replace the batteries – as you do with most wireless mice.

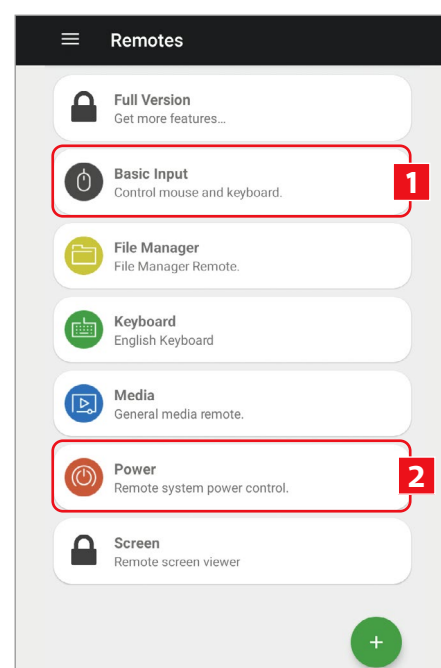
The simplest way to convert an old phone into a PC remote is using the free software Unified Remote (www.unifiedremote.com). Install its Windows server on your computer and its mobile app on your Android phone or iPhone. Select the 'Basic Input' option (1 in our screenshot) and your phone will be instantly transformed into a wireless

remote control for your PC.

Swipe your finger around the screen of your phone to control the cursor on your PC. Tap with one finger to left-click and two fingers to right-click; drag with two fingers to scroll web pages and documents; and pinch the screen to zoom in and out.

Press the keyboard icon to type on your PC using your phone's touchscreen keyboard. Unified Remote also includes remotes for media playback, browsing drives and folders, and a Power option (2) for restarting and shutting down your computer. However, some features require a subscription, which costs £2.99 a month.

An alternative is the Android app Bluetooth Keyboard & Mouse (www.snipca.com/60149). This doesn't require you to install software on your PC, but instead connects via Bluetooth. You may need to disable Microsoft's Phone Link (see page 55) for the app to work.



Unified Remote turns an old phone into a remote for your PC

10 CREATE A PORTABLE GAMES CONSOLE

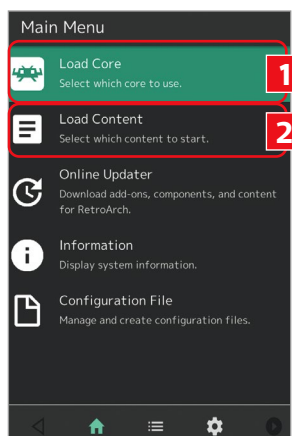
If you enjoy playing games on your phone, but find they take up a lot of space, drain its battery and are frequently interrupted by notifications from other apps, why not turn an old device into a dedicated games console? This will let you play without storage or performance concerns, and without interruptions. It protects your privacy too – many mobile games have trackers that collect your data – especially if you play offline.

You could feasibly download lots of games to your old phone from the Google Play Store or Apple App Store. However, if you prefer simpler games – without ads and in-app purchases – the best option is RetroArch (www.retroarch.com).

This free app for Android (www.snipca.com/60156) and iOS (www.snipca.com/60157) lets you install **emulators** for classic consoles and computers including the Atari 2600, Commodore 64, Nintendo NES, Sony PlayStation and **MS-DOS**. You can then download free **ROMs** for games and make your old phone a portable arcade.

There are several good sources of legal ROMs, including Itch.io (www.snipca.com/60158), MAME (www.snipca.com/60159) and PDR (www.snipca.com/60160). The Internet Archive (www.archive.org) has thousands of classic games, though many are copyrighted so not technically legal to download.

Add emulators to RetroArch to turn your phone into a games console



Five more uses for an old phone

Weather station

WhatWeather (Android www.snipca.com/59216; iOS www.snipca.com/59275) displays a detailed weather forecast on your old phone. This includes temperature, rainfall, wind speed, humidity and much more – and it updates automatically every 30 minutes.

Digital clock

Keep the time and date constantly displayed by installing a big-clock app on your old phone. For Android, use the free Digital Clock (www.snipca.com/60164, pictured left) and for iPhone try ClockPhone (www.snipca.com/60165).

Smart-home controller

Keep your smart devices separate from

your main phone by controlling them from an old phone. Install the Google Home, Alexa, Apple Home or Samsung SmartThings apps to give you a dashboard for your TV, speaker, lighting and more.

Digital photo frame

An old phone with a large screen can serve as a digital photo frame by displaying a slideshow of your picture library. Fotoo for Android (www.snipca.com/60166) and 'Digital Photo Frame with Music' for iOS (www.snipca.com/60167) are the best options.

TV remote

As mentioned opposite, you can use an old phone as a TV remote. Either install the TV manufacturer's app or, if you have devices from different brands, a universal remote such as Universal TV Remote Control for Android (www.snipca.com/59888) or TVRem for iOS (www.snipca.com/59887).

To use RetroArch, tap Load Core in the main menu (1 in our screenshot below left), followed by 'Download a Core' and select the emulator(s) you want to install. Download a game from one of the sites we recommend, then tap Load Content (2) followed by Open to add it to RetroArch

– you may need to move it to a new folder first.

Tap the game to load it and use the controls to play – rotate your phone to landscape mode (see screenshot below left) for a proper handheld-console experience. Press the RetroArch logo to



Put your phone in landscape mode for a handheld-console experience

pause a game and tweak its settings – including audio and video quality.

You can make games easier to play by connecting a controller to your old phone, either via Bluetooth or USB-C. The GameSir NovaLite currently costs £25 (www.snipca.com/60163) and works with Android and iOS. **ca**

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- Why you must use Phone Link The smartest hidden tool on your PC

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The collage features several covers of the **Computer active** magazine. The central cover is the December 2025 issue (Issue 724), which highlights 'BEST NEW SOFTWARE for 2026'. Other visible covers include one about NHS apps, another about Zorin Linux, and one about Windows 10. A large red starburst graphic on the right side of the collage contains the text 'SAVE 37%*'. The background of the collage has a blue and white circuit-like pattern.

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Hide your real email address

Avoid spam and phishing scams by using an email alias to sign up with websites. Robert Irvine reveals the best free services to use



In July, Apple's Hide My Email service (available with a paid-for iCloud+ subscription) was reported to be exposing its users' email addresses (www.snipca.com/60198). As the purpose of the service is to conceal your real email address behind a fake one, this was a serious privacy flaw, though it's since been fixed.

Thankfully, there are alternative email-alias options, which are free to use and – unlike Hide My Email – aren't tied to iOS or macOS. Here, we explain why you should use one and reveal the best services.

Why you should use email aliases

Block spam at the source

Email aliases save you having to rely on spam filters to stop junk messages reaching your inbox. They give websites and apps a fake email address to prevent your real one from being shared with marketing companies and spammers.

You can create separate email aliases for specific purposes – such as signing up for newsletters, entering online competitions and registering with new online services. If spam is forwarded to your main inbox, you can block further junk mail by deleting or deactivating the alias it was sent to.

Some email-alias services have their own spam filters, which doubles the strength of your protection against unwanted messages.

Stay safe from data breaches

When your email address is involved in a data breach or leak, there's a risk it could be used in **phishing** campaigns and other scams. If you use the same email address for several websites, and haven't set strong passwords, the danger is even greater because criminals can potentially take over your accounts.

Using email aliases significantly reduces these security risks because your real address stays private. A leaked alias is effectively worthless because criminals can't target your inbox, access your other accounts or pretend to be you.

Aliases also make scams easier to spot. If you create a fake address to sign up with a specific site, then start receiving unsolicited emails to that alias, you'll know something is amiss – and where the data leak occurred.

Reply from your fake address

One drawback to disposable-email services such as Temp Mail (www.temp-mail.org) is that you can't reply to messages you receive. That isn't a problem when using them for account-verification, but prevents you from responding to emails when necessary. Nor can you refer back to messages later, because they're usually deleted within 24 hours (sometimes 30 minutes).

In contrast, many email-alias services let you reply from your fake address without revealing your real one. And because messages are forwarded to your

main inbox, you can keep them for as long as you want.

Which email-alias service should you use?

GOLD AWARD

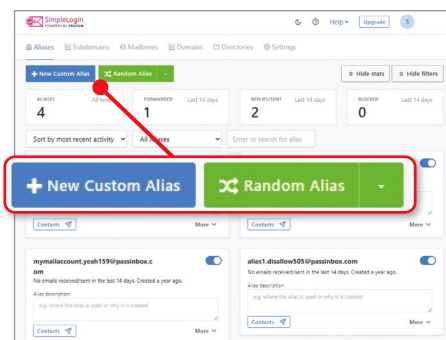
SimpleLogin

www.snipca.com/60188



SimpleLogin is owned by the privacy-focused software company Proton and lets you sign up with either your Proton account or another email address. Although some SimpleLogin features are only available in its paid-for Premium plan, it gives you 10 email aliases for free. You can delete an alias to make space for another one, so you'll always have plenty to choose from.

You can manage your aliases through SimpleLogin's online dashboard, and its extension for Chromium browsers and Firefox. It also has apps for Android



Create up to 10 email aliases for free using Proton's SimpleLogin

(www.snipca.com/60192) and iOS (www.snipca.com/60193). With the extension installed, just click the SimpleLogin icon in an email field to generate an alias. Alternatively, click its toolbar button for further options, then copy an alias to your clipboard.

You can choose between a custom alias (with your preferred prefix) or a random one (see screenshot below left), and from domains including 's1mail.me' and 'passinbox.com'. Reply to an email forwarded to your inbox and SimpleLogin automatically uses the relevant alias.

However, to send a new message from the alias you need to pay for the Premium plan. This costs £2.93 a month or £26.30 a year and includes unlimited aliases and mailboxes (so you can connect multiple email accounts); the option to use your own domain; and PGP encryption.

The free version should be enough for most people and we like that SimpleLogin has anti-spam filters to keep your inbox uncluttered. Though it isn't as smartly designed as Proton's other tools, it's suitably simple to use.

SILVER AWARD

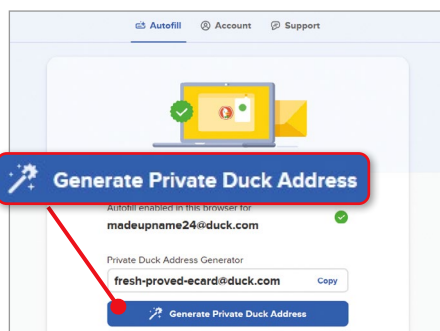
DuckDuckGo Email Protection

www.snipca.com/60195



DuckDuckGo Email Protection places no limit on how many email aliases you can create for free. It's even easier to use than SimpleLogin, but you need to either switch to DuckDuckGo's browser or install its extension, which changes your search engine and New Tab page to DuckDuckGo.

If you're happy with that, Email

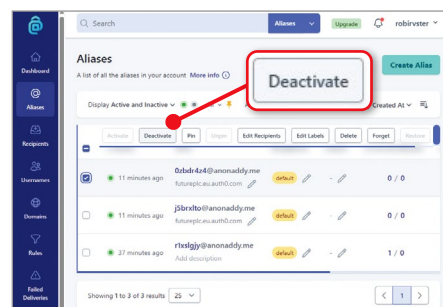


DuckDuckGo can hide both your fake email address and real one

Protection is an excellent service for avoiding spam, scams and online tracking. It gives you an '@duck.com' Duck address that forwards emails to your regular inbox and removes any hidden trackers they contain. You can then generate additional private Duck addresses – or aliases – that conceal both your main Duck address and your real one, doubling your protection against email threats. Any emails you reply to will appear to come from the selected address.

To use the tool, click the DuckDuckGo logo in an email field and choose either your Duck address or 'Generate a Private Duck Address' to create a new alias. Alternatively, click the extension's toolbar button or open the Autofill settings and select Generate Private Duck Address (see screenshot above).

Unlike in SimpleLogin, you can't manage your aliases through an online dashboard, but it's possible to change your forwarding address. Email Protection is also available in the DuckDuckGo browser for Android (www.snipca.com/59844) and iOS (www.snipca.com/59845).



Addy.io's dashboard makes it easy to manage your email aliases

BRONZE AWARD

Addy.io

www.snipca.com/60196



Addy.io's free plan lets you create 10 email aliases that forward messages to your main inbox.

However, unlike our Gold and Silver award winners, you can't reply to those emails (they'll be bounced back if you try). It also limits you to 10MB of messages a month, whereas the other two are unlimited.

Aside from those restrictions, Addy.io offers enough to merit our Bronze award. And its Lite plan, which lets you reply to 50 emails a day, costs only £12 a year.

Addy.io benefits from a smart online dashboard that makes it easy to manage your aliases and view your email activity. You can deactivate and delete aliases you no longer need (see screenshot above) and see how many messages have been forwarded to your real email address.

Click the Settings tab to choose your preferred alias domain (the free plan limits you to two) and the default format for fake addresses, such as random characters.

With the Addy.io extension installed, you can create aliases on the fly. A paid-for subscription unlocks lots of extra features, including the ability to block senders, create rules for incoming messages and send new messages from aliases (as well as replying to them).

Best of the rest

Firefox Relay

www.snipca.com/60197

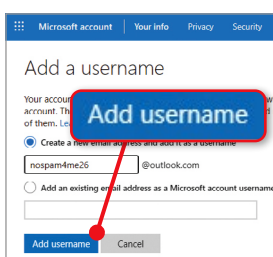


Firefox Relay now lets you create 50 email 'masks' (aliases) for free and blocks trackers when it forwards messages. But to generate them, you need to either install its extension – which is only available for Firefox – or upgrade to Relay Premium. This costs £1.49 a month or £8.79 a year, and also lets you reply to messages anonymously and block spam. **ca**

Create email aliases in Outlook

Google doesn't let you use email aliases in Gmail unless you pay for a Google Workspace account. You can add extra words followed by a plus sign to your username, such as 'yourname+work@gmail.com', but that won't protect your privacy.

Microsoft does offer the feature, allowing you to sign up with websites using aliases (which it calls 'usernames'), and send and reply to messages from your fake addresses. Go to www.snipca.com/60199, sign into your Microsoft



account and select 'Create a new email address and add it as an alias'.

Enter a new username to appear before the '@outlook.com' part of your email address, then click 'Add username' (see screenshot). You can create

up to 10, but only two new ones within a seven-day period.

To send an email from an alias, click the dropdown 'From:' menu in Outlook (web or desktop) and select the fake address. You can even make an alternate username your primary Outlook address.

Bring old software back from the dead

Programs you once loved are still available if you know where to look. **Daniel Booth** reveals how to revive five old Microsoft classics, plus one from Google



1 Windows Movie Maker (8.8MB)

Microsoft released this classic program in 2000 and it was subsequently part of Windows XP (2001), Vista (2006) and Windows 7 (2009), before being left out of Windows 8. You could still get it by installing Windows Essentials 2012, but Microsoft eventually discontinued it in 2017, replacing it with Video Editor in Microsoft Photos and now Clipchamp.

As you'd expect, Clipchamp has many more advanced editing features, but in March Microsoft began forcing you to save edited Clipchamp videos to OneDrive rather than locally on your computer. You can still save **RAW** videos on your computer, but you won't be able to make any changes to them without opening them in OneDrive.

Movie Maker doesn't have this restriction, which is one of the reasons many people celebrated its arrival on the Internet Archive in June. To download it, visit www.snipca.com/60175 then scroll down to the Download Options box on the right and click 'Windows Executable'.

Once installed, drag and drop your videos, or click Import Media at the top left (1 in our screenshot above right) and navigate to them on your PC (2). It works on Windows 7, 10 and 11, and uses 97 per cent less **RAM** than Clipchamp, making it suitable for older or low-powered PCs.

To play modern videos in Movie Maker you'll probably need to convert their **codec** to **H.264**, or install a codec pack on



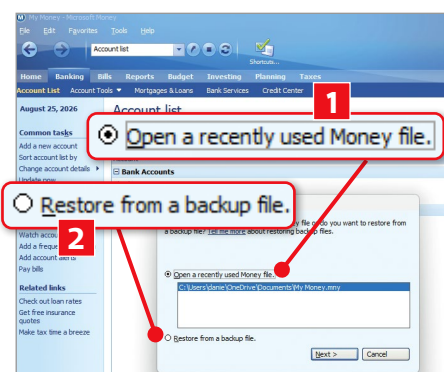
Drag and drop your videos into Movie Maker or click Import Media to find them

your computer. For the former method try an online tool like FreeConvert (www.freeconvert.com) or a desktop program like HandBrake (www.handbrake.fr). For the latter download K-Lite's Codec Pack Mega – visit www.snipca.com/60203 and click Server 1 or 2 under the Location heading.

2 Money Sunset Plus (54.9MB)

From its launch in 1991 to its demise 18 years later, millions of people organised their finances with Money. Microsoft released a Sunset version in 2010 that works entirely offline. That means it can't connect to your bank online, forcing you to enter account details manually. But it does let you open and edit Money data files (which have a .mbf file extension) as well as standard data files (.mny). If those files were created in a version of Money older than 2005 you'd need to convert them to Money 2005 first.

To download Money Sunset from the Internet Archive, visit www.snipca.com.



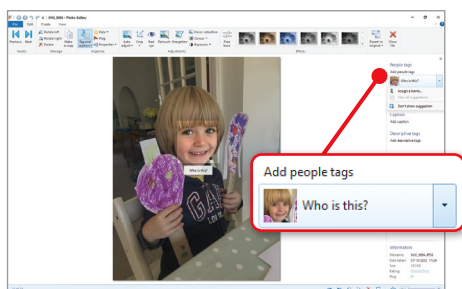
You can restore your backups through Money Sunset

www.snipca.com/60177 then go to the 'Windows Executable Files' box on the right and click 'USMoneyDixSunset.exe'. Choose to create a Money password during installation, and click 'Skip Account Setup' when prompted to enter your bank details because this no longer works.

Once that's done, you can recover old files by opening the File menu at the top left followed by Restore Backup. Select 'Open a recently used Money file' (1 in our screenshot above) or 'Restore from a backup file' (2). Click Next, then follow the instructions.

3 Windows Photo Gallery (1.7GB)

Launched as part of the 2007 Windows Essentials suite, Photo Gallery became one of the best ways to organise and lightly edit photos. Microsoft discontinued it in 2017, but the final version still works



Face-tagging still works in Windows Photo Gallery

on Windows 10 and 11, complete with the popular face-tagging feature (see screenshot above).

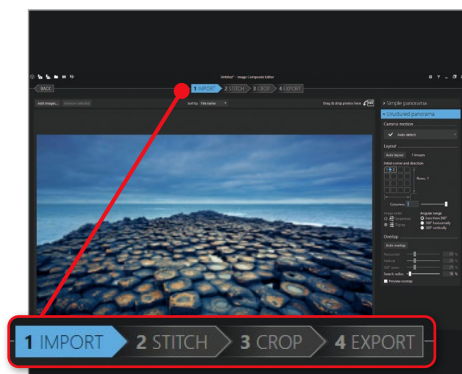
Visit www.snipca.com/60194 then click 'ISO Image' in the Download Options box on the right. Open the 'X19-62243' file that downloads then scroll down to and open the 'en-gb' folder. Next, click the 'wlsetup' file and you'll be asked to download the whole of Essentials (including Messenger, Movie Maker, Mail, Writer and more) or just one program. If all you want is Photo Gallery, select 'Choose the programs you want to install'. Now untick those you don't want, noting that Photo Gallery and Movie Maker come together.

During installation make sure you agree to download .NET Framework 3.5, which Photo Gallery needs to run properly.

4 Microsoft Image Composite Editor (7.6MB)

Microsoft's Image Composite Editor (ICE) was one of the simplest and quickest panorama-making tools ever released. It stitched multiple photos together automatically, producing wide, seamless images without needing any specialist knowledge. Microsoft discontinued it in 2021, but the final version still works perfectly on Windows 10 and 11 and remains popular with photographers who want to make quick, offline panoramas.

Get it from the download [mirror site](#)



Microsoft's Image Composite Editor remains an easy way to create panoramic images

Is it safe and legal to run these programs?

Yes to both, with some caveats. Every program here is discontinued, so will never receive any more security updates. The risk is low because they run entirely offline and only open files already on your PC, which keeps them isolated from most modern malware. Just make sure any files you open in them come from a legitimate source.

Legally, old Microsoft and Google programs are still copyrighted, even if they're no longer sold. But both companies generally tolerate old programs being distributed for free, and you certainly won't get into trouble for downloading them – as long as you only use them personally and don't redistribute or sell the files yourself.

TechSpot – visit www.snipca.com/60205 then click the Windows option below the Download Now heading. During installation you'll need to agree to download Visual C++ 2013 Redistributable Package – or you can preempt this request by downloading it yourself from www.snipca.com/60204.

When the ICE download opens, choose a new panorama from images or a video, or to open one you've already made. It's easy to use – follow the Import, Stitch, Crop, Export workflow at the top (see screenshot below left).

5 Windows Media Center (140MB)

Windows Media Center first appeared in Windows XP Media Center Edition in 2002, before becoming one of the most popular features of Vista (2006) and Windows 7 (2009). It combined TV, recorded programmes, videos, music, pictures and DVDs in one friendly interface. Microsoft removed it from Windows 8 in 2012 and discontinued it entirely in 2015.

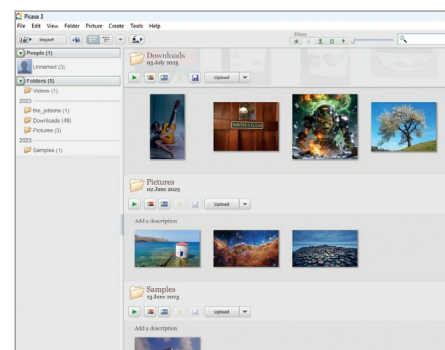
To get it, visit www.snipca.com/60213 and click the long GitHub link at the top. Don't bother ticking the Mini Mods box during installation. Note that some of Media Center's original features won't work because they relied on bygone online services – and you wouldn't be safe going online with it anyway (see box

above). However, core features – playing DVDs (see screenshot below left), browsing videos, music and photos – still run fine offline.

6 Picasa (13.6MB)

And finally we move beyond Microsoft to focus on the best-loved of Google's former programs. Google no longer provides a download link for Picasa, but the final version is still available on reputable software-archive sites including Major Geeks.

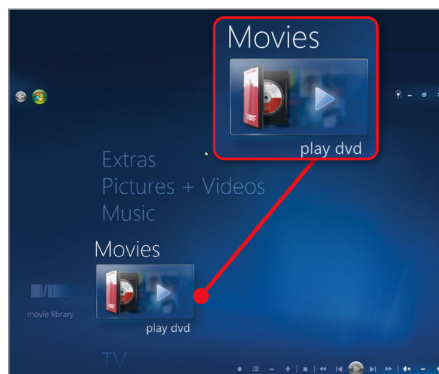
Visit www.snipca.com/60191 then click the army-style Download Now button near the top. During installation leave 'Run Picasa 3' ticked if you want it to launch straight away. It'll also ask you to scan your entire computer for photos or just the My Documents and My Pictures folders, as well as your desktop.



Picasa will scan your PC then group your photos by folder and date

Another prompt asks you to use Picasa as the default photo viewer. We'd advise selecting 'Don't use Picasa Photo Viewer' because otherwise every picture you double-click will launch the whole Picasa interface. Finally, Google asks whether you want the old Google Photos Backup. This was axed years ago, so click 'No, thanks' (and see page 38 for alternatives).

Once Picasa has scanned your computer, you'll see your photos arranged just as in our screenshot above, grouped by folder and date. [ca](#)



Install Windows Media Center to play your DVDs

Problems **Solved**

Our experts solve all your tech problems

PROBLEM OF THE FORTNIGHT

Can I still activate Windows 7?

Q I recently formatted my Windows 7 PC – by accident! – so I decided to re-install it using the original install discs. However, I can't register the product with Microsoft and just get an error code.

After numerous attempts I decided to buy another Windows 7 Pro install disc, but the end result was the same. I then decided to upgrade to Windows 10 using a Windows 10 upgrade disc I already owned but had never used. This registered automatically and I was good to go. However, I wanted Windows 7 specifically for old software and games that wouldn't run on my other Windows 10 machine.

Is Microsoft doing this on purpose in order to deter people from going back to Windows 7? Or is there a way to sort this problem?

Paul Staniforth

A This is happening because Microsoft has disabled some old activation methods. It is still possible to activate Windows 7, but you have to jump through more hoops than before. There also used to be a backup method of activation by phone, but that's also closed down – so it's easy to feel like you've hit a dead end.

Type the Confirmation ID into the Windows Activation box

Windows Activation

Activate Windows now

Step 1: To get a confirmation ID, call:

0800 018 8354 (toll-free)

+44 203 1474930 (toll)

not available (SMS)

Step 2: Follow phone system instructions to enter the installation ID:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

001231

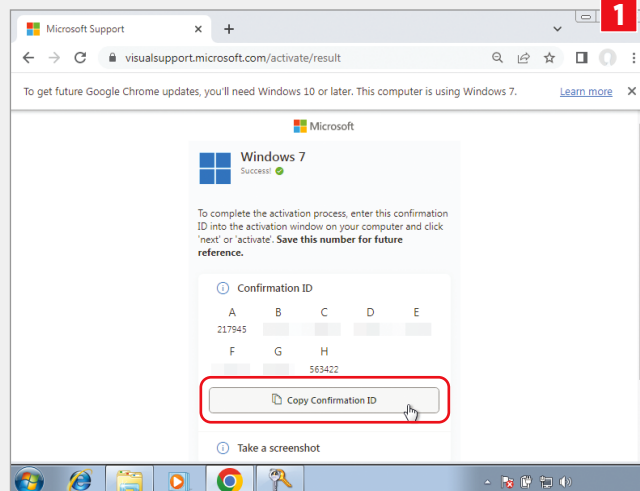
Step 3: Type the confirmation ID the phone system gives you:

A B C D E F G H

217945

217945

Next Cancel



1 You can still activate Windows 7 from Microsoft's website, but it's not as easy as it used to be

We're not sure whether all this is intentional on Microsoft's part, but you certainly need to work harder than previously to get Windows 7 activated.

To start the activation process, launch Control Panel then click 'System and Security' followed by System, and then Activate Windows followed by 'Activate Windows online now'. Wait a moment for that to fail, then click 'Show me other ways to activate' followed by 'Use the automated phone system'. Choose United Kingdom from the dropdown menu, then click Next.

You'll now see a Windows Activation box displaying a UK freephone number.

However, if you dial it you'll simply learn that, as noted, the telephone-activation service has been discontinued. Instead, keeping this box open, switch to your web browser and visit <https://visualsupport.microsoft.com> – which is what has replaced the other activation methods.

On this website, click the blue 'Let's Get Started' button and then click 'Activate a Microsoft Product' followed by Windows and then Windows 7. Next, you'll be asked to enter the nine-segment Installation ID that's displayed under the Step 2 heading in the Windows Activation box. As you type this in, the corresponding nine boxes will populate. When you're done, a 'Copy Confirmation ID' button will appear (see screenshot **1**): click this. You should also note down this number for your own future reference.

Now flip back to the Windows Activation box and type the Confirmation ID into the boxes labelled A to H under the Step 3 heading **2**. We're afraid you can't use the Ctrl+V paste shortcut, as it will fill only the first box – so accept that it's a brief manual slog. Click Next, wait a few moments and – all being well – your copy of Windows 7 will now be activated.

Is my old digital photo frame useless?

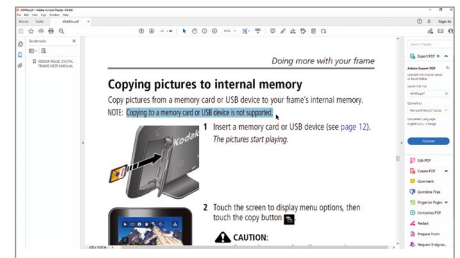
Q Quite a long time ago, I bought my elderly mother, who wasn't very technical, a Kodak Pulse digital photo frame (pictured). I could then email photos of my kids directly to the device, which sat on her mantelpiece.

I'd forgotten all about it until she recently passed away, and I found it while sorting her possessions. It still powers up and has some old photos on it. Is there any way to recover them, and can the frame still be used to add new pictures? Or is it now effectively obsolete?

Stephen Chalmers



The Kodak Pulse digital photo frame has now been discontinued



Download the manual for the Kodak Pulse from the ManualsLib archive

A There's good news and bad. Let's get the bad news out of the way first. We're afraid that Kodak designed the Pulse as a one-way device only, so while it can receive photos it will only ever display them – they can't be passed on or copied elsewhere. There's no export function, no way to copy images to a memory card or USB stick, and no option to access it from a PC as if it were a storage device. In short, what's on there is effectively locked in.

The other piece of bad news is that the frame's headline feature – the ability to email photos directly to it – relied on the kodakpulse(dot)com online service, which was switched off in 2018 (and the domain appears now to be owned by scammers). So, you can't email photos to it as you used to, and connecting it to Wi-Fi won't restore that functionality.

Now for the better news. The photos you can see are stored safely in the frame's internal memory, so they're

not going anywhere – at least while the device itself remains working. If any of the pictures are particularly important, the only realistic option is to literally photograph the screen while they're being displayed. A tad ridiculous, we know – but that's just how it is.

Finally, the frame can still be used to display new photos via its USB port or memory card slot. Just connect your digital media and then follow the Pulse's prompts to either display them directly, or copy them to its own internal memory for use in slideshow mode.

If you're not sure what all the icons do, you can download the device's manual from the ManualsLib archive at www.snipca.com/59958 (see screenshot above).

Why does Microsoft Store stop me renaming files?

Q Since earlier this year, probably after a Windows update and on all three of my computers, whenever I've tried to rename a file or folder, the Microsoft Store opens and blocks what I'm trying to do. I have to close the Store window before I can rename the file.

I've tried disabling the Microsoft Store, but it's had no effect. Have you any idea what's causing this and how to stop it happening? It's one heck of a nuisance.

Carl Hughes

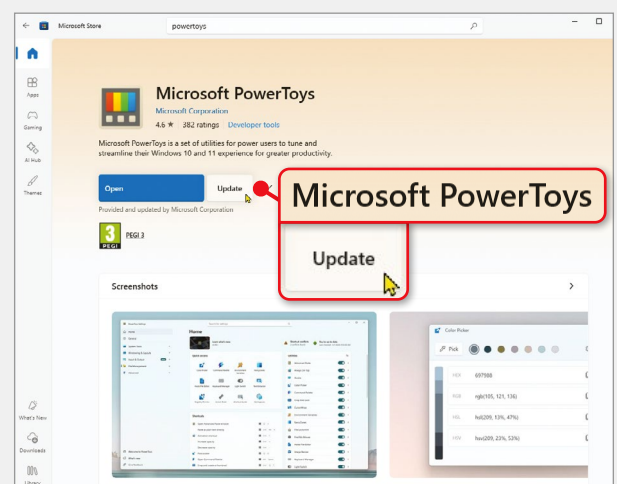
A We scratched our heads on this one for a good while. We then had a lightbulb moment when we noticed that what you described as the Microsoft Store in your screenshot wasn't actually the Microsoft Store. Rather, it's a PowerToys Peek window that has failed to display a

Download the latest version of PowerToys to fix the renaming bug

preview, so is instead showing a 'Search in Microsoft Store' link.

That's key, because there was a bug in earlier editions of PowerToys that would cause Peek to open after pressing the space bar when File Explorer was in a renaming state. As the space bar tends to be pressed a lot when renaming files, Peek launches – but then fails to display a preview because you're in the middle of renaming.

This bug has since been fixed by Microsoft, so the simple solution here is to download the latest version of



PowerToys from www.snipca.com/59961 (see screenshot) to all your machines. If for some reason you want to keep an older version of PowerToys installed, switching off Peek will also make the problem go away.

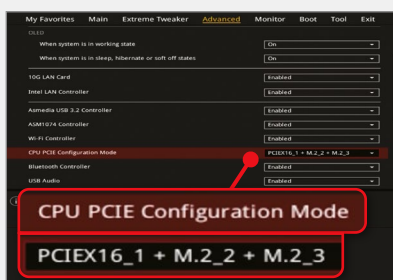
Why don't my PCI Express slots work?

Q I built a PC using an Asus TUF Gaming B450-Plus II motherboard. However, while it has three smaller PCI Express (PCIe) slots, none appears to work. The only way I could get a PCIe Wi-Fi card to work was by plugging it into the full-length GPU PCIe slot. Online comments suggests a clash with M.2 drives, but my system doesn't have these. I'm clearly missing something. Any ideas?

Bill Power

A Yes, we suspect that the motherboard model's PCIe data lanes are shared with the M.2 slots. If those lanes are currently devoted to the M.2 slots, then one or more PCIe slots won't be functioning.

This is usually fixed in the UEFI/BIOS. To access this on your board, tap the Delete (Del) key repeatedly just after switching on your PC. Now, using the arrow keys and the Enter key, navigate to the Advanced tab of the BIOS and then look for a section called Onboard Devices Configuration (or similar). Within this, look for a setting called 'CPU PCIe Configuration Mode' (or similar – see screenshot below). Here, we expect you'll find the option will be set to one PCIe slot and two M.2 slots – but what you actually want is the option that enables two or more of the PCIe slots. So, select the one you want, then navigate to the Exit tab, choose 'Save Changes & Reset' then choose OK.



Look for the CPU PCIe Configuration Mode setting in the UEFI/BIOS

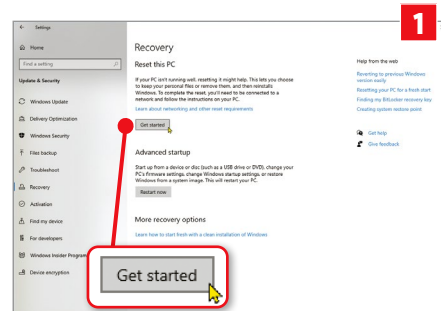
Can I reset Windows but keep my files?

Q My Windows 10 HP all-in-one desktop PC can't be upgraded due to its proprietary motherboard. As I'm in my 85th year, it could yet outlive me. Trouble is, it's full of crud. Despite regular clear-outs using CCleaner and more lately BleachBit, it still runs really slowly.

I'm thinking of performing a factory reset, but I remember reading somewhere that there's an alternative that would retain all my files and folders in their places. I'd prefer this, but I'm unable to find any details on how to do it. Your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Chris Parker

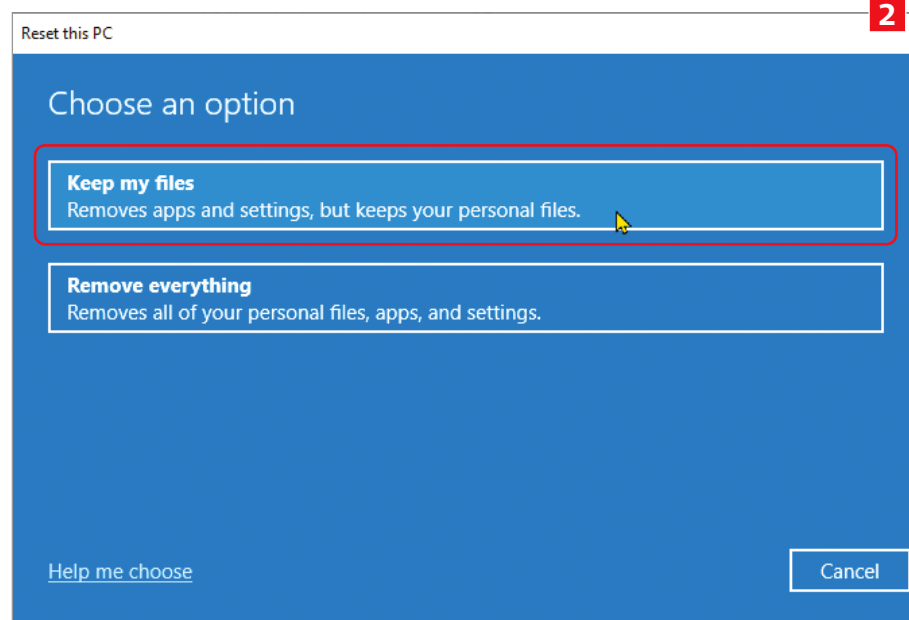
A It's true that a factory reset is the only sure-fire way of restoring a PC to previous performance highs. But you're also right that there's an in-between option that essentially erases everything apart from your own personal files and folders. It's not quite as cleansing as a full-on factory reset



Click the 'Get started' button in the Recovery section of the Settings menu

but, in the vast majority of cases, it's almost as effective – so we'd certainly recommend trying it first.

Even though the whole point of this process is to retain your stuff, you should still back up before proceeding. Then click Start followed by the Settings cog, and then 'Update & Security' followed by Recovery. Next, under 'Reset this PC', click 'Get started' (see screenshot 1) followed by 'Keep my files' 2 and follow the rest of the prompts.



Windows gives you the option of keeping your files when you perform a reset

Q: Can I resurrect my locked DVD player?

A: Issue 716, page 65 – find it on our 2025 Back Issue CD

Buy it from www.snipca.com/57526



Is it safe to use an unsupported phone?

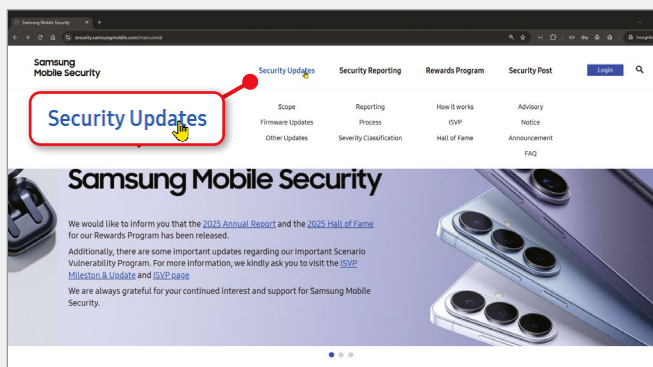
Q A friend and I both own Samsung A52s mobile phones (pictured). Security updates for these ended last year. We're considering the risk we're taking by continuing to use the phones.

I install apps only from the Google Play Store and keep them updated, and have enabled biometric logins wherever possible. I also use the Samsung Secure Folder feature for financial and medical apps, Brave as my browser, and Windscribe as my VPN. I even have Pi-hole installed on a Raspberry Pi as my DNS server on my home network, as per Nik Rawlinson's excellent How To in Issue 688 (page 35).

Given the above, could I keep using this phone for another year or so?

A There are really two answers to this question.

Responsibly, we must say that any out-of-support device could be compromised at any time – and vulnerabilities may never be patched. From that perspective, it's increasingly



Keep an eye on Samsung's security updates for news about vulnerabilities



risky to keep using your phone.

However, while security breaches do happen with worrying regularity – and grab big headlines – it's much less common for such hacks to be personally damaging. The worst attacks target large numbers of people or big corporations rather than individuals. Such security lapses might lead to personal data being leaked, but that's rarely because specific phones hadn't been updated. Moreover, your own behaviour tells us that you're pretty savvy – so we'd say your individual risk is low. It's still worth keeping an eye

on Samsung's security page at <https://security.samsungmobile.com> (see screenshot), however.

So, does that mean we think you're good to continue using your A52s for a bit longer? Yes, but with caveats. Using a VPN, privacy-focused browser and DNS control will not patch operating system flaws. Should one be discovered then, depending on its nature, we'd give serious consideration to whether it's time to upgrade – because it's very unlikely that Samsung will issue a fix.

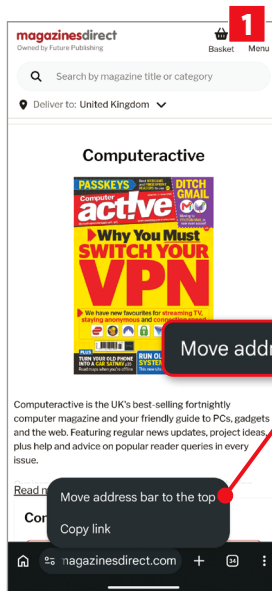
Why has my search bar moved?

Q I don't know why, but the search bar on my Android phone has suddenly moved from the top to the bottom of the screen. It still works as before, but I find this position really distracting and I have no idea how it's happened. My phone was updated recently, so could it be because of that?

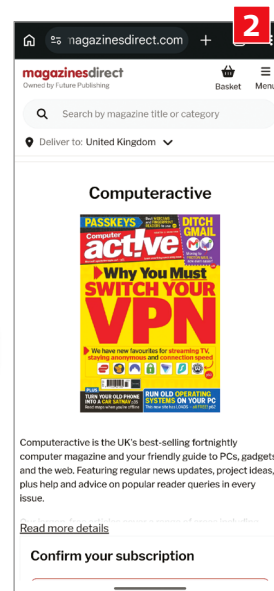
I've looked through the settings and can't find anything to put it back where it was. Are you able to advise?

Malcolm Ellis

A You didn't tell us which Android phone you have or which browser you're using, but it's possible that an update brought a new version of the web browser, with the search bar positioned at the bottom. However, in the default Chrome browser, it's actually pretty easy to make this change by accident, and not even realise – so we suspect that's what actually happened.



Tap and hold the address bar to bring up the option to move it to the top



The address bar will then appear at the top of the browser window

To understand how it probably happened, and to fix it, just tap your finger on the address bar and then hold it there for half a second. Now just tap the 'Move address bar to the top' option (see screenshot 1). You can probably appreciate how an inadvertent finger fumble could cause this to happen.

If you're using a different browser, you might need to switch the option in its own Settings page, not the phone's Settings tool. In Edge, for example, first tap the Menu button (three horizontal lines, bottom right), followed by Settings. Next, tap 'Appearance and layout' followed by 'Address bar' and then Top.

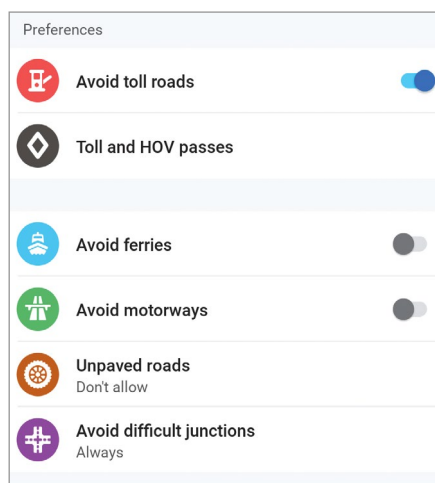
Can I turn my car's screen into a sat nav?

Q I have a 2022 Peugeot 208 car that has an infotainment screen, including Android Auto. What it doesn't have is a built-in sat nav. I can connect my Android phone and get Google Maps, but I find this very difficult to use. Is it possible to convert the screen to include a sat nav, or would that also require additional hardware?

William Daniel

A It is possible to buy an aftermarket replacement head unit (as they're known) for almost any modern car, but practically all of them are based on some variant of Android – so replacing what's in your vehicle probably wouldn't help here. Besides, it sounds as though your problem isn't really with Android Auto at all, but with Google Maps.

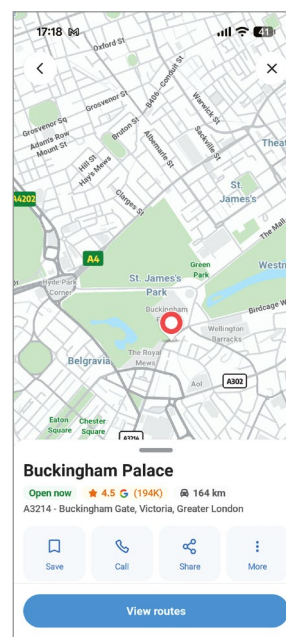
The good news is that nothing says you have to use Google Maps. It's simply Android Auto's default navigation app,



Waze can adjust your driving route to help you avoid toll roads

and there are plenty of alternatives that many drivers actually prefer.

Perhaps surprisingly, one of the most popular is also owned by Google – though only because the company bought the original developer a few years ago. Called Waze, it has an interface that many feel is friendlier than Google Maps (see screenshot above right), along with traffic jams, roadworks, speed cameras and so forth reported by drivers. It can



Many users find the Waze interface friendlier than Google Maps

also redirect your route to avoid toll roads (see screenshot above left). It's free to download from www.snipca.com/59962 and free to use, so you've little to lose by giving it a go.

Once installed, just tap the Waze icon on your Peugeot's Android Auto screen instead of Google Maps.

How do I set up my old Wi-Fi extender?

Q I have Windows 10 laptop that I'd like to use in a room where the Wi-Fi is poor. I do have a TP-Link TL-WA801ND extender (pictured) but can't remember how to set it up. It has an Ethernet input port. Could you help?

Brian Carrington

A Your device can serve as either an **access point** or an extender. The former mode requires a cabled Ethernet connection to your router, but the latter mode doesn't – and it's an extender that you want, so that keeps it easy.

Just plug it into a mains socket in your room, then use your laptop or smartphone to connect to its default Wi-Fi network (the details of which are printed on a label on the underside). Then, access the administration page by launching a web browser and visiting <http://tplinkap.net>, logging in with the default username and password of



The TP-Link TL-WA801ND can be used as either an access point or an extender

'admin'. Click 'Quick Setup' followed by 'Repeater (Range Extended)' and follow the prompts to have the extender connect to your normal Wi-Fi network.

Incidentally, the device's full instruction manual is still available to view or download from the TP-Link website at www.snipca.com/59963.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN...

Bots and chatbots?

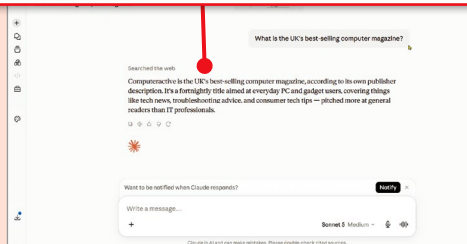
Q Call me stupid, but when and why did bots become a good thing? For years I've understood that bots are a dangerous phenomenon, creating hack attacks and so on. I believe some are even controlled by rogue states, the names of which I don't need to mention! So why is everyone suddenly obsessed by chatbots such as ChatGPT and Claude?

David Petch

A It's a reasonable question, but one that's perhaps rooted in a misconception: that bots are inherently bad things. They can be – and often are – but that was never the original idea.

First, just for anyone who might not know, 'bot' is simply a contraction of 'robot'. We won't deliver a history lesson about that word, but the original vision was to free humanity from boring old manual labour. Traditionally that meant physical work, but today a

Computeractive is the UK's best-selling computer magazine, according to its own publisher description. It's a fortnightly title aimed at everyday PC and gadget users, covering things like tech news, troubleshooting advice, and consumer tech tips – pitched more at general readers than IT professionals.



AI chatbots such as Claude can answer queries using natural language

bot is more likely to be a piece of software that carries out tasks automatically.

These can be put to use for good or ill. Price-comparison websites, for example, rely on bots to crawl retailers' websites looking for the latest deals. But there are lots of malicious bots too. Cyber-criminals create networks of malware-infected computers – known as botnets – and use them for everything from hacking to spreading spam and disinformation.

All of which brings us to chatbots such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, Anthropic's Claude and Google's Gemini. Sure, they're bots – but of a different kind. These employ artificial intelligence (AI) to understand and generate natural language rather than carry out repetitive tasks or launch attacks. You can ask them questions, create document drafts or get explanations of complex topics in simple terms. The idea isn't new, but the advances in AI have made them dramatically better tools. Conversations with modern chatbots feel very close to human conversations.

We explored the best (and worst) chatbots in Issue 738's cover feature. If you missed it, you can pick up a back issue from www.snipca.com/59959.

Want to know the difference between technical terms? Email noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Do I need a new Secure Boot certificate on my laptop?

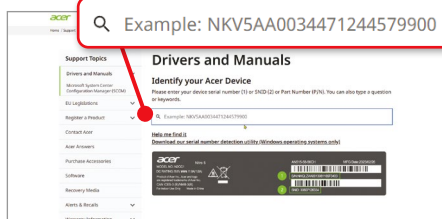
Q My Acer Aspire 5 laptop displayed a messaging saying that Secure Boot was on but that my machine doesn't support the automated certificate update due to hardware or firmware limitations, whatever that means. I clicked a link to learn more, which took me to a Microsoft page that was far too technical for my understanding. Is this something I should be concerned about?

John Coole

A Not immediately, no – but you should do a little investigating.

Microsoft is updating the digital certificates used by Secure Boot, which is a security feature that checks the software loaded when your laptop starts, before Windows itself launches. It helps prevent certain types of malware from loading before Windows, and is an important extra layer of protection.

The certificate-update process is being rolled out gradually. Your laptop may receive the necessary update



Ensure you enter the exact model number of your computer before updating its firmware

automatically through Windows Update, in which case the warning may simply disappear.

However, it's also possible that your particular Aspire 5 model needs a BIOS/UEFI firmware update. This might be delivered through Windows Update, but it might not, so it's worth checking Acer's support pages at www.snipca.com/59960. Enter your exact model number (see screenshot), expand the BIOS/Firmware section and look for any updates mentioning Secure Boot.

If an update is available, follow Acer's instructions carefully. BIOS updates are usually straightforward, but they should

only be installed for the exact computer model. Be sure to back up your laptop first, in case the update should go wrong, and keep it connected to mains power throughout the process.

Finally, if you do nothing your laptop will continue to work normally. However, because it may not be able to receive new Secure Boot certificates automatically, be sure to check regularly with Acer for BIOS/firmware updates.

Next Issue

ON SALE
Weds
23 Sep

- Is my second-hand phone infected?
- Did BT set up my router incorrectly?
- How do I access my old gadget? ...And many more

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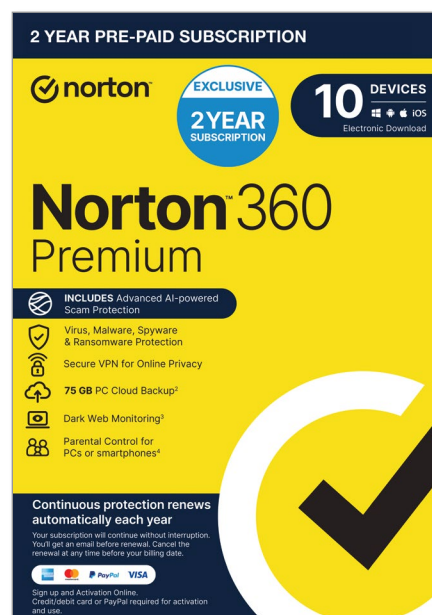
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WHAT YOU GET

- ✓ Real-time malware protection
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- ✓ 75GB PC Cloud Backup

PLUS Monitors the dark web for your personal information



Norton is made by NortonLifeLock Inc – a standalone company dedicated to consumer cyber safety. It has always performed strongly in *Computeractive* antivirus tests, so we highly recommend it.

10 devices for two years NOW ONLY £19.99*
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*while stocks last



Reader Support

Having a problem with our recommended software or expert tips? Email editor@computeractive.co.uk and we'll do our best to help

Why can't I make Thunderbird emails open in DuckDuckGo?

Q I followed your advice in Issue 742's Cover Feature and installed DuckDuckGo's browser (<https://duckduckgo.com>) on my Windows 11 PC. However, there's a specific problem that convinces me to stick with Brave.

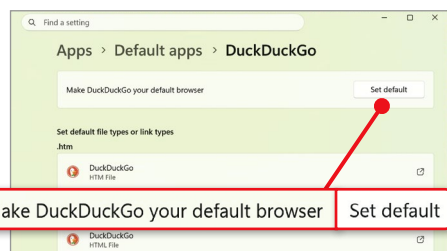
I use Thunderbird to read emails and have configured it to allow me to open my browser of choice for embedded links. It's impossible to configure this feature to use DuckDuckGo as the configuration process refuses to accept the full path to the DuckDuckGo executable file: C:\Users\<user>\AppData\Local\Microsoft\WindowsApps\DuckDuckGo.exe. Can you suggest a workaround?

Raymond Dalgleish

A The DuckDuckGo browser is installed as a modern Windows app, rather than traditional desktop software, which is why Thunderbird may have trouble accessing it directly using the path you've found.

Have you tried setting DuckDuckGo as your default browser in Windows' Settings app? We tried this and it seems to work well, successfully opening the relevant pages in DuckDuckGo whenever we click links in Thunderbird.

To try this, launch Settings, click Apps, 'Default apps' and locate DuckDuckGo in the list. Click it, then click 'Set default' under 'Make DuckDuckGo your default browser' (see screenshot below). After restarting your PC, DuckDuckGo should now be the default for all web links.



Set DuckDuckGo as your default browser in Windows to get links working in Thunderbird

Did Winhance mess up my Outlook and PC?

Q I followed Issue 741's Workshop (page 38) on using Winhance (www.winhance.net) to make important changes to Windows 11.

When I next opened my emails in Outlook 2010, I got the message: 'Description: cid:image001.png@01DD2726.AE0CD520'. The fonts had also changed in my browser and MS Office.

I searched online and it sounds like it was caused by corrupted **HTML file associations** or broken registry keys in Windows. I tried editing the registry, but to no avail. Also, all the app shortcuts on the taskbar have been removed, as has the Phone Link app. What went wrong?

Errol Pillemer

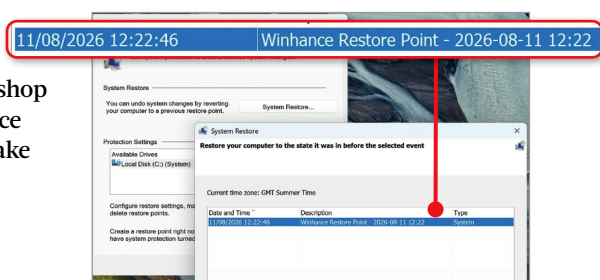
A It's difficult to say because we didn't experience these problems when following the same steps. But as we noted in the Workshop, Windows-tweaking tools can sometimes have unintended effects, which is why we explained how to create a **system restore point** in Step 1.

The fact you're using Outlook 2010 could be significant. Microsoft stopped supporting Office 2010 in 2020, and one of the changes Winhance makes to Windows may have affected a component or setting this older software relies on.

First, try resetting your browser as the default program for web links. Open Windows 11's Settings app and click Apps, then 'Default apps'. Select your browser and click 'Set default'. Restart your PC, then try opening a link in Outlook again.

If that doesn't work, try repairing Office. Search your PC for the old Control Panel and open it, click 'Uninstall a program', select Microsoft Office 2010 and click Change, then select Repair and follow the instructions.

As for Phone Link, Winhance can remove this if you selected it in the 'Software & Apps' section. You can reinstall it for free from the Microsoft



Fix problems caused by Winhance by selecting the restore point and following the prompts

Store. Missing taskbar shortcuts can be added again by opening each program, right-clicking its taskbar icon and selecting 'Pin to taskbar'.

If you still have problems, we'd suggest using the restore point to return Windows to its previous configuration. To do so, click Start and search for 'Create a restore point'. Click this, then click System Restore, Next. Select the Winhance restore point (see screenshot above), then click Next and follow any remaining steps.

Does your recommended tool Kudu contain malware?

Q I've just downloaded the system tool Kudu 1.46 (www.snipca.com/59897) as recommended in Issue 742 (page 18), but my Norton antivirus stopped me installing it. It warned that a virus was present (IDP.Generic) which it then quarantined. Is this real or a **false positive**?

David Lewis

A Assuming you downloaded the Kudu installer from the link we provided, then this is almost certainly a case of Norton falsely identifying it as malware. We ran the download through several security tools and uploaded the file to VirusTotal (www.virustotal.com), where it got a clean bill of health. Try downloading the latest version (1.48 at the time of writing) to see if that helps. If not, follow Norton's advice at www.snipca.com/59997 to restore the file from quarantine.

Jargon Buster

2.5 Gigabit Ethernet A high-speed networking standard with transfer speeds up to 2.5Gbps.

3G/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.

Action camera A digital camera designed to record action while attached to a person's body

ADSL A technology that converts a standard phone line into a broadband internet connection.

AMOLED An alternative tech to LCD for creating flatscreens.

ANC Method for reducing unwanted sound by adding a second sound designed to cancel the first.

Aperture An opening that controls light entering a camera lens.

APK The file format Android uses to install apps.

Aspect ratio A measurement of the shape of a screen.

Auracast Technology that lets Bluetooth devices broadcast audio to nearby earphones.

Benchmarking Comparing products with an accepted standard.

Beta A version of software that's being tested.

Biometric Using measurable personal characteristics, such as fingerprints, for identification.

BIOS Software built into every PC that connects the vital components.

Bloatware Unwanted software built into a new device.

Buffering Downloading a certain amount of data before starting to play a video.

Cast To send content from your PC, phone or tablet to your TV.

cd/m² Candela per square metre. Standard unit of brightness.

Chatbot An AI program designed to recreate conversation with humans.

Codec A file that tells a PC how to record or play a type of media file.

Command Prompt A text-based interface in Windows for writing commands that perform tasks.

Copilot+ Used to classify Windows 11 PCs with an NPU that can perform over 40 trillion operations per second (TOPS).

Core Units on a processor that carry out program instructions.

CPU Central Processing Unit. Another term for a PC processor.

DECT A technology used by cordless digital home telephones.

DNS Tech that associates PCs with their addresses on the internet.

Domain These are used to identify one or more IP addresses.

Driver A file that tells Windows how to work with an external device.

DRM Digital Rights Management. Software that limits the copying of a file.

Efficiency core Processors used for background tasks that don't require much processing power.

Emoji A small graphic that can be inserted into a text or email.

Emulator Software that programs one computer to act like another.

End-to-end encryption A way of encrypting messages so only the sender and recipient can read them.

Equaliser Changes the tone of music produced by a computer or portable player.

eSIM A virtual SIM card that's built into a phone

Ethernet A standard used for almost all wired computer networks.

Executable file/EXE A program file designed to run in Windows.

Factory reset Restoring a device to the manufacturer's default settings.

False positive When an antivirus program wrongly detects a malware infection.

File association A setting that tells Windows which app opens a file type.

Firmware Software stored on hardware to control its operation.

Forked When developers take source code from software to make another program.

Fps Frames per second.

Frame generation Technology that creates extra video frames for smoother motion.

Frame rate The number of still images shown per second to create a moving image.

FTTC Broadband technology that uses fibre-optic cable between a phone exchange and street cabinets.

Full HD 1920x1080 pixels.

Geo-restricted Content that's intended to be watched only in a specific country.

Gigabit Ethernet Networking standard that can transfer data at up to 1,000Mbps.

GPS Global positioning system. Satellite-based navigational system.

GPU A processor for graphics, videos and visual tasks.

Graphics card A component in a computer that produces the image shown on the monitor.

H.264 An MPEG4 video codec used for streaming and Blu-ray.

HDMI A type of connection that transmits high-definition video and audio signals.

HDR Screen tech that improves the range of luminance between the darkest and brightest parts.

HEVC Video file format that offers the same level of picture quality as AVC, but with better compression.

Hotspot A public area covered by a Wi-Fi network that allows you to access the internet.

HTML The language used to write most web pages.

Hz The frequency something happens: 1Hz equals once a second.

IP address A unique set of numbers used to identify computers and websites on the internet.

IP66 Complete protection against dust and resistance against powerful high-pressure water jets.

IP67 Resistant to dust, dirt and sand, and can be placed underwater for 30 minutes.

IPS A screen tech with wider viewing angles and more accurate colours.

Kill switch Quickly shuts down a device or app to stop it working, usually for safety or security.

LAN A computer network in one place, such as a home or office.

Latency A measure of the delay in exchanging data between devices and web servers and on networks.

Liquid cooling A system that circulates water through a computer to keep it cool.

LPDDR5 Low-power mobile RAM, faster and more efficient than previous generations.

LTE A standard for very fast transfer of data on mobile networks.

M.2 A standard specification for PC expansion cards and connectors.

Macro camera Lets you take sharp close-up photos of small objects.

MicroSD card A small type of memory card.

Mirror Third-party download site that hosts software installers.

MS-DOS The standard PC operating system before Windows.

NAS A hard drive attached to a network that can be shared with PCs.

NPU Specialised chip designed for performing AI tasks.

OLED A thin-film light-emitting diode used in TV and PC screens.

Passkey A method for signing into accounts by typing a one-off code, fingerprint or facial recognition.

PCIe A faster slot on the motherboard for expansion cards.

Performance core Processors designed for heavy-duty PC work.

PGP A method for encrypting files and emails.

Phishing Internet fraud that tricks you into revealing personal details.

PIR Passive infrared sensors that measure infrared light from moving objects and people that emit heat.

Plug-in Adds features to software.

PNG An image format that shrinks file sizes using compression.

Port forwarding Choosing which computer in your network a router should connect to.

PowerShell A Windows tool for automating commands.

Progressive web app A website that looks and works like an app.

Proxy server A computer that sits between your PC and the internet and filters the connection.

QR code A square barcode that can be read using smartphones.

RAM Used for data storage while the PC is switched on.

Ransomware Malware run by hackers who lock files on your PC and demand payment to release them.

RAW A format for digital photos that stores the image exactly as the camera captured it.

Ray tracing Provides realistic lighting in an image by recreating how light behaves.

Recovery key A password to access a locked account.

Refresh rate The number of times per second that the image on your monitor is redrawn.

RGB keyboard Advanced type of LED backlit keyboard.

ROM Any memory that can be read but not written to.

Root To perform tasks on Android devices that aren't permitted by the manufacturer.

SD card Secure Digital card. A popular type of memory card.

SIM The smart card used by all mobile phones.

SIM-only A phone package in which you pay only for the data.

SODIMM The memory chips used in laptops.

SSD Storage that, unlike a hard drive, uses no moving parts.

System restore point System files stored on a given date and time to which Windows can revert.

Thunderbolt A very fast port for connecting external storage to a PC.

Timestamp The time which an event is recorded by a computer.

UEFI A replacement for BIOS.

UFS A file system for Linux.

Upscale Creating a larger version of a photo without sacrificing clarity and detail.

USB 2.0/3.0/3.1/3.2/4.0 Faster successors to USB.

USB-A The original type of USB connector, released in 1996.

USB-C A connector that's reversible.

Vlogging Creating and sharing personal or educational video content on online platforms.

VPN Keeps all internet communication safe and private.

White balance Adjusts the balance to make them look more natural.

Widget A small program that runs on the Windows desktop.

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Easy when you **Know How**

Wondering if the power of Bluetooth can give new life to an old device, **Robert Irvine** tries to...



Reuse an old Fire TV remote

Since I switched to a 'Chromecast with Google TV' streaming device, I've barely used my old Amazon Fire TV Stick. After all, plugging two dongles into your TV doesn't double your entertainment – they have the same apps and work in the same way.

I'll keep the Fire stick as a backup, but until required it's consigned to my increasingly stuffed gadget drawer. That leaves me with a redundant remote control (pictured below).

“

I could take a selfie on my phone from 20 feet away

”

Rather than chuck that in the drawer too, I wondered if – in the spirit of this issue's Cover Feature (see page 50) – I could find it a second life. Because it connects to my Fire TV Stick using Bluetooth rather than infrared (more expensive models use both), the remote could potentially control other Bluetooth-enabled devices.

My first thought was my Windows 11 laptop. I already use a Bluetooth mouse, so a Bluetooth remote might also work.

This could prove useful for browsing and playing TV shows from a few metres away, so I wouldn't need to sit at my desk.

To test my theory, I pressed Windows key+I to open the Windows Settings app and selected 'Bluetooth & devices'.

Robert wondered how he could repurpose this old remote



Pair new device

Device name
moto g54 5G

Available devices

ROBERT

L5CG44234T1

[LG] webOS TV UA75006LA

SW-XC725

AR

By pairing his Fire TV remote with his phone...

I clicked the 'Add device' button, followed by Bluetooth, and Windows 11 started searching for devices.

To make the Fire remote 'discoverable', I pressed its Home button for 10 seconds. The letters 'AR' appeared in the device list, which I assume stood for 'Amazon remote'. I clicked that entry and after a few seconds Windows confirmed the connection and said 'Your device is ready to go!'.

Sadly, my success was short-lived because it then showed 'AR' as 'Not connected' due to a driver error. After trying a few fixes, I concluded my remote isn't compatible with Windows 11. You might have more luck with yours – mine is for the cheapest model, the Fire TV Stick Lite.

Moving on, I decided to connect the remote to my Android phone. That may sound odd, as you don't generally need to operate your phone from afar, but I could see several benefits. For example, if I wanted to take a selfie or group photo without stretching out my arm, I could trigger the shutter button from the remote via Bluetooth.

To connect the devices, I swiped down from the top of my phone's screen, tapped Bluetooth and chose 'Pair new device'. I pressed the Home button on the Fire TV remote to enter pairing mode, chose AR in the 'Available devices' list



...Robert could take a selfie from 20 feet away

(see screenshot above left) and tapped Pair. Unlike in Windows 11, the pairing succeeded.

This allowed me to navigate my phone using the remote's circular control pad – or D-pad. I was able to open apps by pressing the central Select button and return to my Home screen using the Home button.

I tested my shutter-button idea by opening the Camera app and pressing Select on the remote to take a photo. This didn't do anything until I manually switched from the rear to the front camera, which then worked perfectly. Thanks to Bluetooth's long range, I was able to take a selfie while standing over 6 metres (20 feet) away from my phone (see photo above).

I was also able to play and pause songs on Spotify and videos on YouTube using the Play/Pause button. However, the remote disabled my phone's keyboard, which meant I couldn't type anything until I disconnected it.

So there certainly is life in an old Bluetooth TV remote, but mainly as a remote shutter button for your phone's camera. If you can think of any other uses, please let me know.

 Need help with your TV remote controls? Let us know: noproblem@computeractive.co.uk



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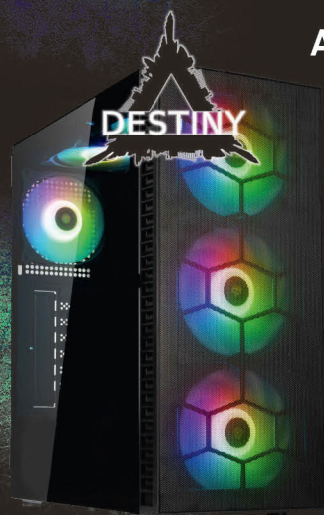
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