Issue 378

WebUser

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They track you even when you're anonymous p57

The GREAT WINDOWS 10 SWINDLE?

All the hidden costs – and how to BEAT them p38

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- Fix upgrade errors
- Perform a clean install

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35

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AND...

The 9 Reasons Your Browser Is Still Slow

And how to speed it up – p64

Never Pay Full Price For Apps Again

The secret to sharing – p48

Stop Your Neighbours Slowing Your Wi-Fi

You won't know unless you check! p54

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Homepage

There's no such thing as a free OS

So, it turns out that Windows 10 is pretty darn good, after all. It's fast, easy to use and aesthetically pleasing; the kind of operating system you could take home to meet your mother if you were going through an odd phase of dating computer software. Best of all, it's free – free as the wind blows, free as the grass grows! Or is it? Since Windows 10 was released, a number of hidden costs have emerged, and the way the operating system works – which is very different to how Windows has worked in the past – means there are likely to be many more along the way. In this issue's cover feature (page 38), we lift the lid on Microsoft's secret methods for squeezing money from Windows 10, from built-in ads to paid-for apps.

Speaking of paid-for apps, on page 48, we reveal how you can slash the cost of Android and iPhone apps by sharing them between family and friends. Very handy for those pricey Angry Birds 2 in-app purchases (see page 34)!

Robert Irvine
robert_irvine@dennis.co.uk
#webuser

ISSUE 378 26 AUGUST – 8 SEPTEMBER 2015 ON THE COVER

abc Average sales, Jan-Dec 2014, 29,057 copies per issue

5 Things you'll learn this issue

1 How to transform your keyboard into an old-fashioned typewriter **page 6**

2 How to recover a forgotten password for a webmail account **page 27**

3 How to prevent your IP address from leaking vital info about you **page 31**

4 How to find the cheapest petrol stations on the move using your mobile phone **page 47**

5 How to convert scanned documents into editable text for free **page 69**

Subscribe to Web User!

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Contents

FREE Screwdriver Set
SUBSCRIPTIONS
Turn to page 62 for special subs offers

ISSUE 378 26 AUGUST - 8 SEPTEMBER 2015

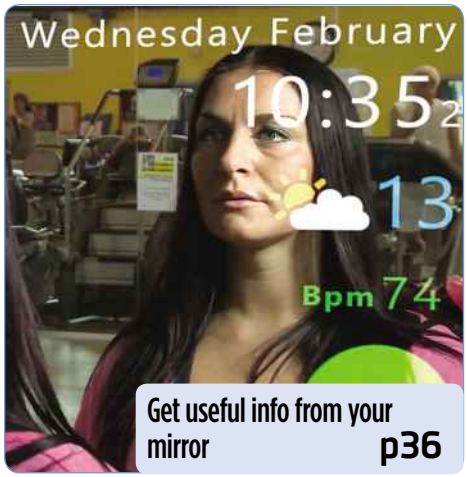
COVER FEATURE

The GREAT WINDOWS 10 SWINDLE?

Hidden costs, essential tweaks and how to fix common problems

p38

Best apps for editing videos p44



Get useful info from your mirror p36

Let family and friends use your apps for free p48

IN DEPTH Articles on the latest tech topics

36 FAQ
Get the inside track on smart mirrors

38 COVER FEATURE WINDOWS 10
How to beat the new upgrade's shortcomings

44 Video-making apps
Edit videos on the go using your phone

46 Best new mapping tools
Handy alternatives to Google Maps

48 Share your apps with other people
How to let friends use your favourite apps

REVIEWS Apps, sites and products on test

14 Best New Websites
We review the best new and relaunched sites

20 Product Test
- PaintShop Pro X8
- Linksys Wi-Fi extender

26 Best Free Software
This fortnight's most useful free downloads

30 Best New Browser Tools
Get more from Chrome, Firefox and Opera

32 Best Free Apps
Our favourite new phone and tablet apps

www.webuser.co.uk www.facebook.com/webusermagazine www.twitter.com/webusermagazine

FAVOURITES Must-read regulars

6 What's New Online
10 brilliant things to do on the web

8 Need to Know
This fortnight's top tech news stories

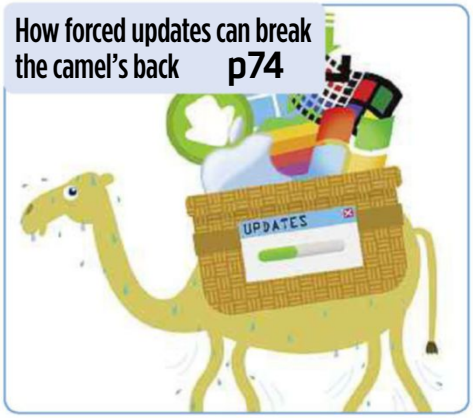
12 Stay Safe Online
Security advice for PC and mobile

18 Build a Better Site
Expert tips, tools and practical help

23 Best Buys
Our pick of the best new products

50 Broadband Deals
Find the best-value package for you

51 Take a Screen Break
New word search and emoji quiz



How forced updates can break the camel's back p74

72 Inbox
Tell us your views and opinions

74 Page 404
Barry's unhappy with updates

Practical WebUser

16 pages

Workshops, tips, projects and problem solving

52 Workshop 1
Stitch Google maps together

54 Workshop 2
Use Android to boost your Wi-Fi

56 Workshop 3
Copy text from images

57 Workshop 4
Block 'super' cookies

58 Weekend Project
Perform a clean install of Windows 10

64 Web User's Top Tips
Speed up your browser

66 Ask the Expert
All your technical questions answered

68 Readers' Tips
The best tips from our readers

70 Readers' Helpdesk
Answers from our reader forums

Use Android to find your best Wi-Fi signal p54

Wipe your PC to install Windows 10 p58

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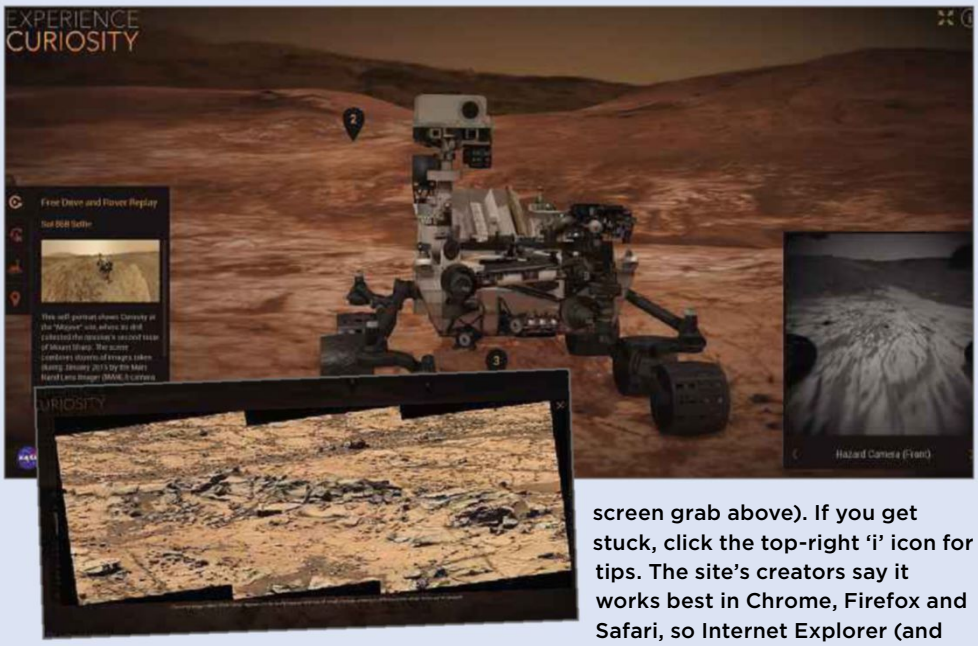
What's New Online

Explore Mars with the Curiosity Rover

Anyone who follows Curiosity on Twitter (@MarsCuriosity) will know that NASA is doing a brilliant job showing us back on Earth what the Rover is doing on Mars. You can now control the Rover (virtually, at least) on NASA's Experience Curiosity website, which recreates the red planet as a digital landscape that you can pan across and zoom into. Click anywhere to send Curiosity rolling to that position, or choose one of the map markers, which represent locations it has visited. At the bottom right of the screen you'll see the view from one of seven cameras attached to the Rover.



Use the right-hand menu to move Curiosity's antenna and robotic arm, and read more about how the equipment works. You can also see photos it has taken, including the beautifully barren Pink Cliffs (see screen grab above). If you get stuck, click the top-right 'i' icon for tips. The site's creators say it works best in Chrome, Firefox and Safari, so Internet Explorer (and Edge) users should temporarily switch from their usual browser.

eyes.nasa.gov/curiosity

Customise the BBC Homepage

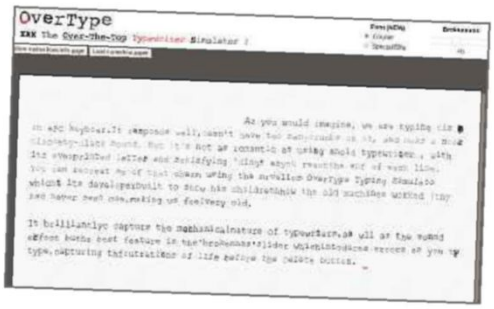
bit.ly/bbchome378

The BBC may not let you build your own TV schedules (wouldn't that be great?), but at least you can now tweak its homepage (www.bbc.co.uk) to show more of what you want to read. Click the 'Settings and Location' link at the top left and you'll be taken to the Homepage Settings page. From here you can add news (including local), sport and entertainment categories, plus 'collections' on topics from across the BBC's family of websites. Scroll to the bottom for the most important option: 'Technology and gadgets'.

To make these changes you'll need to sign in with your BBC iD. Read more about this at bit.ly/id378.

Turn your keyboard into an old typewriter

uniqcode.com/typewriter



As you would imagine, we're typing this using a PC keyboard. It responds well, doesn't have too many crumbs on it, and makes a nice clackety-clack sound. But it's not as romantic as using an old typewriter, with its overprinted letters, wobbly lines and satisfying 'ding' as you reach the end of a line.

You can recreate some of that charm using the marvellous OverType Typewriter Simulator, which its developer built to show his children how the old machines worked (they had never seen one, making us feel *very* old). It brilliantly captures the mechanical nature and noise of typewriters, but the best feature is the 'brokenness' slider at the top right. This introduces errors as you type, capturing the frustrations of life before the Delete button. Our typed effort (above) clearly shows that we didn't spend enough time at secretarial school.

We highlight 10 of the most amazing and amusing things you can do on the web this fortnight

Explore the world's top tech cities

www.savills.co.uk/tech-cities

This stylish map could be the most interesting thing ever created by an estate agent. Made by Savills, it shows the world's 12 biggest tech cities (including London, San Francisco and Seoul), alongside info about living and doing business there. London, for example, has a typical broadband speed of 26.9Mbps (half the global average) and double the average transport costs.

Identify old photos of the UK

bit.ly/tate378

Do you recognise this Welsh church? We know the photo was taken by the English artist John Piper some time between the 1930s and 1980s, but not much more. It's one of nearly 1,000 black-and-white photographs taken by Piper across the UK that the Tate Archive wants your help in identifying. In total the Tate has put online around 6,000 photos Piper took of Britain's countryside and historic architecture, including shots of ruined abbeys, country mansions and stunning rural views.

See Earth change over 600 million years

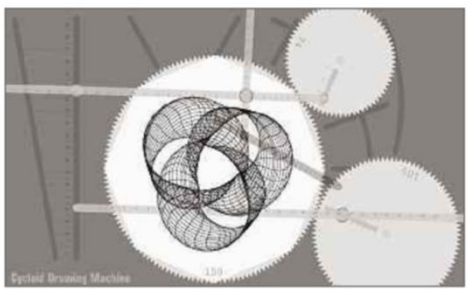
dinosaurpictures.org/ancient-earth

This is what Europe looked like 50 million years ago. You can make out what would become the British Isles, but the rest of the continent looks like an archipelago – though Spain is just edging into existence. This wonderful Chrome Experiment shows how Earth has changed over 600 million years, letting you jump to milestones in the evolution of life, including the first reptiles and primates, and the extinction of dinosaurs. Click 'Remove clouds' to get a clearer view of the continents as they drift into their current positions.

Draw with a virtual Spirograph

wheelof.com/sketch

It doesn't have as fun a name as Spirograph – one of the best children's toys ever invented – but the Cycloid Drawing Machine works in the same mesmerising way. Click one of the presets (A-G) to see it in action, and change what's being drawn by moving the cogs. Press fast-forward if you get bored!



5 TO FOLLOW ON TWITTER

@BBCTechTent
Updates from BBC show Tech Tent, presented by Rory Cellan-Jones

@dannysullivan
Tips on Google and SEO from the founder of Search Engine Land (searchengineland.com)

@shaunthesheep
The adventures of Aardman Animations' woolly hero

@GarminUK
News on the company's latest products, plus money-off deals when you trade in old ones

@jeremycorbyn
Reports and photos from the man who may be Labour's next leader

Watch non-stop video on Periscope

periscope.tv/couchmode

Periscope's new Couch Mode makes flicking across live streams as easy as changing TV channels. Click the Next Broadcast link to skip to a new stream. You can't control what appears, but that's part of the fun.

Check mobile coverage near you

www.ofcom.org.uk/mobile-coverage

Using Ofcom's Mobile Coverage Checker lets you see the quality of mobile coverage throughout the UK. Type a postcode or place, then select a network, signal type (voice calls, 3G or 4G) and location (indoor or outdoor).

Use Outlook's new email add-ins

bit.ly/outlook378

Your browser has add-ons, but Outlook has add-ins, tools that let you use other services from within your email. This collection includes Uber, Boomerang and Evernote, but the PayPal option is the most useful.

Need to Know

Sony tells Vaio users not to upgrade to Windows 10

What happened?

Sony warned anyone who uses one of its Vaio laptops or all-in-one PCs to hold off upgrading to the new Windows operating system until at least October.

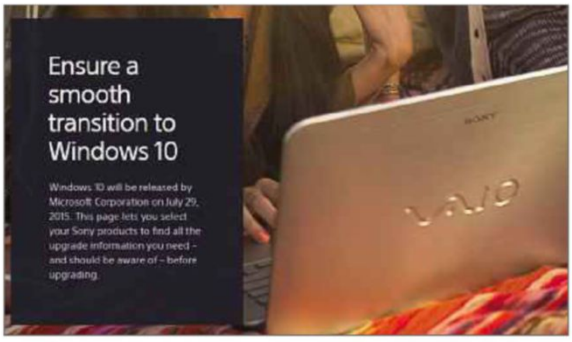
Microsoft released Windows 10 at the end of July, with the upgrade made available free to Windows 7 and 8 users in waves. However, Sony has advised its customers not to perform the upgrade quite yet because its own driver updates aren't ready – despite the Windows 10 preview having been available for a year and the launch date being announced many months in advance.

The company made its stance clear with a bold 'Patience is advised' message on its website, warning "do not upgrade yet" (bit.ly/sony378). It explained: "To ensure your Vaio PC works with Windows 10, it is strongly recommended that you wait to upgrade your PC until the drivers are ready."

So when exactly will that be? Sony has promised to get the drivers out "as quickly as possible", but the exact date will depend on which model of Vaio laptop you have. For some users, it could be as late as November before they are given the go-ahead.

Sony says it will only make its Windows 10 drivers available once it has fully tested them and can guarantee that the upgrade will go smoothly. The question is: why is it taking so long?

One factor could be the sale of the Vaio PC-making division to a Japanese investment firm last year, which raises confusion over who is handling the driver updates for previously sold devices. Sony will have downsized its own PC support division after the sale, while the new firm only had 240 employees when the deal was done.



Sony says it wants to ensure users have a 'smooth transition' to Windows 10

How will it affect you?

The length of time you're being asked to wait to install Windows 10 on a Sony laptop or desktop PC depends on what version of Windows the device came with – not what it's running now.

If you bought a machine with Windows 8.1 preinstalled, you should receive detailed information on upgrading very soon (if you haven't already), with the necessary driver and application updates to follow in October. If your PC came with Windows 8, you'll need to wait until November to get the driver and app updates you require.

If your PC arrived with Windows 7 installed, it's still not clear when Sony will be issuing an update. The company promised to offer information "regarding limitation and issues" in August, but had yet to do so at the time of writing. However, the clearly different message does raise fears that older PCs bought with Windows 7 installed may not be able to upgrade to Windows 10 at all, or may face problems if trying to do so. We'll have to wait for more information from Sony to know the full story. You can see the schedule and check it for updates at bit.ly/w10updates378.

What do we think?

What a disappointment. Whatever the reason for the delay, it's no way to treat customers. The drivers should have been ready in good time, and if unforeseen problems cropped up delaying their release, Sony should have communicated it to users more clearly.

It will be a shame if Windows 7 users can't take advantage of Microsoft's free upgrade offer simply because they bought their laptop from Sony. Microsoft has worked hard to ensure older PCs can run Windows 10, which should be applauded as it extends the lifespan of such machines. The lack of driver support shouldn't be what makes an expensive laptop obsolete.

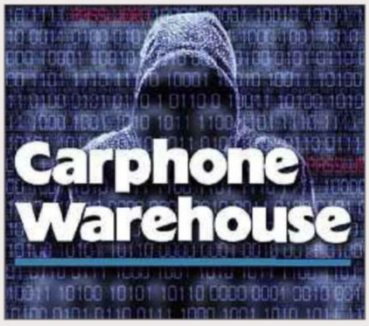
Sony Vaio laptop owners shouldn't panic, however. You still have a year to upgrade to Windows 10 for free. As we explained in our 'Windows 10: the Truth' cover feature in Issue 376 (bit.ly/webuser376), it's always wise to hold off updating to a new OS so that others can discover the bugs and give developers time to patch them. But that should be your decision, not one enforced by Sony.

• See our cover feature on page 38 to learn about the hidden costs of Windows 10.

What we think of this fortnight's top tech news stories and rumours, and how they affect you

Carphone Warehouse hack leaks customer credit card details

What happened?



Carphone Warehouse customers were given reason to worry after the technology retailer and mobile network operator was hit by a "sophisticated attack" at the beginning of August. Hackers gained access to 2.4 million customers' names, addresses, dates of birth and bank details, as well as those of users of its ISP TalkTalk and virtual mobile network iD. Additionally, as many as 90,000 sets of credit card details may have been accessed by the hackers.

How will it affect me?

If you've been hacked, Carphone Warehouse will have emailed you by now with information. If you didn't receive this message, contact the company's customer support team, change your password and also keep an eye on your credit card balance. If you use the same password across multiple websites, be sure to change any that share the same login credentials as any Carphone sites, as online criminals have been known to try passwords across unrelated sites.

The hack affected Carphone Warehouse, as well as TalkTalk and iD, along with price-comparison sites such as OneStopPhoneShop.co.uk, e2save.com and Mobiles.co.uk. Carphone Warehouse recently merged with Dixons, but the parent firm says PC World and Currys accounts weren't hacked.

What do we think?

It's remarkable that such a big firm can be targeted so successfully – surely a company as massive as Carphone Warehouse should also have the best in security? But hackers only need to be successful once to wreak havoc. Because of that, we all need to be careful with passwords: try not to use the same one across different websites, or consider using a password manager.

Despite the potential damage the hack may have caused, we do have some praise for Carphone Warehouse: the attack happened on 5 August and customers were told three days later. Such comparatively fast disclosure should be the norm, not the exception, though sadly companies more concerned with their own bottom line than their users' safety often err the other way.

Google changes its name to Alphabet

What happened?

Google surprised the world by announcing a company reorganisation that sees co-founder Larry Page step aside as CEO in favour of Sundar Pichai and moves the search business and other projects into a new holding company called Alphabet. This means that the overarching company Google will now be called Alphabet, though Google products and services such as Maps will retain their names.

How will it affect me?

Page wrote in his blog post announcing the change that Google is not a "conventional company". The reorganisation probably means we can expect more non-web projects from Alphabet. Page will be CEO of the new company, while his co-founder Sergey Brin will be president. That means the pair are likely to increasingly focus their energies on projects such as Life Sciences, which makes smart contact lenses, and Calico, which performs longevity research. They'll also oversee X Lab, which is home to tech projects such as broadband balloons. The shift means all those projects will get more attention, so we can expect to hear more about them in the future.

We're also likely to hear more from Sundar Pichai, who will run the Google side of the company. He was named product chief at the end of last year, largely taking over keynote speeches and product announcements.

What do we think?

The split is a good move: Google's core businesses were getting muddled up with its exciting and intriguing research projects, from self-driving cars to drones. We want to keep hearing about such fascinating work, but Google needs to stay focused on search, email, and its other consumer-focused products – these are what fund the rest of the work, after all.

We're not so sure about the name, though. Surely Google of all companies would know that a generic company name like "Alphabet" is going to be very hard to search for?

Microsoft can now disable pirated software

What happened?

Microsoft updated the terms and conditions of its End User Licence Agreement (EULA) to allow it to disable any counterfeit software or hardware found on your PC without requiring any further consent. If you're using a Windows 10 computer, you will have agreed to the new terms the first time you ran the new operating system.

Section 7b of Microsoft's Services EULA, titled "Updates to the Services or Software, and Changes to These Terms", stipulates that it "may automatically check your version of the software and download software update or configuration changes, including those that prevent you from accessing the Services, playing counterfeit games or using unauthorised hardware peripheral devices."

How will it affect you?

If you use a Windows 10 PC, a Windows Phone or any of Microsoft's other devices, the company can now disable any games you've pirated or hardware you've unlawfully hacked. However, while it's obvious what Microsoft means by "counterfeit games", the wording "unauthorised hardware peripheral devices" is a little hazy. We think it could mean that Microsoft can now block devices such as uncertified PCs or illegally modified Xbox One and Xbox 360 controllers. Also, Microsoft's EULA doesn't state if it will also disable other counterfeit software, such as cracked versions of Office or Adobe Photoshop, or if it only cares about pirated games. Either way, if you only ever use legally purchased programs and games, then you don't need to worry.

What do we think?

Video game piracy, or "counterfeit games" as Microsoft puts it, has been a big issue in PC gaming for a long time so we're not surprised that with these new terms and conditions, Microsoft has practically baked protection against it into the core of Windows 10. From a business point of view, this makes sense, and it could also give software developers some reassurance that their software isn't being shared and used illegally. However, Microsoft checking everything you install does feel like unnecessary surveillance for the majority of PC users who'd never dream of downloading counterfeit games. And those who do are bound to find some way of continuing to do so.

FIRST LOOK

GoPro Hero4 Session

bit.ly/session378

Go Pro's latest action camera, the Hero4 Session (£329.99), differs from its predecessors in that it's waterproof to 10 metres *without* being placed in a protective housing. It's also a cube, which makes it 50 per cent smaller and 40 per cent lighter than the high-end, rectangular Hero4 Black (£409.99). The new design definitely makes the camera more aerodynamic and we almost forgot about it altogether after we'd mounted it on our head. The new low-profile, ball-joint mount also makes it easier than ever to adjust the camera's angle on the move.

Most of the Hero4 Session's functions are controlled via a single button – press it once to wake the camera, and again to commence recording. We were a little disappointed by how long you are then kept waiting before recording begins, and also found it difficult to hear the confirmation beep in loud environments. Otherwise the shutter button worked well, even letting you capture 8-megapixel time-lapse shots with a long press. For other functions, you'll need to buy an optional remote or use the GoPro companion app (available on Android and iOS).

The Session captures 1080p video at up to 60fps, which doesn't match the Hero4 Black's impressive 2.7k resolution at the same frame rate. Even so, we were really impressed with the Sesson's picture quality given its size. Its twin microphones performed well too, picking out the kind of detail a protective housing would usually muffle.

The camera's low-light performance was less impressive, and the Session may not be the best choice for early morning or evening bike rides. Also, the new GoPro's battery is integrated – understandably considering the compact dimensions, but it means you'll need to charge it after about 90 minutes of recording. In all, although the Session is a great camera and we love its lightweight design, we prefer the slightly higher-spec Hero4 Silver, which is available for the same price.

WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Will age ratings protect kids from pop filth?

A shared initiative between the government, the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) and the UK music industry is working to apply age-appropriate labelling to music videos hosted on popular video-streaming sites such as YouTube.

When a participating record label uploads a music video with a BBFC rating, YouTube will automatically classify the content, and give it a 'Partner Rating' label. The BBFC determines age ratings for music videos in a similar way to film classifications, weighing up suitability based on the video's depictions of "drug misuse, dangerous behaviour presented as safe, bad language, sexual behaviour and nudity, and threatening behaviour and violence". So far only one music video has received an 18 rating: Dizzee Rascal's gruesome 'Couple of Stacks'.

"Keeping children safe as they experience and enjoy all the benefits the internet has to offer is a key priority for this Government's One Nation approach to help families across Britain," said Baroness Joanna Shields, Minister for Internet Safety and Security. "We will continue to work with industry to develop ways to help parents to better protect children online from inappropriate music videos with explicit adult or violent content."

LIKELIHOOD RATING

✓✓✓✓✓

Although the government's desire to let parents protect their kids from unsuitable content is admirable, it's hard to see how this new measure can work. Only Sony Music UK, Universal Music UK and Warner Music UK are on board from the big labels, so there's still plenty of opportunity for children to find and watch unrated videos, especially if they're uploaded from an unofficial source. Factor in other video-streaming sites not involved with the initiative, and it's obvious that children and teens determined to watch their favourite artist's new music video will find a way to do it.

What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

The Nipper

bit.ly/nipper378 | **From £12**

So ingenious that you wonder why no-one thought of it before, The Nipper is a tiny portable charger that can boost the battery in your mobile phone using two standard AA batteries. This makes it ideal for when you've run out of juice while you're on the loose: just pop into a shop and buy a couple of batteries, connect them to the tiny 17mm cube, plug the microUSB connector into your phone, and you're away. It weighs a mere 10g, so will easily fit into your pocket or on a keyring. It's already met its £6,000 target so get your order in quick before they're all gone!

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

Tesco introduces Windows 10 tablet for £99

Tesco has launched the Windows Connect, one of the first tablets to come with Windows 10 pre-installed. The device costs only £99 and comes with a 1GHz processor, 1GB of RAM and 32GB of storage.

LastPass makes mobile apps free

LastPass has made its password-management apps free to use on smartphones and tablets. The service is free on desktop PCs too, but to sync your passwords between platforms, you'll still need a Premium subscription.

WE DON'T LIKE...

Police investigate first case of cyber-flashing

British Transport Police are investigating a case of cyber-flashing after a female commuter received indecent images of a man on her phone. The images were sent using Apple's file-sharing function, AirDrop, making the incident the first of its kind.

Amazon criticised for "callous" working culture

A recent article published in the New York Times revealed that Amazon "offers no pretence that catering to employees is a priority" and that staff are encouraged "to rip into colleagues' ideas, with feedback that can be blunt to the point of painful".

Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

SECURITY ALERT! | What's been bothering us this fortnight

Microsoft fails to disclose content of Windows 10 updates

Microsoft has released several patches for Windows 10 since the operating system's launch at the end of July – but nobody really knows what's in them. Windows 10 saw Microsoft move to a regime of rolling updates, with patches applied automatically on all Windows 10 machines. However, Microsoft doesn't seem very keen to let people know what's being fixed.

The third cumulative update for Windows 10 was released on 14 August and replaced the update from 11 August, which left some machines in an endless reboot cycle. Although Microsoft's support page for the latest update stipulates which files have been altered, it doesn't inform users which bugs are being fixed in the process, leaving Windows 10 users in the dark about whether a known bug has been fixed until they actually install the patch.

Only users of the Windows 10 Pro and Enterprise versions of the operating system are allowed to defer updates to the operating system. They are now mandatory for Windows 10 Home users, which makes it even more critical that Microsoft doesn't allow faulty updates to be released to the general public. See our cover feature on page 38 for more about update problems in Windows 10.

Facebook flaw could be used to harvest users' data

A web developer has discovered a security loophole in Facebook's settings that could allow a hacker to decrypt and harvest users' personal data, including names, telephone numbers, locations, images and more. In a blog post made to draw Facebook's attention to the problem, Reza Moaiandin said he was able to use a script to look up different phone number combinations and access user details. Until Facebook fixes the flaw, you can safeguard your own personal info by adjusting your privacy settings. Go to Settings, Mobile, select Privacy and click the drop-down menu next to your phone number in the 'Who can look me up?' section. Select Friends to limit who can look you up using your phone number. bit.ly/security378

Security hole found in old Intel processors

New research has uncovered a serious security exploit in Intel processors made between 1997 and 2010 (pre-Sandy Bridge). The discovery was made by security researcher Chris Domas, who found that if an intruder gains access to your chipset, they can take over almost all functionality on your PC.

Once infected, neither antivirus software, hard drive reformatting or reinstalling Windows will fix the problem, although any malware using the exploit will need to get onto your PC in the first place via conventional means such as a virus or worm. It is thought unlikely that Intel will fix the vulnerability because it only affects old hardware. bit.ly/intel378

Security Helpdesk

Your questions answered by security specialists

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT:
David Emm, Principal Security Researcher at Kaspersky Lab (www.kaspersky.co.uk)

Q How worried should we be about the Carphone Warehouse hack (see the news story on page 9)?

Brandon Norton, Facebook

A I would recommend that all Carphone Warehouse customers change their passwords – including changing them on any other sites where they have used the same password. They should also be cautious about any emails they receive. The hackers behind the attack may already have been able to formulate phishing emails, so consumers must think carefully about whether the emails they receive are legitimate. I would caution against clicking links in emails – it's always better to type the website address manually, to avoid the risk of being redirected to a phishing site. Finally, they should keep a close check on bank accounts and report any suspicious activity to the bank and to Action Fraud (www.actionfraud.police.uk).

Worryingly, many people use the same password and personal details across multiple online accounts, so if their details have been compromised by one attack they could find other online accounts suffer too. While businesses can do their part by encrypting confidential information, it is also up to individuals to ensure that their passwords are complex, that they do not reuse them on different sites and that they change them regularly. A password is the frontline of defence and so it needs to be sufficiently strong; ideally at least 12 characters long and consisting of a mixture of letters, numbers and symbols from the entire keyboard.

Email us your security questions at webuser@dennis.co.uk

Subscribe to *Web User* to stay safe on Windows 10

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0 000037 873202 >

Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

ENTERTAINMENT

RELAUNCH

Digital Spy

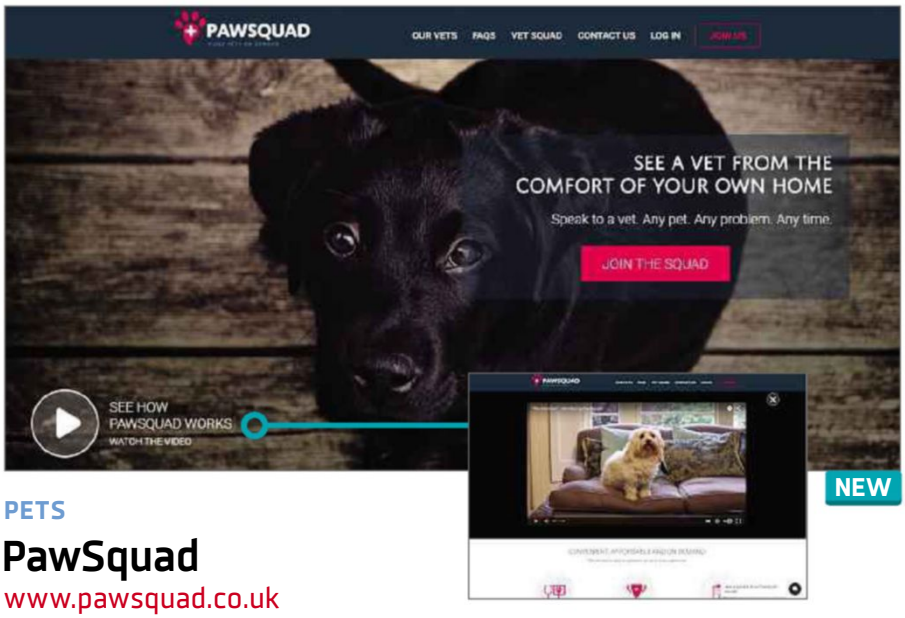
beta.digitalspy.co.uk

TV, tech and entertainment site Digital Spy has an impressive new look, designed to make it easier to find the stories you want to read regardless of the device you're using. The new layout is smarter, cleaner and faster, with space for larger headlines, photos and videos and improved navigation. Another move is a promise from Digital Spy to stop using "intrusive" ad formats, which has always been one of our biggest bugbears with the site. The comments below articles have mysteriously vanished, but then the site is still in beta. To use it, either head to the link above or click the 'Go to Beta' button at the top of the homepage.

Our rating ★★★★★

TV
The new layout provides space for bigger photos and videos

NEWS
The latest stories are now much quicker and easier to browse



NEW

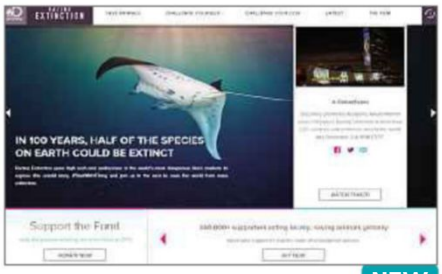
PETS

PawSquad

www.pawsquad.co.uk

If Fido's acting funny, you can't ask him if he's feeling ill. Rather than drive him to the local vet – with its limited hours and high prices – you can seek advice online instead via video vets. For £15, you can get professional advice immediately over the internet from a registered vet via video call at any time between 6am and midnight. The video vets keep a medical record for your pet, and even forward it to your usual vet should you need to make a visit. It's not only for dogs, but cats and any other pets that may have you worried too, with vets able to answer questions on illnesses, basic care and even pet travel.

Our rating ★★★★★



NEW

CONSERVATION

Racing Extinction

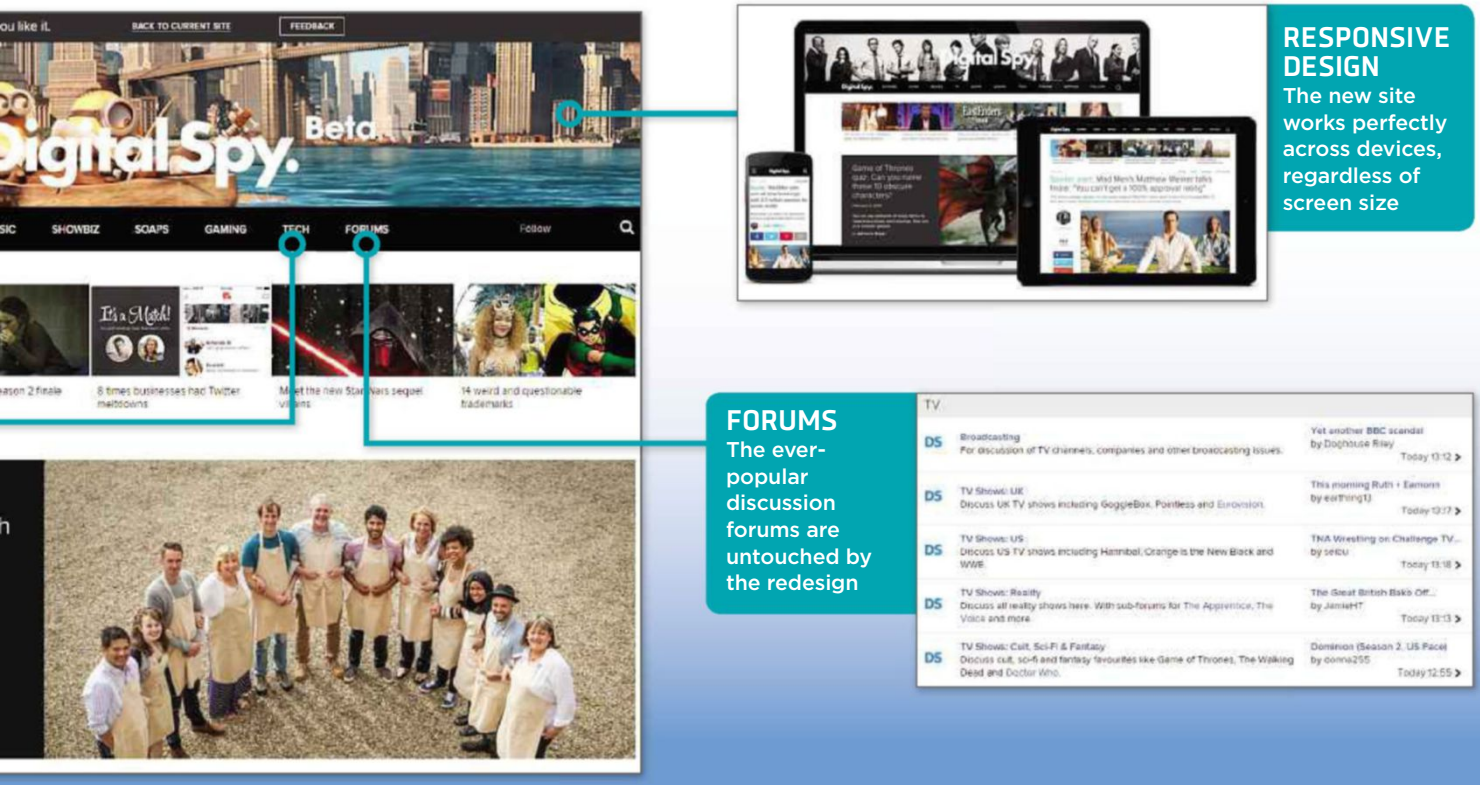
www.racingextinction.com

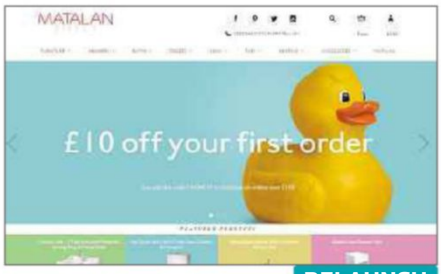
You may have heard of this campaigning group recently: Racing Extinction was behind the series of images of endangered animals that were projected onto the Empire State Building a few weeks ago. Now, the Discovery Channel site is asking you to "challenge yourself" to help save soon-to-be extinct animals, by signing petitions against wildlife trade, learning about how you affect the environment via an online quiz, and signing up for a "five-day carbon cleanse". Additionally, the site is full of beautiful videos highlighting the threat to our fellow earth inhabitants – from us.

Our rating ★★★★★

Reviews by Nicole Kobie and Robert Irvine

We review this fortnight's best new and relaunched websites and rate them for content, design and features





RELAUNCH

SHOPPING

Matalan Direct

direct.matalan.co.uk

Do you wish Matalan stores were bigger, so you could buy your new bathroom at the same place as your latest pair of shoes? Now they are – online, at least. The retailer has expanded its digital sales floor with a new site that offers home furniture, accessories and more – even the bathroom sink, but not yet the kitchen sink. Indeed, at the moment the site mainly features bed and bathroom furniture, but is expected to expand to the remaining rooms in your home soon. The site itself is not only cleanly designed and easy to navigate, but it's also bright and colourful.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

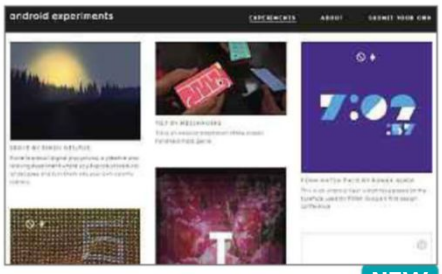
TECHNOLOGY

Apple

www.apple.com/uk

Apple fans, stay calm: yes, the store is down at the Apple website, but that doesn't mean the new iPhone 6S is on the way. Instead, the design-savvy tech maker has reworked its site to remove the tab for the Apple Store. Naturally, you can still buy Apple's tech trinkets, but instead of going to a separate store page, the sales function is integrated throughout the website. This way, if you're dreamily browsing MacBooks and decide you simply must have one, there's a handy Buy button in the top right-corner. But design aficionados need not worry: the site still looks beautiful.

Our rating ★★★★☆



NEW

TECHNOLOGY

Android Experiments

www.androidexperiments.com

This site has been launched to highlight the work by Android developers outside of Google. It's essentially an art gallery of creations, from watch faces for Android Wear devices to games that use the sensors in your phone. Some are simple in design, such as an app called Landmarker that tells you about landmarks that are ahead of you, like an augmented-reality compass. Others are beautiful tools to interact with art and photography, such as the Selfie x Selfie, which builds layers of portraits. The site emphasises the versatility of Android, and you can submit your own creations.

Our rating ★★★★☆

Tell us about your website via webuser@dennis.co.uk

RELAUNCH

DAYS OUT

Great British Gardens

www.greatbritishgardens.co.uk

Discover the finest gardens to visit around the UK at this superbly presented site, which combines stunning photos with lots of helpful information, including details of visiting times, how to get to the garden, places to stay nearby, disabled access, refreshments and, of course, the plants and trees you'll enjoy there. You can browse the content by county or garden type – for example, coastal, water or woodland – and find the best places to view seasonal flowers. With effective use of videos and social elements, Great British Gardens is clearly put together with real passion and knowledge, and is far more than a mere guide.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

THEATRE

Globe Player

globeplayer.tv

Enjoy some Shakespeare-on-demand at this site for the Globe Theatre, which lets you stream and download its productions to enjoy at your leisure. The service has just added its plays from 2013, including *The Tempest*, *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, serving up comedy, tragedy and history in impressively high quality. Titles cost from £3.99 to rent for seven days, and £7.99 to keep or to send as a gift. There's also plenty of free content, including interviews with actors and directors, and videos of the Sonnet Project, which is filming all 154 of the Bard's sonnets in different locations around New York.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

DELIVERY

Royal Mail Sameday

www.royalmailsameday.com

Previously, this website for the Royal Mail's same-day delivery service offered little more than a phone number and an application form for prospective drivers, but this relaunch makes it a lot more useful. You can now get a quote for a Sameday courier based on the destination and the size of van required for your items; and either book a collection for a specific time or get them picked up within the hour. Although we wouldn't describe the service as cheap – we were quoted £25.20 to deliver a package a mile away – the site is easy to use, and offers useful extras such as scheduled collections and multi-drop.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

PEOPLE

Bill Oddie

www.billoddie.com

Someone ought to tell Bill Oddie OBE that having a massive auto-playing video of you birdwatching and hillwalking on your homepage is irritating rather than impressive, even if it does capture your essence. Still, if you're a fan of the "wizened Godfather of Nature", you'll find lots of goodies (sorry) to explore here, including photos of his favourite birds, details of his conservation work and the chance to buy his books via Amazon. We particularly like the lively collage of snaps and achievements in the History section, and the Spotify selection of Oddie's favourite music. Bill's blog has been replaced by his Twitter feed, but it hadn't been updated for ages, anyway.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

PHOTOGRAPHY

Colin Prior

colinprior.co.uk

This sophisticated website for the Scottish landscape photographer Colin Prior provides an impressive showcase for his stunning shots of sunlit mountains, desolate moors and dramatic skies. This relaunch expands his online portfolio to include many other types of images, including lifestyle, structure and portrait. As well as browsing Prior's work, you can buy prints, books and calendars from the store; watch videos of him in action; and develop your own photography skills by signing up for one of his workshops. As the proud owners of one of his gorgeous prints of Glencoe, we can enthusiastically vouch for the quality.

Our rating ★★★★☆

PEOPLE

Felix Dennis

www.felixdennis.com

The official site for the late, much-missed founder of Dennis Publishing now serves as a celebration of his remarkable life and character. The streamlined design organises content into three main sections: Poet, Publisher and Planter of Trees, as well as offering an extensive multimedia gallery of photos, videos and a complete collection of covers from his controversial magazine *Oz*. If your appetite is whetted to learn more about Felix Dennis, you can buy his best-selling book *How to Get Rich* and his collections of poetry in print and on CD. There's also information about the cause that dominated his life from the late Nineties and is his legacy: planting trees through the Heart of England Forest project, to which you can donate through the site.

Our rating ★★★★☆

FILM & TV

Find Any Film

www.findanyfilm.com

We've long been fans of this site for finding films to watch at the cinema, online or on DVD/Blu-ray, and it's now been expanded to cover TV shows, too. Just search for a movie or show title, actor or director to discover where you can buy, rent or book tickets for it, then click straight through to the relevant site. We're pleased that Find Any Film has ditched its gloomy black design and annoying scrolling logos, and we like the BBFC Insight descriptions for each title, but it's a shame you still can't filter your search results by format, and that it's rental search doesn't include Netflix or Amazon Prime.

Our rating ★★★★☆

ALSO NEW

PRIVACY

Wallet Wall

www.walletwall.com

★★★☆☆

Wallet Wall is leading the fight against electronic pickpocketing, whereby someone uses radio-frequency identification (RFID) to steal your data. Its website explains the risks posed by RFID, both from criminals and the government; looks at the technology behind RFID chips; and promotes its RFID-blocking wallet, which you can buy for £20 from the site.

LOCAL

London.gov.uk

beta.london.gov.uk

★★★★☆

Currently in beta testing, this new Gov.uk site for the capital packs lots of useful information into a friendly, image-led design. Topics covered include Transport, Environment and 'Policing and crime', and you can find out what's happening in London via the events calendar, newsletter and Twitter feed. Expect other cities to get their own versions soon.

FOOD

Danepak

www.danepak.com

★★★☆☆

If you know your bacon, this site is more fun than most food brand promotions. Alongside the inevitable information about Danepak's different varieties, there's a game in which you chase pigs around a maze, classic TV ads (remember the 'hunt for Herbert the Turbot'?) and a poll that asks you to vote for red or brown sauce.

SPORT

Shoot

www.shoot.co.uk

★★★★☆

Launched in August 1969, the football magazine is still kicking about via its impressively slick and content-packed site. As well as news, interviews, top-5 lists, opinion pieces and player profiles, there are loads of videos and a Spotify playlist of the top tracks being played in stadiums. We're also pleased to see a section for women's football.

WEBSITE SECRETS

Get extra emoji in Facebook

Most Facebook users know how to get basic emoji, such as smiley and sad faces, without needing to copy and paste them from elsewhere. But did you know that you can also add a penguin, a shark and a robot to your status updates and comments on posts using a few simple punctuation marks? Just try the following to conjure up these secret emoji:

Penguin <(")
Shark (^^^)
Robot :|]

For a full list of emoji codes, visit emojicodes.com.

Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Mobile site design checker

Once you've started making your website work better on mobile devices, you need a way to check it looks good on them all, from phones to tablets. Responsinator (www.responsinator.com) can help with this without you needing to have lots of hardware to hand. Type the address of the page you want to test into the search box and click Go. You can then scroll down to view what the site looks like on a variety of Android and iOS screen sizes.

Check how your mobile site will look on a mobile device

Google requests EU cookie warning

Google is demanding that websites that host its AdSense adverts must now comply with the EU's ruling on warning visitors about cookies by 30 September 2015. If you have Google's ads on your site, you'll have to insert some code that warns people that your site uses cookies. Google has set up an information site at www.cookiechoices.org to guide you through the process. It recommends a number of tools to help, but Silktide's Cookie Consent tool (bit.ly/cookie378) is free and easy to set up.

Deal of the Fortnight

Krystal (krystal.co.uk) has a new reseller package for users who host sites for other people. The Unity package costs £15.59 per month for the first year (10 individual users).

Web-building Helpdesk

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT:
Michael Ashworth, MD of Nublue (www.nublue.co.uk)

Q As a teacher I want a website where students can download documents, watch videos and submit answers. What kind of traffic package will I need?

David Tems, via email

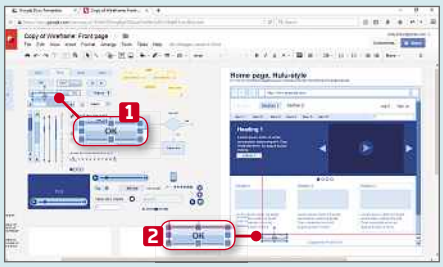
A If you know how many people will visit your website each month and how much data will be on it, multiplying these numbers will give a basic monthly bandwidth figure. Most hosting providers have a range of packages that let you to scale up (or down) if your initial package turns out to be unsuitable. Keep your bandwidth low when using video and audio by hosting it on external sites – these include sites such as Vimeo or SoundCloud – and then use their tools to embed the content on your site.

MINI WORKSHOP | Use a Google Drawing template to create a wireframe design

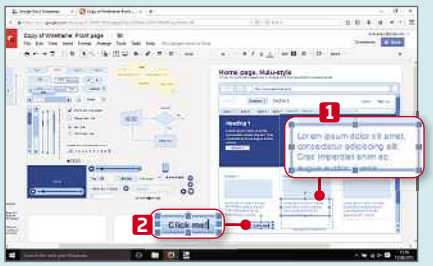
Google Drawings templates: docs.google.com/templates | 20 mins | Any browser

It's a good idea to sketch out your website before you start coding. The professionals do this using wireframes (blueprints of a site). If you can't draw, Morten Just has created some handy Google Drawings templates.

1 You'll find a list of Morten's templates at bit.ly/just378. Find the 'Wireframe: Front page' template and click the 'Use this template' button. This makes your own copy you can edit. An example page is displayed, 1 which you can use as a starting point. There are stencils you can grab and drop into the page in the grey area to the left. 2



2 Click and drag around one of the stencils to make sure you pick up the whole object, 1 because clicking on a section of it may just pick up a single element of a multi-part stencil. Press Ctrl+C to copy it, then Ctrl+V to paste a new copy of it. You can then drag it to the page. Guides appear 2 to help you line up with other page elements.



3 You can resize items by selecting them and dragging their handles. 1 You can also edit text by clicking it and replacing what's there. 2 When the wireframe is finished and you print the document, you'll only print the area in white, without all the spare stencils from the grey area.

+ Email us your website building questions at webuser@dennis.co.uk

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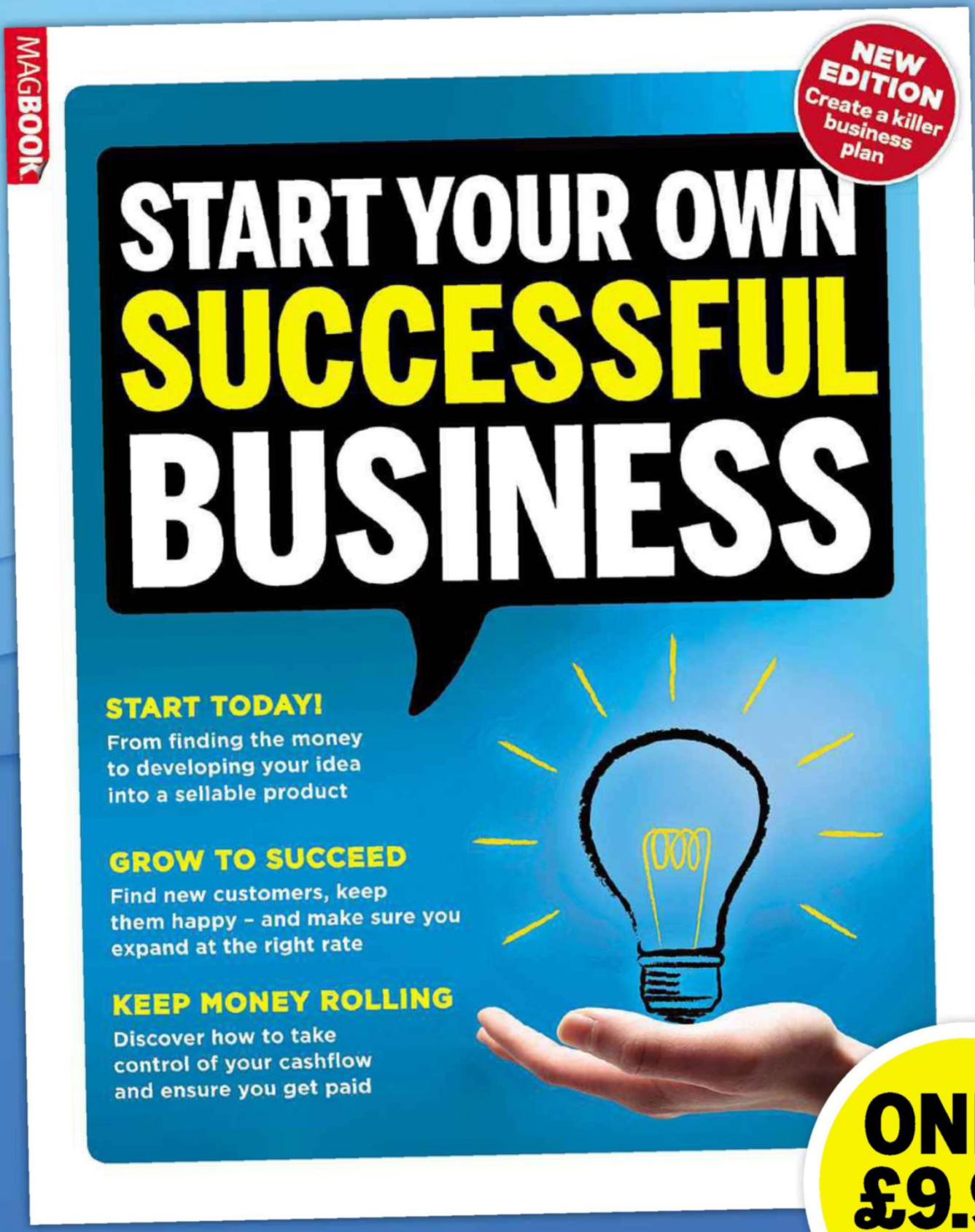

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Product Test

We test and compare the latest products

Corel PaintShop Pro X8

Andy Shaw tests the latest version of a classic Windows image editor

PaintShop Pro is a PC classic. Originally developed by Jasc Software and released as shareware, it was one of the first full-featured image processors available for the PC, rivalling Adobe's Photoshop (at the time only available on Apple computers and aimed at professionals) for a fraction of the price.

Corel took over the PaintShop Pro brand in 2004 and while the software has been tweaked and refined over the years, it essentially does the same job it always has: providing you with tools to improve your photos. Whether they just need a crop and straighten, or more complicated retouching, there are plenty of tools available.

Imaging software usually falls into one of two categories: photo-organising tools such as Google's Picasa, which is able to do a handful of editing tricks from its relatively simple photo viewer; and more complex image-editing packages like PaintShop Pro, which cost more but are also able to do far more.

Getting started

This extra depth is apparent as soon as you launch PaintShop Pro X8. It looks like Corel has tried to squeeze as much as it possibly can onto the screen when you start, which gives you a good sense of the breadth of tools available right from the start.

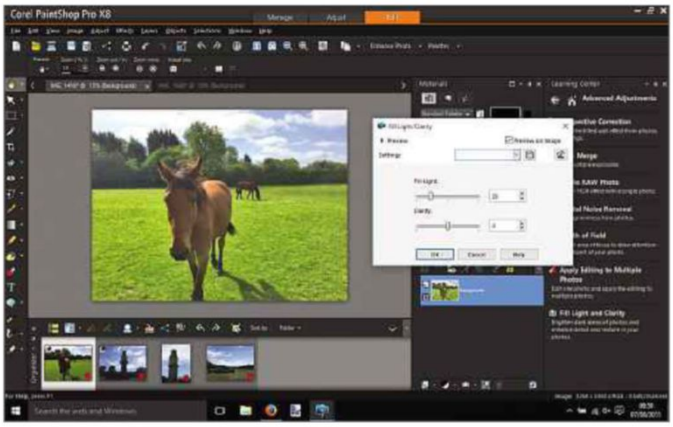
However, it also leaves very little space for the actual images you're editing. Our test laptop's screen is by no means the smallest, yet it was still almost completely filled with toolbars when we first opened PaintShop Pro X8. Fortunately, you can undock the toolbars from the main screen and choose to have them floating instead, which opens up a lot more space for the image you're editing.

> "It looks like Corel has tried to squeeze as much as it possibly can onto the screen when you start"

PaintShop Pro's interface is a good blend between modern and classic. The dark colour scheme with brightly coloured highlighting gives it the look of a modern creative tool, but the banks of icons across the top and down the left-hand-side keep it familiar. If you've used a previous version, even one from a long time ago, you should still be able to find your way around.

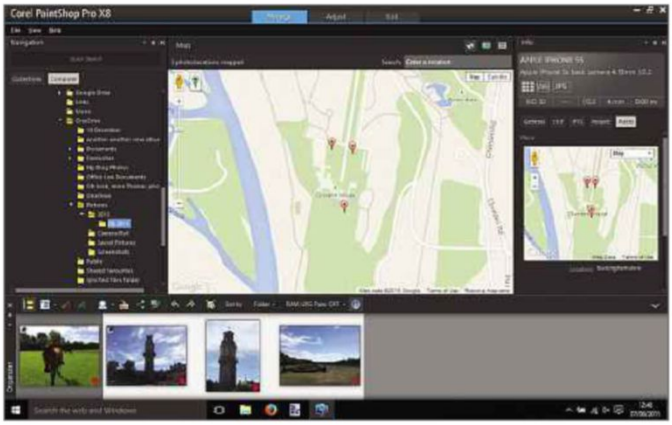
Basic functions

The software is split into three main sections, which are accessed from tabs at the top of the screen: Manage, Adjust and Edit. Manage is fairly straightforward – it's where you go to choose your files. Pick a folder from the tree on the left and you'll see its contents as thumbnails in the



Handy tools can help you perform basic, essential edits

The floating toolbars option gives your picture more space



View where your photos were taken on a Google map

Most of the simple editing tools are grouped in the Adjust tab

middle. Click on an image to highlight it and its EXIF data will be shown on the right (details such as the camera it was shot with and the exposure length). You'll also see a small preview of the image below the folder tree. Editing tools on offer here are kept to a minimum, though you can perform basic tasks like rotating images. If you've taken photos with a phone or a camera that can gather location information, you can view where they were taken on a Google map.

Serious editing

The Adjust and the Edit tabs are both used for more serious editing. The Adjust page offers a wide selection of quick-access tools for things like cropping, adjusting the overall colour and removing red-eye and blemishes. There's also a smart photo-fix tool that can have a good go at automatically fixing problems it detects with your image.

The idea is to keep the most advanced and complex tools for the Edit tab, but the Adjust section doesn't really look any simpler. It contains a large number of tools, and many aren't particularly accessible until you learn your way around the software.

For example, the colour chart in the top left makes it look more scientific, and while the instant effects tool on the right provides thumbnails that demonstrate what each effect does, the icons for cropping and other fixes are hidden away on tabs under the colour chart.

If you've got serious editing work to do, head for the Edit tab. You don't need to reopen the image, and any changes you've made so far will be carried across from the previous tools. In this section you can select particular areas of your photo to work on and build layers of effects, which makes it easier to adjust or undo individual changes down the line.

Although floating the toolbars clears up space for your images on screen, there's still a lot going on in the Edit section and the tools are unforgivingly complex. Helpfully, there is a Learning Center, which you can use to find particular effects, or learn more about whatever tool you've got to hand. This goes a long way to helping you learn the processes in PaintShop Pro, but it will be hard work if you're not already used to the software.

There are several new tools on offer in PaintShop Pro X8, but none are particularly innovative. For example, you can now remove unwanted elements from pictures and have the software cleverly fill the gap with background so it looks like the item you removed was never there. But while that's a great trick, it's not new to image editing, so is more of a catch-up for PaintShop Pro rather than any clear advantage over its rivals. It can also now flow words around shapes, which will be useful if you regularly add text to your pictures. But again, this is far from revolutionary – in fact, desktop publishing software and even most Office tools having been capable of this kind of thing for years. Still, it might save you having to open another program during the editing process.

Worth the upgrade?

There are also some new additions and enhancements to the selection and layer tools, but in truth existing PaintShop Pro users haven't got that many compelling reasons to upgrade.

OUR VERDICT

★★★★☆

FEATURES	★★★★☆
PERFORMANCE	★★★★★
EASE OF USE	★★★★☆
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆

The latest version of PaintShop Pro carries on the tradition of solid image editing that the software has held since its inception. It's one of the more sophisticated image editors but is a little behind in the race for new and innovative tools. However, all the tools it has are tried and tested. Free software such as Paint.net (www.getpaint.net) has many of the same tools but PaintShop Pro is more refined, with an added organiser and shortcuts for particular tasks that the free software doesn't offer.

PRODUCT INFO

PaintShop Pro X8

www.corel.com/gb

Price: £59.99 (£44.99 upgrade)

WHAT YOU NEED

- 1.5GHz or faster processor with SSE2 support
- 2GB of memory (4GB recommended)
- 1GB of hard drive space (2GB recommended)
- 1,024 x 768 pixels, 16-bit colour display (1,366 x 768 pixels, 24-bit colour recommended)
- DirectX 9 or higher compatible video adapter with latest driver
- Windows 7, 8.1 or 10, 32- or 64-bit

FOR

✓ Every basic image editing tool you need

✓ Lots of extra tools for a broad range of assisted edits

AGAINST

✗ Newcomers have a lot to learn

✗ Busy interface best suits larger screens

GREAT FREE OPTION

Paint.net, free

www.getpaint.net

EASIER TO USE INTERFACE

Adobe Photoshop Elements 13, £79.10

bit.ly/pse378

Linksys RE6700 Wi-Fi Range Extender

You don't want your Wi-Fi extender hogging a power socket. **Andy Shaw** tests one with a pass-through option

Network dead zones are the most annoying thing about Wi-Fi, but wherever you put your router, the chances are that there will be places in your house that your network can't reach. One answer is a range extender. This new model from Linksys is as fully featured as they come, operating across both 2.4GHz and 5GHz networks, and even boosting the latest 802.11ac routers.

The device has the best setup tool we've seen to date. Once you've plugged it into a wall socket, you can access its own network using a tablet, phone or laptop – whatever device it is you're trying to extend the internet for. You then connect to a very simple and clear website, which takes you step-by-step through the process of setting it up, one stage at a time. The highlight is the visual range indicator, which shows you whether you've positioned the device too near, too far or just the right distance away from your router. If it's within the green bars, then it's fine. It takes all the guesswork out of positioning the device, and the rest of the setup is equally straightforward.

The RE6700 is very well equipped. It has a Gigabit Ethernet port, so you can connect a compatible wired device at maximum speed, bridging the gap between your Wi-Fi and your Ethernet-only device. It has external antennas, which you can adjust the positioning of, to see if it can improve your signal. It also has a standard 3.5mm audio jack socket, which you can use to connect some speakers – the device can then stream music from a PC connected on the same network that has either Windows Media Player or iTunes installed.

Perhaps most importantly, though, it has a pass-through socket, so you can still use the wall socket it's plugged into to power another device. This might be the set of speakers that you're using with the 3.5mm jack plug, but even if you don't have an associated device to plug in, it's always a bonus to be able to plug something else in without disconnecting the Wi-Fi.

We tested the device using a single-band ISP router that doesn't reach particularly far into our test house. Trying to access the internet in the bedrooms is an unpleasant experience. We get 36Mbps (using Ookla Speedtest at www.speedtest.net) in the same room as the router, but moving through to the worst bedroom sees the connection become very flaky, with the best speed we measured being around 3Mbps. By placing the RE6700 between the router and the dead zone, we saw the speed increase to 13Mbps. This is a dramatic improvement to the quality of the internet connection and will certainly help make your Wi-Fi more accessible all over your home.

PRODUCT INFO

Linksys RE6700
www.linksys.com/gb
Price: £69.99
Buy from:
www.argos.co.uk

SPECIFICATIONS

- 802.11 a/b/g/n/ac standards
- Gigabit Ethernet port
- 3.5mm audio jack
- 2.4 and 5GHz bands
- WPS and Reset buttons

FOR

✓ Pass-through socket so you don't sacrifice a plug
✓ Significantly boosted our Wi-Fi
✓ Lots of extras
✓ Easy setup

AGAINST

✗ Bulky for a range extender (but no bigger than a pass-through HomePlug)

OUR VERDICT

★★★★☆

There's nothing missing from this well-equipped Wi-Fi range extender, which covers all the network settings you might need, and throws in a pass-through power socket for good measure. This makes it good value for money. Most importantly of all, it solved the connection problems in our Wi-Fi dead zones with a minimum of fuss.

FEATURES	★★★★★
PERFORMANCE	★★★★☆
EASE OF USE	★★★★★
VALUE FOR MONEY	★★★★☆

Web User's Best Buys

Web User and its sister titles test over 2,500 products every year

HARDWARE

WI-FI EXTENDER

Netgear Nighthawk AC1900 Extender

£130 from www.broadbandbuyer.co.uk
Date tested: July 2015

The Netgear Nighthawk is pricey, but it's also fast, powerful and built to last. Its advanced tools will be compatible with future Wi-Fi standards and it provides excellent performance.

KEY SPECS

AC1900 Wi-Fi ■ Dual-band ■ 5 x Gigabit Ethernet ports ■ USB 3 ■ WPA and WPA2 security ■ DLNA server ■ 252 x 174 x 31mm ■ Two-years return-to-base warranty

NETWORK CAMERA

Y-cam HomeMonitor HD

£150 from www.homemonitor.me
Date tested: June 2015

The Y-cam HomeMonitor HD will save you money in the long run if you want to save captured motion-detected footage online. Its free online storage option supports a wide range of devices.

KEY SPECS

Apps for Android, iOS, Windows Phone, Roku ■ 1/4in CMOS sensor ■ Viewing angle: horizontal 80°, vertical 45°, diagonal 87° ■ 1,280 x 720 pixels resolution ■ 15fps frame rate ■ Ethernet and 802.11n Wi-Fi ■ 85 x 85 x 30mm ■ 1150g

BUDGET PC

Chillblast Fusion Cyborg

£600 with monitor, £500 without from www.chillblast.com
Date tested: May 2015

The Chillblast Fusion Cyborg is compact, quiet and capable of excellent performance. There isn't much room in the case for future expansion, but it's a great value PC.

KEY SPECS

Quad-core 3.2GHz Intel Core i5-4460 ■ 8GB of memory ■ 1TB hard drive ■ 21.5in monitor ■ 1,920 x 1,080 pixels resolution ■ 3 x USB 3 ports, 5 x USB 2 ports ■ Windows 7 or 8.1 ■ 427 x 364 x 189 mm ■ Three-years return-to-base warranty

BUDGET LAPTOP

HP Stream 11

£179.99 from store.hp.com/ukstore
Date tested: April 2015

The HP Stream 11 offers excellent performance and a respectable battery life. It's a sleek, attractive laptop, available in blue or magenta, with a good screen that offers wide viewing angles.

KEY SPECS

Dual-core 2.16GHz Intel Celeron N2840 processor ■ 2GB of memory ■ 11.6in non-touchscreen ■ 32GB flash drive ■ 1,366 x 768 pixels resolution ■ Single-band 802.11n Wi-Fi ■ 300 x 206 x 20mm ■ 1.29kg ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

MULTIROOM SPEAKER

Sonos Play:1

£169 from www.currys.co.uk
Date tested: March 2015

The Sonos Play:1 offers impressive audio quality and comes with excellent software and great apps that provide seamless integration with music services. It's the ideal speaker to use as a starting point for a home entertainment system.

KEY SPECS

2 x speakers ■ 802.11n Wi-Fi, 1 x 10/100 Ethernet ■ Android and iOS apps ■ Compatible with UPnP and SMB servers ■ AAC, FLAC, MP3, OGG and WAV ■ 161 x 12 x 12mm ■ 1.8kg

SSD

Samsung 850 Pro 256GB

£136.03 from www.kikatek.com
Date tested: February 2015

The Samsung 850 Pro is crammed with new technology that makes it faster and more durable than its competitors. You could buy a similarly sized SSD for much less, but in our tests the cheaper models weren't as fast and they don't come with the 850 Pro's generous 10-year warranty.

KEY SPECS

256GB (also available in 128GB, 512GB & 1TB) ■ 53p per GB ■ SATA III interface ■ 2.5in drive case ■ 10-year warranty ■ 100 x 70 x 7mm ■ 66g

All prices correct at time of review

TABLET

Google Nexus 9

£319 from play.google.com
Date tested: February 2015

The Nexus 9 is our favourite Android tablet. It has a fantastic screen, even better than the iPad Air 2's, and superb battery life, lasting over 15 hours in our tests. It's cheaper than the latest iPad and comes in 16GB and 32GB capacities.

KEY SPECS
8.9in screen ■ 2,048 x 1,536 pixels resolution ■ Dual-core 2.3GHz 64-bit Nvidia Tegra K1 Denver processor ■ 16/32GB storage ■ 4G option costs £60 extra (32GB models only) ■ Android 5.0 ■ 228 x 154 x 8mm ■ 425g

WINDOWS 8.1 LAPTOP

Asus Transformer Book Flip TP300LA

£449.95 from www.johnlewis.com
Date tested: January 2015

This touchscreen laptop folds over into a chunky tablet. It's well built, did well in our performance tests and has a fantastic battery life.

KEY SPECS
Dual-core 1.9GHz Intel Core i3-4030U processor ■ 4GB of memory ■ 13.3in touchscreen ■ 1,366 x 768 pixels resolution ■ 500GB hard drive ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ 326 x 232 x 22mm ■ 1.75kg ■ One-year collect-and-return warranty

WIRELESS ROUTER

D-Link DIR-868L

£65.97 from www.dabs.com
Date tested: December 2014

If you're willing to switch your wireless devices to the 5GHz network, the D-Link DIR-868L offers fast and reliable performance at a great price. It's simple to set up and provides a handy wizard to guide you through the process.

KEY SPECS
Dual-band 2.4GHz and 5GHz ■ 802.11b/g/n ■ 1,300Mbps theoretical maximum speed ■ 6 x internal antennas ■ 4 x 10/100/1000Mbps Ethernet ports ■ WPA and WPA2 encryption ■ 1 x USB 3 port ■ 217 x 123 x 102mm ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

DESKTOP PC

Chillblast Fusion Obelisk

£699.98 from www.chillblast.com
Date tested: November 2014

This great all-round desktop PC achieved a good overall performance in both our Windows and gaming tests. It runs quietly, has a good-quality monitor and is packed with great components, including a fast SSD and a generous hard drive.

KEY SPECS
Quad-core 4.2GHz Intel Core i5-4690K processor (overclocked) ■ 8GB of memory ■ 5 x USB3, 5 x USB2 ports ■ Gigabit Ethernet ■ 120GB SSD ■ 1TB hard drive ■ 1,920 x 1,080 pixels resolution ■ Windows 8.1 ■ 465 x 430 x 192mm

KEYBOARD

Cherry MX-Board 3.0

£55 from www.kikatek.com
Date tested: November 2014

The Cherry MX-Board 3.0 is a hard-wearing mechanical keyboard that's a pleasure to type on. It's quiet for a mechanical model but still makes more noise than a standard keyboard. It doesn't have a lot of features, but it's ideal if you're looking for a standard, good-quality keyboard.

KEY SPECS
104 keys ■ 1 x USB port ■ 1.8m detachable cable ■ 2 non-slip surfaces ■ 2 rubber caps for adjustable feet ■ 44.6 x 15.8 x 2.8cm ■ 0.83kg ■ Win-Key lock

NAS DRIVE

Asustor AS-202TE

£199.66 from www.scan.co.uk
Date tested: September 2014

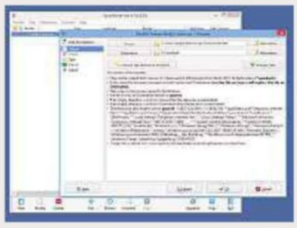
This NAS drive put in an excellent performance in our tests, transferring files over our network faster than any of the other devices we tested. It has an impressive range of tools, including an HDMI output for streaming to TV.

KEY SPECS
EXT4 file system ■ SATA3 hard drive ■ 2 x 3.5in bays ■ 1 x 10/100/1,000 Ethernet ■ 2 x USB 2 ports, 2 x USB 3 ports ■ 1 x HDMI (1.4a) ■ 1 x 3.5mm mini-jack ■ 230 x 164 x 108mm ■ 1.87kg ■ Two-year return-to-base warranty

SOFTWARE & SERVICES

BACKUP AND SYNC

SyncBackFree



Free from bit.ly/syncback366
Date tested: March 2015

SyncBackFree is very capable software that gives you plenty of control over how it can be used. If you know what you need from your backups and you're prepared to spend some time configuring the options, SyncBackFree has everything you need.

KEY FEATURES

Synchronise: Copy files in both directions ■ Restore back-up files easily ■ Email logs ■ Schedule backups ■ Simple and Advanced mode ■ Runs on Windows 8, 7, Vista, and XP ■ Extensive Help documentation and support

INTERNET SECURITY

Kaspersky Internet Security 2015

£17.99 from bit.ly/kaspoffer
Date tested: January 2015

Kaspersky Internet Security performed near-perfectly throughout our tests last year, with only one unwanted program slipping through. Our sister title *Computeractive* is selling it at the reader-offer price of £17.99 (full price £39.99). Click the link above.

KEY FEATURES

Anti-virus and firewall tools ■ Protects online shopping and banking ■ Identity and privacy tools ■ Dangerous-website alerts ■ Advanced parental control ■ Licences for one, three and five PCs; for one or two years, or pay monthly ■ Multi-Device version for Mac and Android protection

PHOTO EDITING

Adobe Photoshop Elements 13

£81.08 from www.adobe.com/uk
Date tested: December 2014

With its tidy interface and pop-out trays, Adobe Photoshop Elements provides everything an amateur photographer needs and helps you quickly find the right editing tools.

KEY FEATURES

Compatible with Windows XP, Vista, 7, 8+ (32- and 64-bit) ■ Bundled photo organiser ■ Content-aware edits ■ Guided edits ■ People-beautifier tools ■ RAW support

VIDEO EDITING

Adobe Premiere Elements 13

£81.08 from www.adobe.com/uk
Date tested: December 2014

Premiere Elements 13's superb interface makes its many features neat but accessible. You won't find better video-editing software for the price.

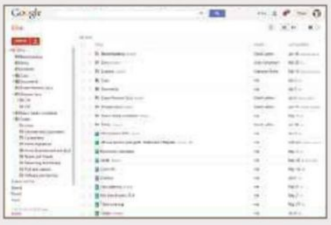
KEY FEATURES

Automatic editing ■ Export to multiple video formats ■ Burn to DVD and Blu-ray ■ Image stabiliser ■ Stop-motion capture ■ Motion tracking ■ Musical scores and sound effects ■ Upload to YouTube and Vimeo

ONLINE STORAGE

Google Drive

From free from drive.google.com
Date tested: August 2014



Google Drive is easy to use and has lots of free storage. The Windows software integrates with Explorer, so saving and syncing files is like keeping them in any other PC folder.

KEY FEATURES

15GB free storage ■ Web-based office software ■ Works with Windows XP, Vista, 7 and 8+ ■ Chrome browser add-on ■ Android and iOS apps ■ 100GB extra storage for £1.19 per month; 1TB for £5.97 per month; 10TB for £59.51 per month

ONLINE SITE BUILDER

Weebly

From free from www.weebly.com
Date tested: May 2014

Weebly's drag-and-drop interface makes it extremely easy to use. Its templates are a little restrictive, but there are still plenty of options to choose from and the results look great. It also has free Android and iOS apps.

KEY FEATURES

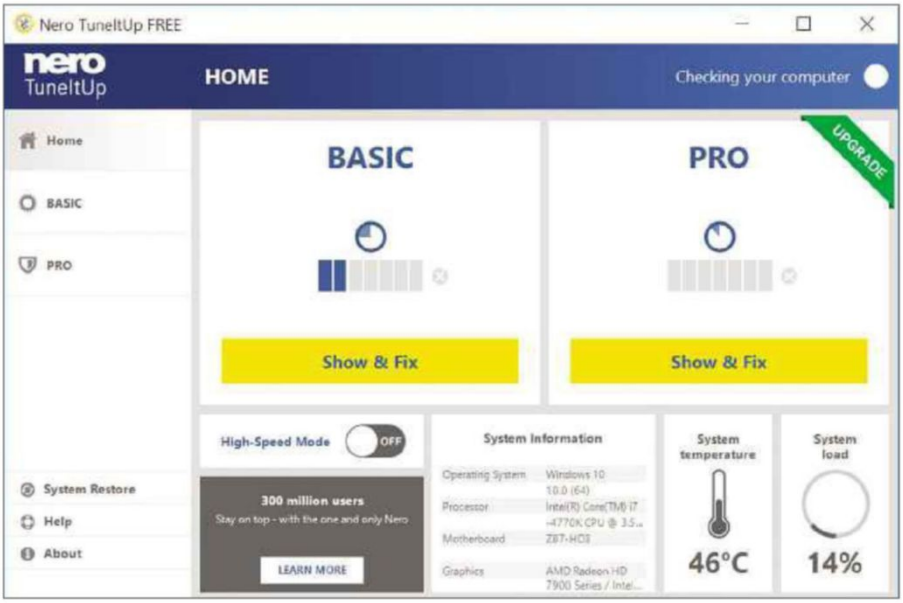
115 templates ■ Unlimited storage ■ SEO tools ■ Meta tags ■ Password protection ■ E-commerce tools ■ Ad-free Starter edition ■ Android and iOS apps ■ RSS ■ Site stats

Best Free Software

SYSTEM TOOL

Nero TuneItUp

bit.ly/nero378
Min requirements: Windows XP/ Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 15MB



TuneItUp, from disc-burning specialist Nero, is designed to clear out junk and optimise your PC to make it run faster. It can delete unnecessary files, empty the Recycle Bin, clear your browsing history, locate large files and safely uninstall unwanted programs.

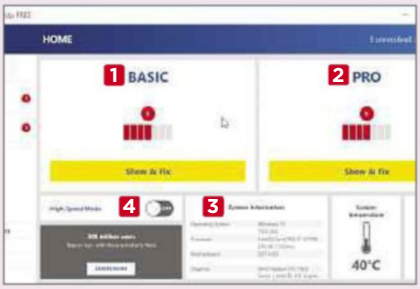
Like similar tools, TuneItUp is easy to use, and gives you the option to clean up and speed up your system with a single click, or manually confirm the changes it's about to make first. If you've recently upgraded to Windows 10, TuneItUp claims to be able to remove any unnecessary clutter and correct any sluggish behaviour encountered as a result of the update.

It's fully Windows 10-compliant, so it can clean up after new components, such as Microsoft's Edge browser.

There are free and paid-for versions of the program available, so make sure you click the download button for the free one at the bottom of the page or you'll be asked to pay. The free edition offers a cut-down experience, but still provides enough tools to keep undemanding users happy. These include a Registry cleaner, multimedia data manager and uninstall wizard. The paid-for edition costs £29.99 and offers quite a few more features. You can click the Basic and Pro buttons in the program to see the differences.

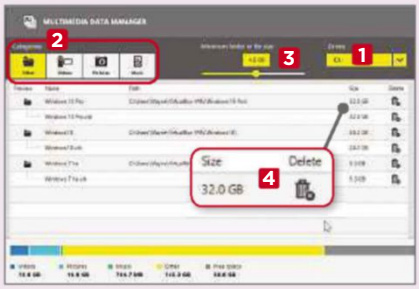
TuneItUp's home screen displays system information, the current system temperature and system load. From here, you can also toggle High-Speed Mode on or off. This feature can boost resource-hungry applications such as games or video programs by temporarily disabling unused and non-essential services. To use it, turn the switch to On, then start up the program you want to speed up.

MINI WORKSHOP | Clean up and speed up your PC using Nero TuneItUp



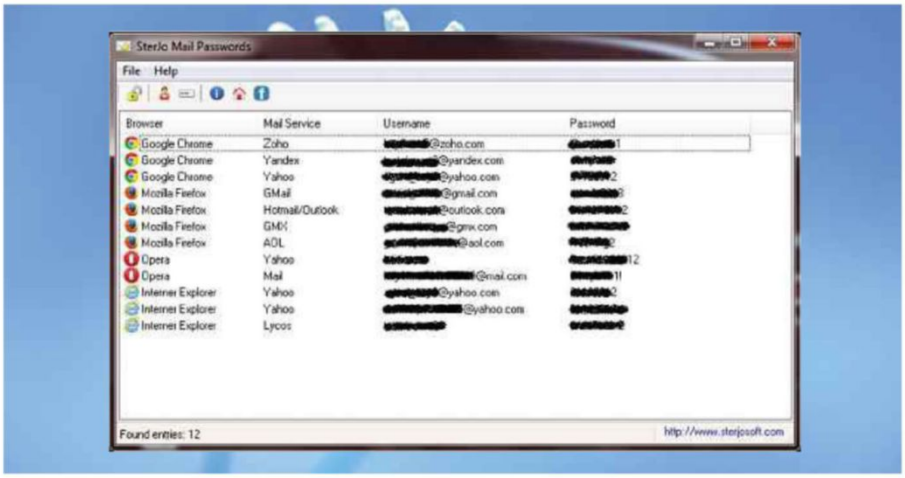
1 You don't need to run a scan manually with Nero TuneItUp, as the program will automatically check your PC and present you with a number of problems that can be fixed in both the Basic 1 and Pro 2 editions. You can view system status details here 3 and turn High Speed Mode on or off. 4

2 Click Basic on the left. 1 The colour-coded bars show the number of problems found. 2 If you trust the software, you can click Fix Now 3 to remove everything, or you can clean up individual sections. 4 Click the Details chevron 5 to see exactly what issues the software has identified, and choose what to remove.



3 You can batch-uninstall unwanted programs by clicking Show and choosing the applications to remove. The Multimedia Data Manager scans the size of your files and displays the largest ones first. You can choose the drive to target, 1 filter by category 2 and set the minimum size to look for. 3 Free up space by deleting large items. 4

This fortnight's top new software downloads to help you make the most of your PC, and they're all FREE



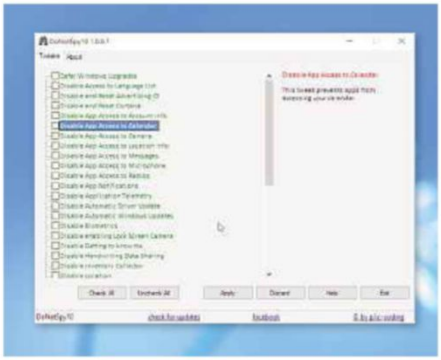
PASSWORD-RECOVERY TOOL

SterJo Mail Passwords

www.bit.ly/sterjo378

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 741KB

Can't remember what your password is for a particular webmail service? SterJo Mail Passwords searches your PC for login details stored locally in any of the main browsers. Admittedly, you could find these details manually yourself, but the program simplifies the process down to a single mouse click. Once the details are found, right-clicking will let you copy the user name, password or both. It works with various webmail services, including Gmail, Hotmail, and Yahoo Mail.



PRIVACY TOOL

DoNotSpy for Windows 10

bit.ly/donotspy378

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 858KB

Windows 10 has several components that collect personal usage data – such as your keyboard input and speech – which you may be uncomfortable with. DoNotSpy provides a simple way to quickly turn off any such features you don't like. Click an item to find out what it does, and tick it to disable it. Note that blocking certain elements may cause Windows features to stop working properly, so proceed with caution.

WEB BROWSER

Opera 31

www.opera.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 687KB (installer)

Opera is an excellent, speedy alternative to Firefox and Chrome. It's based on the same rendering engine as Chrome, it supports add-ons and it has a feature designed to speed up page loading on slow networks. Discover, Opera's news and updates tab, has been redesigned in this build, and synchronisation of your typed history has been improved as well. The browser is much faster on older devices now, too.

New Windows 8 Apps

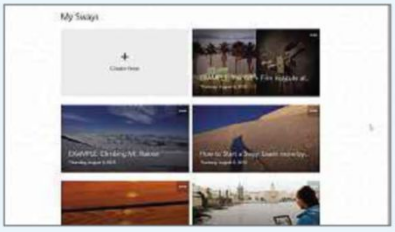
Sway

bit.ly/sway378

Min requirements: Windows 8+/10

File size: 62.2MB

Like a modern version of PowerPoint, Sway lets you create presentations and stories, called Sways, and add interactive multimedia content such as images, video, tweets, Vines and GIFs.



Pic Collage

bit.ly/piccollage378

Min requirements: Windows 8+/10

File size: 12.13MB

Pic Collage lets you combine photos, text, stickers, drawings and cut-outs to create your own collages. It's very easy to use and works with both touch and keyboard and mouse.

Candy Crush Saga

bit.ly/candycrush378

Min requirements: Windows 8+/10

File size: 46.69MB

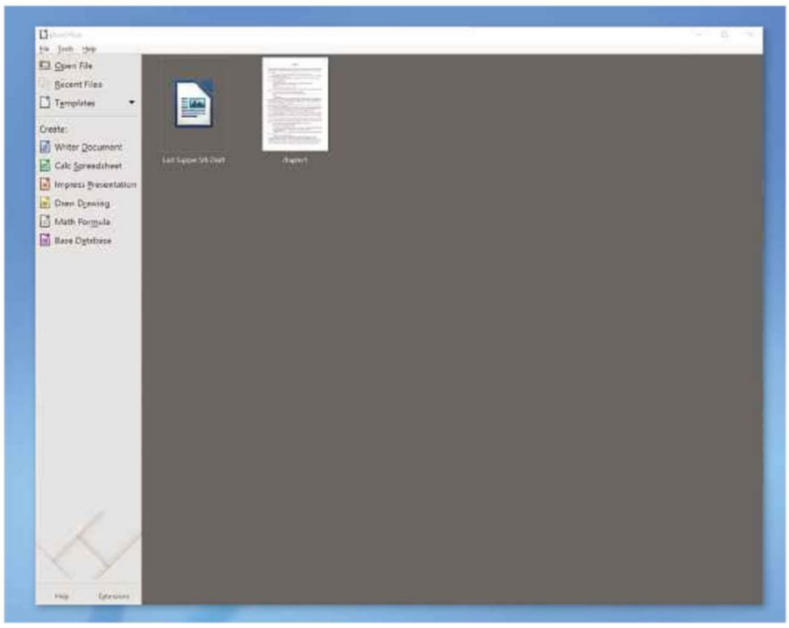
King's hugely addictive puzzle game finally arrives on Windows. If you haven't played it, the aim is to switch and match different candies. There are lots of levels to play through.

OFFICE SUITE

LibreOffice 5

www.libreoffice.org

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, Mac OS X, or Linux **File size:** 211MB



The popular open-source office suite has been updated, and this major release introduces a huge number of changes and improvements to LibreOffice, including the introduction of a dedicated 64-bit build for Windows, an overhauled interface with new icons, better use of space, and usability tweaks. It's fully Windows 10-compatible and features enhanced support for rival office suites, including Microsoft Office and Apple iWork.

The various modules in LibreOffice all gain new functionality. Writer, for example, now offers style previews in the sidebar, the ability to drag and drop images into documents, and picture cropping. Calc, meanwhile, gains support for complex formulae and new functions.

ANTI-MALWARE

SUPERAntiSpyware 6

www.superantispyware.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 21.9MB

SUPERAntiSpyware can find and remove all sorts of threats from your PC, including spyware, adware, Trojans, rootkits, worms and rogue security programs. It's light on resources, so won't slow your system down or interfere with other security tools. You're given a choice of scans – Complete, Quick, Critical Point (which looks for active infections) and Custom. You can tailor the software's behaviour to suit you, and there are tools to remove stubborn files, fix malware damage, uninstall unwanted programs and more.

The latest version of the software features a new, touch-friendly interface, improved scanning speeds, and a System Investigator that lets you see what's running on your PC.

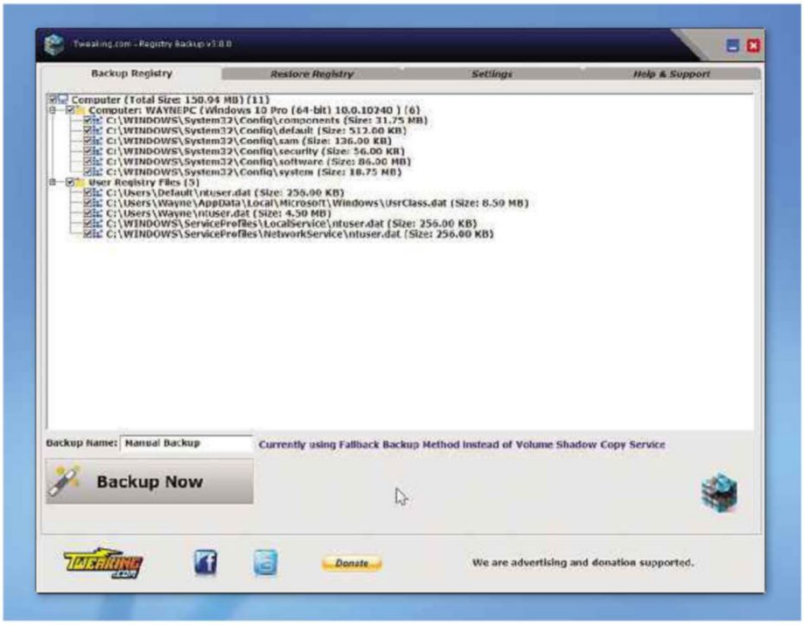
REGISTRY TOOL

Registry Backup 3

bit.ly/regbackup378

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 4.4MB



The Windows Registry is pretty robust, and doesn't usually require 'cleaning' or defragging. It can occasionally go wrong, though, such as when clean-up programs delete important keys by mistake. Registry Backup uses the Windows Volume Shadow Copy Service to create a snapshot of your Registry at that moment in time, so you can quickly restore it in the event of problems. There are large buttons for backing up and restoring the Registry, as well as a Settings tab for managing your previous backups.

This new version of Registry Backup runs considerably faster and offers a wealth of stability and performance enhancements. It's fully Windows 10-compatible, too.

✗ Don't install...

Air Control

bit.ly/aircontrol378

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, Mac OS X or Linux

File size: 125MB

Chances are your aviation ambitions don't involve traipsing up and down aisles between scary-looking passengers and visiting poorly rendered aeroplane toilets, but such is the level of detail in this "new generation" flight simulator. Air Control would almost qualify for 'so bad it's good' status, if it didn't cost £6.99.

...Install this instead ✓

FlightGear

www.flightgear.org

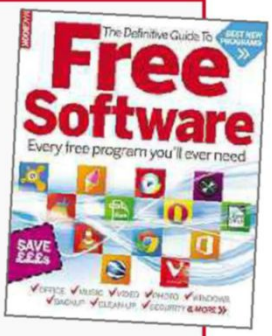
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10, Mac OS X or Linux

File size: 1GB

If you've ever dreamed of becoming a pilot, this amazing free program puts you in the cockpit from the comfort of your PC. There are dozens of planes, helicopters and other aircraft to choose from – including the Wright Brothers' Flyer, Boeing 737s and Zeppelin airships – and 20,000 real world airports. FlightGear is impressively realistic, with convincing scenery and weather conditions. It's not easy to master, but a detailed manual at mapserver.flightgear.org/getstart will get you up in the air and back down again.

GET THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO FREE SOFTWARE

Our new Free Software MagBook is packed with 148 pages of brilliant workshops, tips and advice about every program you'll ever need.



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- Replace Windows tools with better alternatives
- Download free office tools that save you £££s
- Clean your PC to make it run as fast as new
- Tweak your browser to unlock hidden features
- Record free music and video from any website

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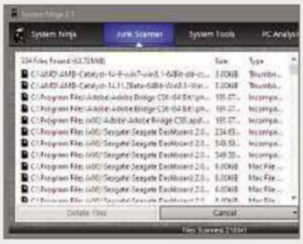
UPDATED | New tweaks and fixes for your favourite free programs



SYSTEM TOOL

System Ninja 3.1

singularlabs.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+

File size: 2.6MB

System Ninja is a worthy alternative to CCleaner that removes junk from your PC, including temporary files, cookies, thumbnail caches and more. This version adds support for Windows 10 and its new Edge browser, improves the cleaning of log files and fixes various bugs.

IMAGE VIEWER

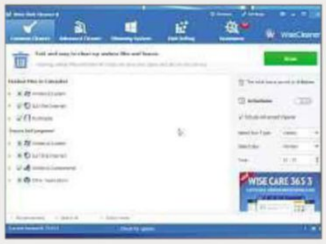
IrfanView 4.40

www.irfanview.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 3.2MB

IrfanView is a tiny yet featured-packed image viewer and editor. Version 4.40 adds a 64-bit version of the program, which is faster at handing very large images. The latest update also gains support for animated PNG files, a PDF plugin and numerous tweaks and bug fixes.



SYSTEM CLEANER

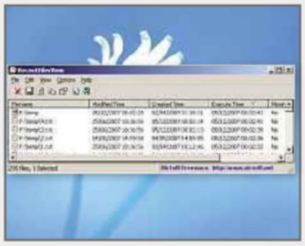
Wise Disk Cleaner Free 8.71

www.wisecleaner.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 2.9MB

Wise Disk Cleaner deletes junk files, cleans up after Windows and internet use and can remove unwanted Windows features. It also has a disk defragmenter. This update adds Windows 10 compatibility, Edge cleaning, improved transitions, and minor interface tweaks.



SYSTEM TOOL

RecentFilesView 1.30

www.nirsoft.net

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10

File size: 44KB

This tiny free program displays a list of all recently opened files on your PC, and allows you to export the page or delete certain entries. It now also features an Advanced Options window (F9), which lets you load information about recent files from an external source. ■

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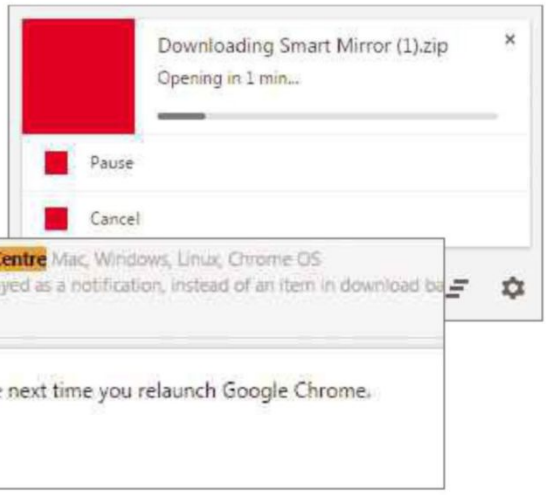
Best New Browser Tools

CHROME

Display downloads as notifications

When you download files in Chrome, progress is shown in a box in the bottom-left corner of the window. Not only does this take up space, but the box vanishes moments after the download finishes – typically just when you're about to click to open the file – so you have to go to your Downloads folder to get to it. A new experimental feature in Chrome solves the problem by showing your download in a separate window, which doesn't interfere with what you're doing and lets you retrieve files at any time. To activate it, type `chrome://flags` into your address bar, look for the entry 'Download Status in Notification Centre' and click Enable. Relaunch Chrome and the progress box will pop up on screen the next time you download a file. Once the download is complete, click the arrow on the taskbar to open the notifications area, then click the notifications icon to open the file.



Discover places to visit via Airbnb

If you're interested in using Airbnb (www.airbnb.co.uk) to find affordable holiday accommodation, it's worth installing a new add-on from location-information service Yapq (yapq.com) called 'Explore nearby places for Airbnb' (bit.ly/explore378). As its name suggests, this add-on shows you interesting things to see and do in the vicinity of properties listed on Airbnb, so you can avoid booking accommodation that turns out to be in the middle of nowhere. Each recommended place of interest is embedded on the relevant Airbnb page, along with how many minutes' walk the place is from where you're staying, and you can click 'Read more' to see full details on Yapq. The extension suggests an interesting array of places around the world, including tourist attractions, historic buildings and areas of natural beauty.

Watch films at the same time as friends

You no longer need to be in the same room as someone to enjoy films and TV shows on Netflix together. The new Chrome extension Showgoers (bit.ly/showgoers378) lets you sync your Netflix viewing to watch movies at the same time as friends, no matter where they are. Once it's installed, just start playing a film or programme, then click the 3D-glasses icon to launch Sync mode and generate a link. Share this with someone else and when they click it (provided they also have Showgoers installed), their Netflix player will open the same content at the same position as yours, and you can watch together. When you play, pause, or jump to a new time in the movie or show, their Netflix player will follow yours. Showgoers is ideal for long-distance relationships, so you and your loved one can laugh, cry and scream in tandem even when you're thousands of miles apart.

Access all Google tools from one menu

Black Menu (bit.ly/black378) has long been one of our favourite browser add-ons, giving you instant access to all the most popular Google tools from a single toolbar menu. As well as searching sites and services including Maps, YouTube and News, it also lets you perform useful tasks such as to translate foreign words and phrases with Google Translate, compose a Gmail message, or add files to Google Drive. Black Menu now boasts the same 'Material design' interface that Google has been applying to its products for the past year.

This fortnight's most useful tips and add-ons to help you get the most from Chrome, Firefox, Opera and more

FIREFOX

Find out more about your IP address

Your IP (internet protocol) address tells the web all manner of information about you, but most people don't even know what theirs is, never mind what it means. Whats My IP (bit.ly/whats378) lets you find out your IP address instantly by clicking its toolbar button. Even better, you can see exactly what information it divulges about you by clicking Check – this may include your geographical location, your ISP, your operating system and the browser you're using, among other details. Whats My IP also tells you if your IP address has been blacklisted by any sites and, if so, why. If you decide you're unhappy with how much info your IP address gives away, click the Disable WebRTC link to protect your privacy (you can re-enable it when required).

Open a new tab next to the current one

By default, all browsers open new tabs to the right of the tabs you already have open. This may be logical given that we read from left to right, but is less useful when you have lots of tabs open and you're in one towards the left. Nearby New Tab (bit.ly/nearby378) solves this problem by forcing Firefox to open a new tab directly to the right of the active one, moving the others along to make space. To use the add-on, just click the plus-sign icon that it places on your toolbar, rather than the usual plus sign for a new tab. Alternatively, you can middle-click the usual plus sign or press Ctrl+Shift+T to open a nearby new tab.

Block all or only selected pop-ups

Pop-up adverts are no longer the menace they were 10 years ago, mainly thanks to the effectiveness of built-in pop-up blockers. But sometimes they can do their job too well, such as when legitimate websites have placed important information or an essential tool in a pop-up window. Simple Popup Blocker (bit.ly/popup378) lets you choose which pop-ups you see and which you don't simply by clicking its toolbar button and toggling between allowing all pop-ups (if you're a glutton for punishment), blocking them all or only allowing pop-ups requested by the current site.

Hide the time on YouTube videos

Sometimes knowing exactly how many minutes are remaining can impair your enjoyment of a video, such as when you're watching a sporting event and don't know the final result yet, or are enjoying a clip so much you never want it to end. Anticipation for YouTube (bit.ly/anticipation378) handily hides the time and the progress bar on videos at the click of a button, so you don't have any idea how long you've got left. It even hides the durations of videos in the sidebar, though it does at least let you skip back and forth through clips using the arrow keys.

OTHER BROWSERS

Stop HTML5 playing automatically

Although it's generally agreed that HTML5 provides an excellent replacement for Flash, some sites insist on using it to play audio and video automatically when you visit them. Disable HTML5 Autoplay (bit.ly/auto378) is a new Opera extension that does exactly what it says on the tin, preventing HTML5 content from playing unless you click to view it. Usefully, the add-on displays an icon on your toolbar that changes colour to indicate when media elements are present on a page, so you can play them manually or not at all. When the icon is grey, it means there's nothing to see or hear.

Install the world's most useless extension

We make no excuses for the poor quality of this issue's final browser tool, and neither does its creator, having given it the name World's Most Useless Extension (bit.ly/useless378). Essentially, as soon as you install the add-on a mouse-pointer hand appears onscreen and clicks a big Uninstall button to remove it. Install the extension again and the same thing happens. We did warn you it was useless!

Best Free Apps

App of the Fortnight

INFORMATION

NEW

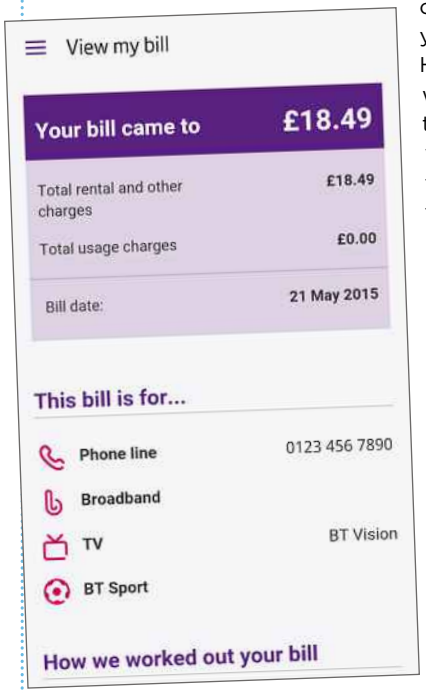
My BT

bit.ly/mybt378

Min requirements: Android 4.1, iOS 7.1

Size: 5.5MB

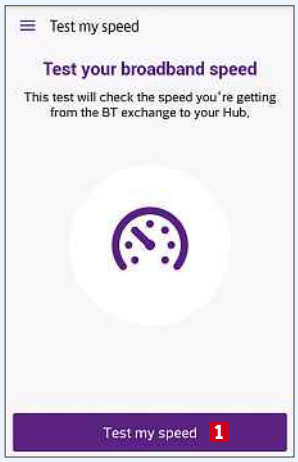
My BT makes managing your BT account easier than ever. The app has built-in tools for viewing your bill and current package, and you can also use it to track an order, change an engineer appointment or check the status of broadband in your area. After logging into the app for the first time, you'll be asked to set up a PIN, so that signing in is quicker in the future. From its home screen, you can then see a summary of your account information as well as three quick links to view your bill, check your service status or test your internet speed. We were particularly impressed with the internet speed check feature, because, unlike other speed test apps, you can see how your Home Hub is performing without even needing to connect to it. When we received the results from our test, the app told us that our internet speeds were slower than they should be and suggested that we restart the router, which, remarkably, the app can also do remotely. This simple but useful feature should make marching between rooms to restart your Home Hub a thing of the past!



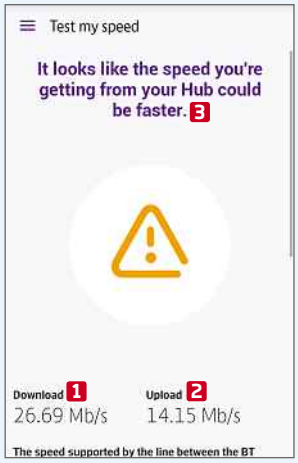
Our rating ★★★★★

MINI WORKSHOP
Troubleshoot broadband problems using My BT

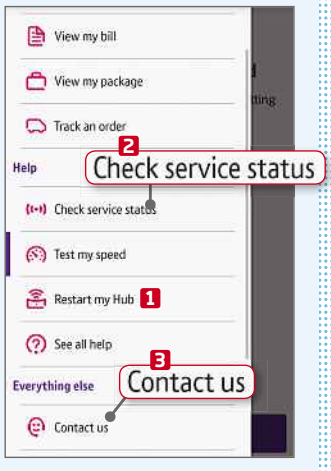
1 Open My BT and log in. Tap the 'Test my speed' quick link on the home screen and then tap it again 1 to test your internet connection. A progress screen appears informing you that your internet speed is being checked, which can take a few minutes.



2 Once the test has finished, My BT shows your current Download 1 and Upload 2 speeds, and a warning message appears 3 if your speeds are below expectations. Scroll down and tap 'Restart my Hub' to reboot your Home Hub or 'Optimise my speed' to see some tips for improving speeds.



3 If you experience slow internet speeds again, you can reset your Home Hub 1 from My BT's sidebar, or tap 'Check service status' 2 to see if there are any known broadband faults in your area. You can also use the Contact Uus 3 button to call or chat with a BT representative.



This fortnight's top free and paid-for apps for Android, iOS and Windows phones and tablets, and smart TVs

LANGUAGES

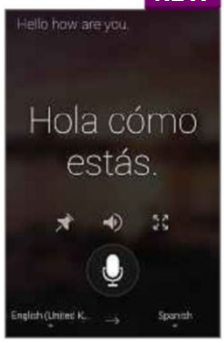
NEW

Microsoft Translator

bit.ly/translator378

Min requirements: Android 4.3, iOS 8, Windows Phone

Size: 5.3MB



Microsoft Translator lets you translate written and spoken words to and from over 50 different languages. Whether you speak or type the words, the translated phrase appears quickly on screen and can be pinned to view later or displayed on a full-screen translation card, which is useful when trying to communicate something to others. In many cases, there's also the option to hear your translation spoken out loud. The app needs a data connection to work, but you can browse recent and pinned translations offline.

Our rating ★★★★☆

SECURITY

NEW

Stagefright Detector App

bit.ly/stagefright378

Min requirements: Android 2.3.3

Size: 1.1MB

As we reported in Issue 377, Stagefright is a critical Android bug that could allow hackers to access your data by sending you a media message. The Stagefright Detector App has been developed by the security firm who discovered the vulnerability, to detect whether your device might have been affected. Unless you've got a Nexus device or a new flagship phone, it's unlikely you'll have received a patch yet. Until then, ensure your default messaging app is set up not to automatically retrieve MMS messages.

Our rating ★★★★☆

FOOD

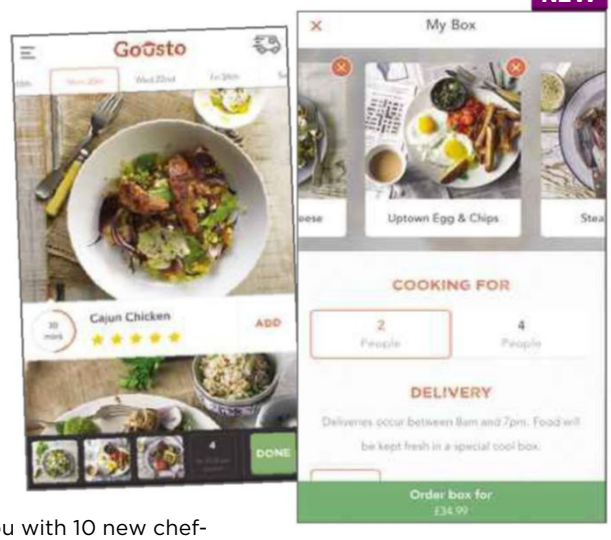
NEW

Gousto

bit.ly/gousto378

Min requirements: iOS 7

Size: 23.9MB



Don't you hate it when you find a great recipe, but you've got none of the ingredients at home? Often, you'll end up cooking something easier instead, but it'll be something you've eaten hundreds of times before. Gousto makes it easier for you to discover and cook new dishes by providing you with 10 new chef-designed recipes every week and delivering the ingredients right to your door. Nationwide delivery is completely free and everything is sent in the quantities that you require it, meaning that no food need go to waste. Prices range from £4 up to £7.50 per person, per meal – the more you order the cheaper it works out. There's no question that it's cheaper than ordering takeaway (and probably healthier, too), but just remember to place your order a few days in advance.

Our rating ★★★★★

ROUND UP | Quick bites

Firefox Browser for Firefox

bit.ly/firefoxandroid378

Min requirements: Android (varies with device)

Size: Varies with device

As well as improving its performance, the latest update to Firefox Browser for Android introduces a new feature that lets you open your browsing history by simply long-pressing the back or forward buttons.

WhatsApp Messenger

bit.ly/whatsapp378

Min requirements: iOS 6, Android 2.1, Windows Phone 7.5

Size: 46MB

WhatsApp for iOS has received a major update introducing custom notification settings for individual chats and the option to include videos in chat backups. You can now also share contacts and Apple Maps locations.

Amazon Instant Video

bit.ly/amazon378

Min requirements: iOS 7, Android 3.2

Size: 39.4MB

The iOS version of Amazon Instant Video has been updated to let you stream content over your mobile data connection. You can also now stream movies and TV shows in HD.

BOOKS

NEW

A Game of Thrones: Get into the Books

bit.ly/thrones378

Min requirements: iOS 8

Size: 41.3MB

Game of Thrones fans who haven't read the books that the TV series is based on can use this new iOS app from Harper Collins as an easy entry point into the *Song of Ice and Fire* saga. It includes 40 extracts from the books with special introductions and maps to help you find your way around the story. The extracts can be read offline, browsed by theme and adjusted to make the text the ideal size for your eyes. Best of all, there's an anti-spoiler setting that ensures you don't read any further into the story than you've watched of the HBO series.

Our rating ★★★★☆

GAME

NEW

Angry Birds 2

bit.ly/angrybirds378

Min requirements: Android 4.0, iOS 7

Size: 68MB

There have been many special editions of Angry Birds since it was released in 2009, but Angry Birds 2 is the first official sequel. The new version introduces a twist in that you can choose the order in which you fling the birds with your catapult, meaning you'll have to pick wisely to destroy the most blocks and cause maximum destruction. There are new levels to explore and you can use a range of spells, including Blizzards and Golden Ducks, against the green porkers. Angry Birds 2 also lets you challenge players from around the world in new daily tournaments. The downside is that you're constantly prompted to make in-app purchases for extra features and lives.

Our rating ★★★★☆

5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

HEALTH

Moodnotes

bit.ly/moodnotes378

Min requirements: iOS 8

Size: 13.5 MB **Price:** £2.99

Moodnotes helps to improve your thinking habits and increase your happiness by encouraging you to track your mood and the things that influence it. Developed by Thriveport, it uses cognitive behaviour therapy and positive psychology.

MUSIC

Nimbus for Soundcloud

bit.ly/nimbus378

Min requirements: Windows Phone

Size: 2.97MB **Price:** £1.49

This app aims to give Windows Phone users functionality that Android and iOS users take for granted, by letting you find music, create playlists and follow friends and artists on the audio-sharing site.

VIDEO

myTube!

bit.ly/mytubewindows378

Min requirements: Windows Phone

Size: Varies with device **Price:** 79p

The latest version of myTube lets Windows Phone users upload and delete videos from YouTube – functionality that's not available from the official YouTube app for Windows Phone. You can also use the app to search a channel's videos.

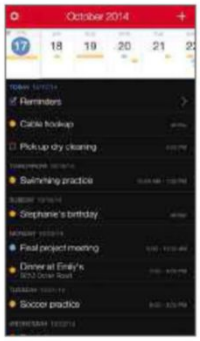
CALENDAR

Fantastical 2

bit.ly/fantastical378

Min requirements: iOS 8

Size: 24.2MB **Price:** £3.99



This best-selling calendar app was completely redesigned for iOS 8 and it's recently been updated so that you can save draft events and reminders by simply swiping down on the red header to browse your schedule.

EDUCATION

Beaker by Thix

bit.ly/beaker378

Min requirements: iOS 5.1.1

Size: 30.8MB **Price:** 79p

Perfect for budding chemists, this fun new app turns your iPhone into a virtual beaker, letting you mix 150 different elements and compounds. By swiping your finger and holding it to mimic the action of striking a match, you can also see how different experiments react when ignited.

Moodnotes | Nimbus for Soundcloud | myTube! | Fantastical 2 | Beaker by Thix

Best New TV Apps

TV & FILM

BT TV

www.bt.com/tv-packages

Min requirements:
BT subscription with YouView or Vision+ box
Size: N/A

BT TV is rapidly catching up with Virgin Media and Sky in the choice it offers viewers, and has now added three more UK TV lifestyle channels to its portfolio: Eden, which screens wildlife, science and adventure documentaries, including shows from David Attenborough; Good Food, which features cookery programmes from around the world; and Home, which showcases daytime favourites like *Homes Under the Hammer* and *Escape to the Country*. The new channels are also available to BT subscribers on the catch-up service UK TV Play. You'll need a BT TV Entertainment package to watch them, which costs from £7.50 per month.

FILM

Movies by Flixster

bit.ly/flixster378

Min requirements;
Android (varies with device), iOS 7
Size: Varies with device

Although UK users miss out on some of Movies by Flixster's best features, such as Netflix integration, it's still a good app for film fans. You can locate your nearest cinema and see what's showing there for the next week; read reviews of new releases and add them to your 'Want to See' list; and watch trailers, interviews and clips. There's a DVD section you can browse by genre, and a Flixster Top 100 based on user ratings. This update adds HD playback for trailers, an improved interface that makes it easier to see cinema showtimes, and notifications for when films you want to see are released.

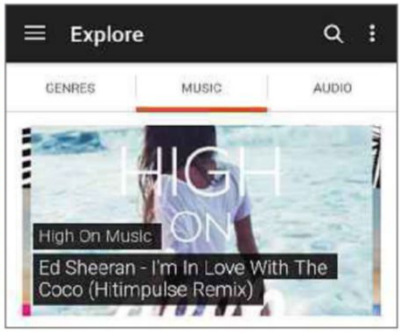
AUDIO

SoundCloud for Android

bit.ly/soundcloud378

Min requirements:
Android (varies with device)
Size: Varies with device

Google's Chromecast isn't just for streaming video from your phone or tablet to your TV; it can do the same job with mobile audio too. The popular audio-sharing service SoundCloud (soundcloud.com) clearly knows this, and has added Chromecast support to its Android app. This means you can enjoy SoundCloud's catalogue of music and spoken word offerings on your home entertainment system instead of your tinny mobile speakers. You can browse by keyword tag, create your own playlists and upload your own recordings via the app, with all content free to listen to.



✗ Don't install...

Hyper Battery Saver

bit.ly/saver378

Don't believe the hype(r) – this app will not "increase your battery life by 30 per cent". It's more likely to make you weep in frustration at how shoddy it is, and the valuable seconds you wasted by installing it. Even the developer seems to admit in the app's description that only the paid-for Pro version actually does anything, and, even then, it just disconnects you from your mobile network.

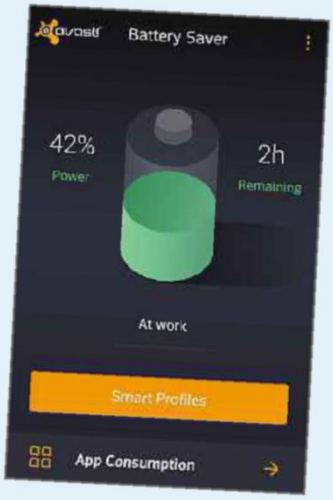
...Install this instead ✓

Avast Battery Saver

bit.ly/avast378

Min requirements:
Android 4
Size: 3.7MB

Most people know that you can prolong battery life by reducing the brightness of your screen and turning off Wi-Fi, but this excellent app goes further in helping you squeeze as much juice as possible from your phone or tablet. The app offers four Smart Profiles: 'At home', 'At work', 'At night' and 'Emergency Mode', which can be customised according to your needs, tweaking the brightness levels and the intervals that the device remains offline for while your screen is turned off. Equally handy is the App Consumption feature that identifies apps using excessive battery power so you can stop them until you need them again.



FAQ

Everything you need to know about the most interesting new technology trends and events

Smart mirrors

You can ask smart mirrors a lot more than if you're the fairest of them all, such as if you may be unwell. **David Crookes** reflects on these innovative new devices

What is a smart mirror?

Smart mirrors go beyond simply showing your reflection as you groggily peer into them in the morning. Instead, they act as large screens that deliver useful, targeted information and even an analysis of your overall health. Their makers say they will revolutionise our daily routines and prompt us to take better care of ourselves.

How do they look?

To the casual observer, they look like a normal bathroom mirror, but when they are activated – most likely when someone stands in front of the mirror – they are able to overlay graphics and text. This means you can continue to use the mirror in the usual way while viewing the other info that's being displayed. At the same time, the mirror will be typically gaining more than your reflection: it will be using sensors to get under your skin and tell you more about yourself.

What sorcery lurks behind this magic mirror?

The way each smart mirror operates depends on the manufacturer, since there are a number of such devices either coming to the market or in the planning stages. In March, Oral-B presented a mirror at the Mobile World Congress that syncs with an electric toothbrush to tell you know how well you've cleaned your teeth (bit.ly/oralb378). It presents animated images and stories to encourage better dental hygiene in children and lets parents set their kids specific goals. It also has news, weather, travel and timer apps, with third-party developers encouraged to add more.

Brushing your teeth can be fun using an Oral-B mirror

What health benefits do these mirrors have?

Possibly the most advanced is the Wize Mirror (bit.ly/wize378), which uses a combination of sensors and cameras to glean a solid picture of your health. It is still in development but promises to check for signs of fatigue, anxiety and stress.

The Wize Mirror (see main picture, above) will also use a five-camera 'multi-spectral' imaging system to study your skin and circulation, and check for signs of diabetes and circulatory problems. With a 3D scanner to monitor your face for signs of swelling or weight gain, and a breath monitor to keep an eye on alcohol consumption and smoking levels, it's like having a virtual doctor on your bathroom wall.

Who is making it?

The Wize Mirror is being developed with European Union funding and the project is being co-ordinated by the Italian National Research Council. It is being seen as a means of making Europeans more healthy in the long-term and, by catching symptoms early, it could ease the pressure on a nation's health services.

Could it be used for sinister purposes?

We wouldn't be surprised if the mirrors spark a few scare stories about the Big Brother-style monitoring of our health and whether insurance companies will seek access to the data, but we'll reserve judgment for the moment.

How will the smart mirror know who I am?

The mirror has built-in facial recognition so everyone in your family will benefit from its advice. When you use the mirror, it will give you an overall health score so you can track your progress every day.

But will a smart mirror tell me if I look good?

At least one of them will. Panasonic showcased a smart mirror at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas earlier this year. This looks for tell-tale signs of ageing and skin damage using high definition cameras, suggesting

Try out different outfits in shops using the Memomi mirror

cosmetics and treatments to help with any conditions it spots. It also lets you see how you would look with different make-up and hair styles and it is intended for use by retailers rather than in the home.

The same goes for a mirror called Memomi that uses cameras and sensors to assess a person's body and presents clothes to fit – all without the shopper having to go to the hassle of stripping off. Hand gestures are used to switch from one outfit to another and it allows shoppers to see their back and side views as well as the front.

Can't I try that at home?

Maybe soon. Samsung has created a new OLED mirror display that allows people to experiment with clothes and jewellery. It uses 3D cameras and is powered by Intel's Real Sense technology. The company is earmarking it for the high street but it says a home version that could offer Facebook notifications and style advice isn't out of the question.

Can smart mirrors be useful in any room, though?

Sure. Toshiba has also showcased a smart mirror that it says could be used in the kitchen or living room as well as the bathroom to display recipes and other useful goodies. It is in the concept stage at the moment.

What else is out there?

You can already buy Bluetooth mirrors for the bathroom. The HiB Vibe (bit.ly/hib378), for example, lets you stream music and internet radio from a smartphone or other Bluetooth device and pumps it out using its built-in stereo speakers.

Stream music from your phone through your mirror

Your mirror could help you experiment with a new look

Would a smart mirror let me watch TV?

That doesn't appear to be the aim of the current and forthcoming crop of smart mirrors, but who knows? Anyway, you don't have to wait for that. LED mirror televisions have been around for a good while, with manufacturers such as Philips offering them with decorative surrounds. Designer Mirror TV (www.designermirrortv.co.uk) even lets you design your own with various frames to choose from.

Design a mirror that doubles up as a TV

Could I make my own smart mirror?

Actually, there is every chance you could. A chap called Michael Teeuw has designed his own smart mirror which is powered by a Raspberry Pi computer. There is a step-by-step guide to making it at bit.ly/michael378. Teeuw has even provided all of the code needed to make it work. Another techie called Nick Nothom (www.nicknothom.com) has produced a voice-activated prototype smart mirror that runs Android Wear, which cost him $500 (£322) to make.

Create your own smart mirror using a Raspberry Pi

Anything cool and very cheap out there right now?

You could always download one of the many mirror apps available for your phone or tablet. It's not quite a smart mirror but it's at least a handy way to check your appearance on the move. After all, that's what mirrors are really for, right?

SMART MIRRORS ON THE ROAD

Satellite navigation

bit.ly/synergy378

You can now buy rear view mirrors for cars that incorporate a display. The Synergy GPS Smart Mirror includes satellite navigation, moving it away from the dashboard while still allowing half of the mirror to be used as intended.

Vanishing acts

bit.ly/nissan378

Nissan's Smart Rearview Mirror does the opposite of what you would expect a mirror to do: it removes people. Using a rear-facing camera, it gets around the problem of a back-seat passenger's head obscuring the driver's view of the road behind.

Mirroring phones

bit.ly/peugeot378

Okay, so it's not a smart mirror as such but Peugeot's Mirror Screen is still rather neat. It mirrors the display of your phone onto a 7in touchscreen mounted on the dash of the company's New 108 and New 208 cars.

The GREAT WINDOWS 10 SWINDLE?

COVER FEATURE

One month on from the launch of Windows 10, we expose the hidden costs that undermine the 'free' upgrade, reveal how to tweak its most annoying settings and explain how to fix common problems

From early indications, Windows 10 is looking like a success for Microsoft. The reviews have been mostly positive, users are reporting that the new operating system is fast and easy to use, and thus far there has been no sign of the major backlash that followed the arrival of Windows 8.

Microsoft says some 14 million people updated to Windows 10 in the first 24 hours, which is an impressive number considering that it was a staged rollout and many users had to wait days or even weeks after launch day for a chance to upgrade, while some of those trying to upgrade on the day experienced problems when trying to do so.

Of course, much of Windows 10's popularity is down to the fact that it's being touted as a free upgrade, although since its release several hidden catches have been revealed that show the operating system isn't completely free at all. Microsoft is a successful business, after all, and would never offer its flagship product free of charge without having a plan in place to recoup at least some of the costs from users down the line.

In this feature, we take a closer look at just how Windows 10 isn't really free at all, and explain how you can avoid its hidden costs, tighten your privacy settings and address frustrating problems.

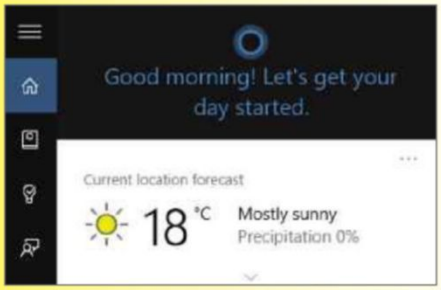
• Find out what Barry Collins thinks about the true cost of Windows 10 on page 74.

Why Windows 10 isn't really free

Microsoft has indicated that it wants Windows 10 to be installed on one billion devices by 2017, which would go down in history as one of the most generous tech giveaways ever, not to mention one of the oddest business decisions, if the operating system was genuinely free. Of course, we know that this isn't the case and in fairness Microsoft has been upfront about Windows 10 only being available for free for the first year, and even then only to existing users of Windows 7 and 8+. But what the company hasn't been so forthcoming about is exactly how users, including those who upgrade for free, will end up paying in the long term.

Microsoft claims Windows 10 is free, but it's not being completely honest

Windows 10 is a completely different type of operating system to Windows 7, which required you to buy the software upfront but then didn't ask for any further money other than for separate, optional products such as Office. With the new OS, you might not have to cough up to begin with – unless you're buying it pre-installed on a new PC – but you're hooked into other Microsoft services like never before. Windows 8, which introduced paid-for apps and seamless integration with 'freemium' tools such as OneDrive, Xbox Live and Skype, can now be seen as a stepping stone to introduce users to concepts that Windows 10 embraces fully.

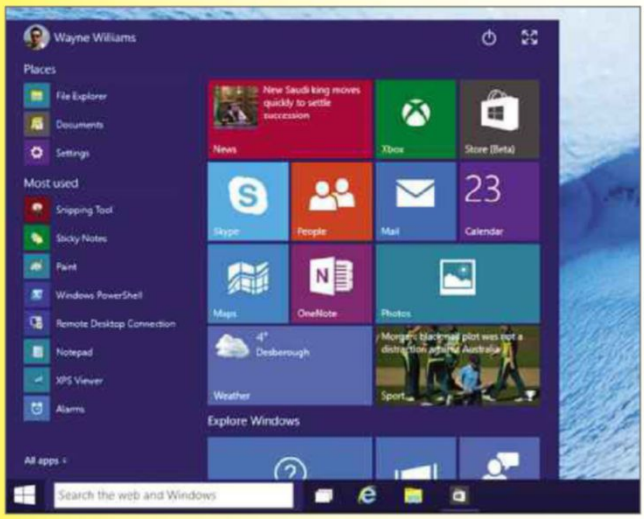


Cortana can be helpful, but should also learn to mind its own business

Indeed, more cynical users might see it as Microsoft's way of getting objections to some elements of its new business model out of the way early on. After all, Windows 8 proved so unpopular that most users were willing to welcome any new operating system from Microsoft, allowing the company to use Windows 10 to implement its furtive money-making tactics in full force.

There is still uncertainty about how these tactics will develop. But with automatic updates now compulsory, any changes Microsoft makes to Windows 10 will be unavoidable and irreversible, and some will involve users paying, or – as in the case of Solitaire – being strongly encouraged to pay, to remove annoyances and access extra features.

As we reported last issue, Windows 10's new privacy settings have already prompted complaints because of the way they use and share your data *by default*, making it easier for Microsoft to make money from advertising. Even the personal assistant Cortana has access to your calendar, contacts, location info and more. Microsoft says this is simply to help Cortana do a better job, but it seems unnecessarily nosy if you don't actually use the tool. You could argue that Google has built its whole business around collecting our data in similar ways, but that doesn't make such methods any less intrusive.



Microsoft has taken seamless integration with freemium tools to a whole new level with Windows 10

That's not to say there isn't plenty to like about Windows 10 – especially after the design disaster that was Windows 8 – and we gave the new OS a four-out-of-five rating in our in-depth review last issue. But despite our conclusion that "Windows 10 is worth the upgrade, but only because it's free", it's now clear that it's not quite as free as we and many other users initially believed.

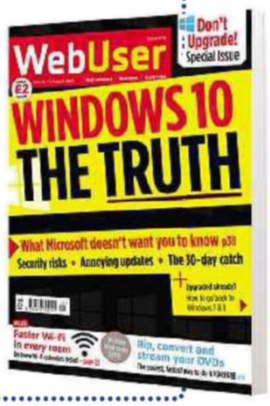
Read on for our practical advice on ways of addressing these problems and concerns, so you don't get tricked into sharing and paying more than you'd bargained for.

WINDOWS 10: WERE WE WRONG?

In our cover feature in Issue 376 (bit.ly/webuser376), we expressed reservations about whether you should upgrade to Windows 10. At the time of writing, the finished version of the new operating system wasn't yet released. Now that it has been, were our fears justified or totally unfounded?

While Microsoft did belatedly address a few of the unanswered questions we had, allaying some concerns, our fear that there would be plenty of bugs left to fix was proved to be true. There have been reports of all sorts of problems, especially with audio and drivers. The OS is generally very stable, but most of the bugs that persist are of the irritating kind – graphics disappearing temporarily, system slowdowns and so on.

Updates are mandatory in Windows 10, a policy change we warned about and this, almost inevitably, caused major problems for some Windows Insider testers just prior to the operating system's official release. One system update caused File Explorer to crash, while a forced graphics driver update led to all manner of issues, even locking some PCs.



And that's just in the first month, so on reflection we think we were right to suggest waiting a while!

Avoid the hidden costs of Windows 10

In this issue's Weekend Project on page 58, we show you how to perform a clean install of Windows 10. It's important to remember that although the new operating system is billed as "free", this only applies if you update an existing version of Windows 7 or 8.1. If you want to run Windows 10 from XP or Vista without having to pay for it, you will need to install Windows 7 or 8.1 first, then upgrade by July 2016. After that, a Windows 10 licence will cost you £99.99 for the Home edition, or £189.99 for Pro.

If you're currently running Windows XP or Vista, you can reduce the overall cost of Windows 10 by first purchasing a cheap edition of Windows 7 or 8+ from Amazon or eBay, where they sell for as little as £30, and then upgrading from that. Make sure it's genuine, however, and that you have Service Pack 1 or Update 1 installed, or Microsoft won't let you perform the free upgrade to Windows 10. Also, your PC will need to meet the minimum system requirements for Windows 7, 8 and 10.

Paid-for apps

One of the most controversial extra costs for Windows 10 concerns the official Windows DVD Player app, which replaces the absent Windows Media Center. If you're upgrading from Windows 7 Home Premium, Professional or Ultimate, or Windows 8.1 with Media Center, then Microsoft says you will get Windows DVD Player for free "for a limited time that will end at or before the [end of the] free Windows 10 upgrade offer" (bit.ly/dvdapp378). If you're upgrading from any other version of Windows, the app will set you back £11.59 from the Store (bit.ly/dvdplayer378). This is a lot for a very basic tool that can only play DVDs, not Blu-rays, and there are plenty of rival apps that can do a lot more, and are free to use. Our favourite is the brilliant VLC Media Player, which is available both as a program (www.videolan.org/vlc) and a Windows 10 app (bit.ly/vlcapp378).

Windows DVD Player costs a lot of money for such a basic app

Buy paid-for apps using a Gift Card to reduce the risk of overspending

Even more controversial is the Microsoft Solitaire Collection, which you can find under 'M' in the Windows 10 All Apps list, or by clicking Start and typing `Solitaire`). Although the app is free, and offers lots of game variations, Microsoft wants you to upgrade to the Premium version, which costs £1.19 per month (or £7.69 outright). That might not sound like much, but all you get for your money are the ads removed (and they aren't obtrusive anyway), more coins for completing Daily Challenges (which you don't need) and a boost for every game of TriPeaks and Pyramid (which, again, you don't need). If you play Solitaire for hours every day, it's arguably worth the outlay, but you'd be better off playing a free online version such as Solitr (solitr.com).

There are free Office apps – Word, Excel, PowerPoint and others – available from the Windows 10 Store, which let you create and edit documents, and are simple to use but powerful enough for most users' needs. However, Microsoft would rather have you shell out for an annual Office 365 subscription to unlock the app's full range of features. To avoid the subscription, which starts at £59.99 per year for Office 365 Personal (which covers one PC only), you can buy Office Home & Student 2013 outright for a one-off £109.99 (bit.ly/office378). Alternatively, you can forego paid-for office software altogether and use the recently updated LibreOffice 5 (www.libreoffice.org), which is entirely free.

Payment details

Finally, to buy anything from the Windows Store, you need to first link a payment option – such as a credit or debit card, or PayPal – to your Microsoft account, making it all too easy to lose track of your spending. You could avoid this by removing your payment option after making a purchase, or better still invest in a Windows Store Gift Card (bit.ly/giftcard378). This lets you buy apps whenever you want, but limits the total amount you can spend. Gift Cards are available for amounts up to £50, and they never expire, so you can use them whenever you want.

You can also share paid-for apps with family and friends so they don't have to pay separately, or just split the cost between you. See our feature on page 48 to find out to set up this option.

Can't upgrade for free? Buy a cheap version of Windows that can

Microsoft asks you to pay for an ad-free version of Solitaire

Windows 10 settings you must change

Stop automatic Windows 10 updates

Windows 10 automatically downloads and installs updates as soon as they're available, which is designed to keep your PC more secure but may become annoying if you're trying to concentrate on something else at the time. Windows 10 Pro users can defer these updates by going to Settings, Update & Security, clicking 'Advanced options' and then ticking the 'Defer upgrades' box.

There is also a free troubleshooting tool from Microsoft designed to let you temporarily uninstall updates that are causing system crashes or instability until a fix is available, which you can download from bit.ly/updates378. Run this tool, select 'Hide updates' and Windows won't install the unwanted updates until you tell it to.

Stop your PC sharing updates over the internet

Windows 10 has a built-in P2P-style system called Windows Update Delivery Optimization (WUDO), which shares Windows updates you've downloaded with other PCs over the internet. This benefits users on slower, less reliable connections, but if you'd rather not give up your internet bandwidth, you can disable the feature. Open Settings and click Update & Security. Click Windows Update and then click the 'Advanced options' link. Click 'Choose how updates are delivered'. You can turn the feature off entirely, or restrict it to just PCs on your local network.

A Windows 10 troubleshooting tool lets you temporarily delay updates by hiding them

Stop Windows 10 sharing your Wi-Fi

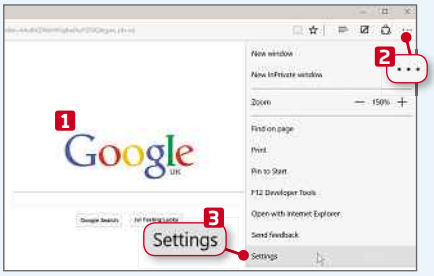
Windows 10 introduces a new feature called Wi-Fi Sense (bit.ly/wifisense378), which lets you connect to open hotspots and wireless networks that have been shared by your friends, and share your own wireless network with Outlook.com contacts, Skype contacts and Facebook friends, without having to give them your actual Wi-Fi password. Sense restricts what people have access to, and despite some of the scare stories in the media, it's rather useful and not really a privacy risk because your Wi-Fi details are encrypted.

However, if you don't like the idea of your Wi-Fi data being shared, it's easily disabled. Go to Start, Settings, Network & Internet, Wi-Fi, Manage Wi-Fi settings and turn off the sharing features. You can also prevent the service from using your Wi-Fi by adding `optout` to the end of the box displaying the name of your wireless access point (the SSID).

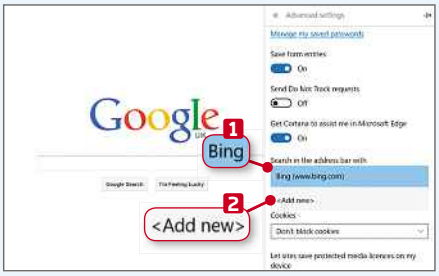
You can prevent Microsoft from sharing your bandwidth

You don't have to share your Wi-Fi connection if you don't want to

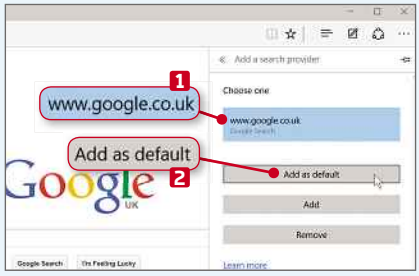
MINI WORKSHOP | Stop Edge telling you how to search the web



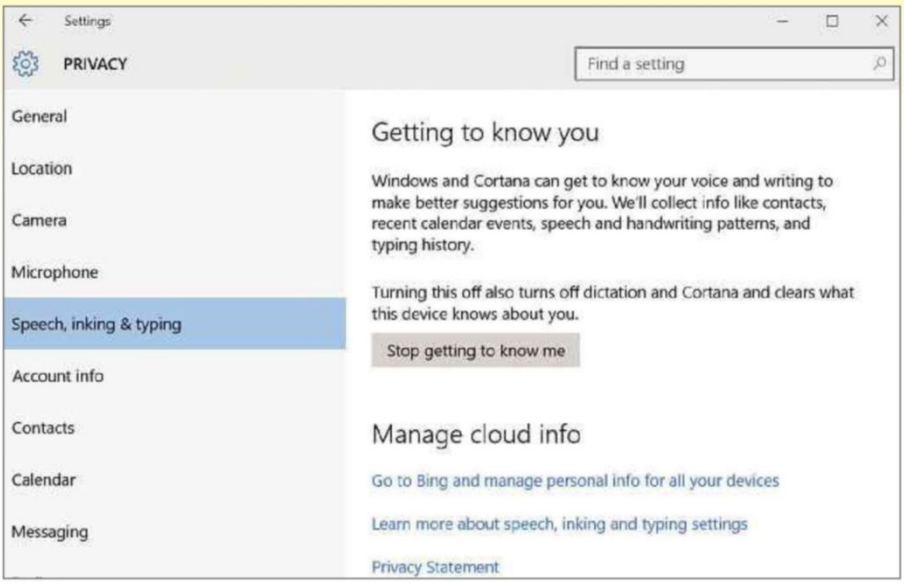
1 Edge, Microsoft's new web browser, comes with Bing as the default search engine. Changing this to something else – such as Google – is possible, but the process is far from intuitive. Go to the search site you want to set as the new default, **1** and click on the three dots in the top right corner. **2** Select Settings. **3**



2 Scroll down until you see the 'View advanced settings' button. Click it, and under 'Search in the address bar with' you should see Bing listed. **1** Click that entry. It will be the only search engine available, but you can add a different choice by clicking 'Add new'. **2**



3 Google will appear in the list of available search engines. Select it **1** then click on the option to 'Add as default'. **2** The change will be made instantly, and you will have a new default search engine. You'll also now be able to choose which search option to use under 'Search in the address bar with'.



You can adjust Windows 10's privacy settings if you're unhappy with Microsoft's defaults

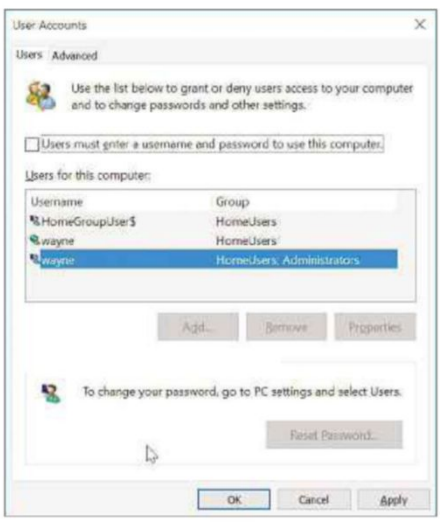
Stop Microsoft spying on you

You can adjust Windows 10's privacy settings if you don't want your data to be stored, shared or used without your permission. Click Start, type `privacy settings`, then hit Enter. Work your way through the settings using the categories on the left. For instance, you can choose which apps have access to your location, webcam and microphone. Windows 10 and Cortana want to 'get to know you', which sounds innocuous but actually involves collecting things like contacts, recent calendar events, speech and handwriting patterns, and typing history. This can be disabled entirely if you don't like the idea.

Bypass the Windows 10 lock screen

By default, Microsoft forces you to log into Windows afresh each time you start up, either using a username and password, or a PIN. The latter is the speedier option of the two, but you can choose to skip the login stage altogether and boot directly to the Desktop. This obviously compromises your security a little, so might not be a good idea if there are nosy people in your house or office.

To make the change, click Start, type `run`, then click the Run option, type `netplwiz` and click OK (or press Window+R and do the same). Highlight your account and untick the option 'Users must enter a username and password to use this computer'. Click Apply, then enter your password and confirm it. Click OK, restart your PC and you'll be logged straight into Windows without needing to enter a password.



Stop Windows 10 from insisting that you enter a password to log in

Manage your Windows 10 notifications

Windows 10's new Action Centre displays all the notifications you receive from Windows and certain installed applications. If you feel you're seeing too many, however, you can restrict both the types of notification you see, and the specific apps that are able to send them. Open the Action Centre by clicking on the notification icon in the System Tray. Click All Settings, System and select 'Notifications & actions'. You'll see a list of Notifications categories, each of which can be toggled on or off. These include 'Show me tips about Windows', 'Show app notifications', 'Show notifications on the lock screen', and 'Show alarms, reminders and incoming VoIP calls on the lock screen'. Below you'll see which apps are able to send you notifications, and you can remove any you don't want in the same way. You can additionally configure quick actions by clicking on notifications when they appear in the System Tray area.

Use Quiet Hours to silence notifications

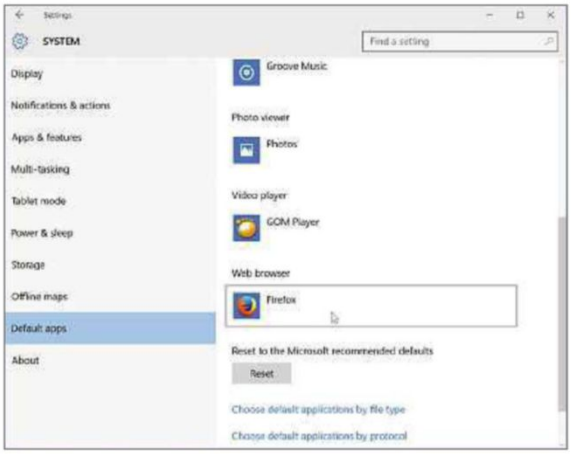
If your PC is on all the time, you probably won't want it playing sounds in the middle of the night every time a new notification arrives. To stop this, click the notification icon in the System Tray, then select All Settings, System, then 'Notifications & actions'. Browse the list of apps and make sure 'Play a sound when a notification arrives' is turned off for all items. To disable notifications altogether during the night, open the Action Centre in the System Tray and click the Quiet Hours button. Just make sure you turn the feature off again in the morning!

Tell Windows to stop bothering you while you're trying to sleep

Change your default browser

Microsoft's new browser Edge is the default in Windows 10, but it's arguably a bit lacking when compared to the likes of Chrome or Firefox. Fortunately, you don't have to stick with Edge if you don't want to. To change your default browser, open the Start menu, type `default app settings` and hit Enter. Click Web Browser, then select your preferred browser as the default.

See our Mini Workshop on the previous page for more on breaking Edge's restrictions.



You're not obliged to use Edge as your default browser

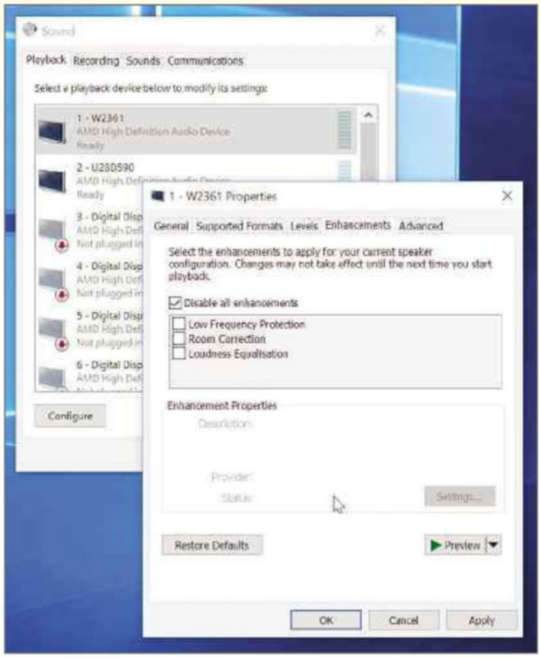
Fix common problems

Overcome sound problems

Audio problems are currently the most widely reported complaints about Windows 10. There are various workarounds depending on the source of the problem, so if you're not sure what's gone wrong, or even what hardware you have installed, try them all. To fix an issue with Conexant audio hardware, click Start, type `msconfig.exe`, hit Enter and click on the Boot tab. Click the Advanced options button, click the Maximum memory box and set the value to '3072'.

For a VIA HD Audio-related problem, right-click the audio icon in the System Tray, and select Playback Devices. Right-click the audio output device and select 'Set as Default Device'. Select the hardware, click Properties, click the Enhancements tab and tick the 'Disable all enhancements' box.

Finally, if you have a Realtek audio driver installation problem (you'll see the error code 0x000005b4), there's a solution to try at bit.ly/sounderror378.



Many users have reported problems with audio drivers when upgrading to Windows 10

Overcome Windows 10 upgrade errors

The Windows 10 upgrade process should go smoothly, but occasionally it doesn't. The error 0x800F0923 is likely caused by an incompatible program or driver. You can address the issue in the Get Windows 10 app by clicking the menu button, and then 'Check your PC'.

Error 0x800F0922 happens when there is not enough free space on the partition you're installing Windows in. Error 0x80200056 occurs when the upgrade was interrupted – try again and hopefully it will work this time. If your PC fails to meet the minimum requirements (which should only happen with a very old PC), you will see the error codes 0xC1900200 – 0x20008 and 0xC1900202 – 0x20008.

Change the colour of title bars

Changing the colour of program title bars in Windows 10 is much harder than it used to be. Open File Explorer and navigate to C:\Windows\Resources\Themes. Click the 'aero' folder, copy it by pressing Ctrl+C, then paste (Ctrl+V) to create a backup. Click Continue in the Folder Access Denied box, then tick the 'Do this for all current items' option and click Skip. Select the copied folder and press F2, then name the folder 'Colours'. Click Continue to skip the UAC warning.

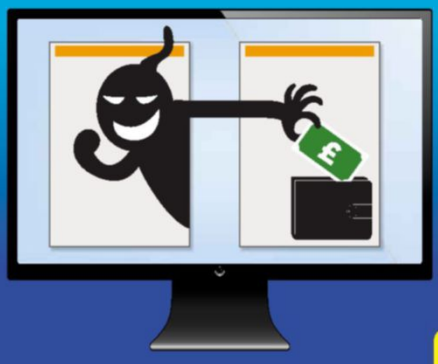
Open the folder, select 'aero.mstyles', press F2 and rename it 'colours.mstyles'. Open the en-GB folder and change 'aero.msstyles.mui' to 'colours.msstyles.mui'. Accept the UAC warning both times. Return to the Themes folder and copy the 'aero.theme' file to your Desktop. Rename it 'colors.theme'. Right-click the file, go to 'Open with' and select Notepad. Scroll down to the [VisualStyles] section and change 'Path=%ResourceDir%\Themes\Aero\Aero.msstyles' to 'Path=%ResourceDir%\Themes\Aero\colours.msstyles'. Close and save the file, then double-click the shortcut to change the colour of the title bars. To change the colour scheme, go to Start, Settings, click Personalisation and pick a different colour. The changes will be made instantly. To undo the change, open the Desktop shortcut in Notepad, rename 'Path=%ResourceDir%\Themes\Aero\colours.msstyles' back to 'Path=%ResourceDir%\Themes\Aero\Aero.msstyles', save the file and double-click the shortcut. ■

Upgrading should be easy, but you may experience errors

NEXT ISSUE on sale Wednesday 9 September 2015

STOP USING THESE SITES!

From dodgy privacy policies to sneaky charges, we expose 10 popular websites that are abusing their power



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Best Android video-editing apps

If you record video clips on your phone, it's handy to be able to edit them without transferring the files to your PC. **Edward Munn** tests six of the best Android video-editing apps that let you create your movie on the go and share it instantly

KineMaster | bit.ly/kinemaster378 | ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★★ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★ EASE OF USE ★★★★☆

WebUser GOLD AWARD

What we liked:

KineMaster was by far the best video-editing app we tested, offering a set of tools unmatched by its rivals. When you first launch the app, there's a handy 'Get Started' wizard to get your first project off the ground in double-quick time. Choose a title, theme and soundtrack, select the media files you want to use, and you're up and running. After this introduction (which you can skip altogether if you prefer), the app's timeline interface lets you fine-tune every aspect of your edit, including trimming the length of each clip and choosing the transitions between them. If you don't want your video's appearance to be dictated by a preset theme, you can make colour adjustments or add colour tints to your clips, and KineMaster's Layer menu also lets you add images, stickers, text and handwriting at any point.

KineMaster gives you the option to overlay an audio commentary track as the video plays. You can even fine-tune the volume for specific sections of the audio track or video clip using the 'Volume envelope', which is the type of tool you'd normally only find on desktop video-editing software.

KineMaster saves your project after every change you make, so there's no risk of losing everything if you haven't been saving manually, while the Undo button immediately reverses any editing changes youre not happy with. You can save the finished video in Full HD (1,920 x 1,080 pixels), High Definition (1,280 x 720 pixels) or Low Quality (640 x 360 pixels), and there are built-in options to instantly share it on YouTube, Facebook, Google+ and Dropbox.

How it can be improved:

Because of its vast array of features, KineMaster is a little fiddlier to use than our Silver and Bronze award winners. Your videos will also be prominently watermarked unless you subscribe to the premium service, which costs £2.91 a month or £23.25 a year.

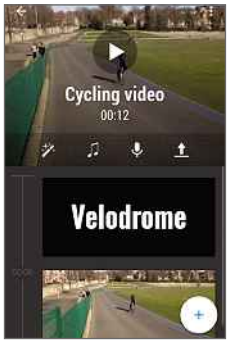
OUR VERDICT

KineMaster has a remarkably well-designed interface and tools that you'd normally only find on video-editing software for your PC. For full and precise control over all aspects of your edit, this is without doubt the best app for the job.

WeVideo Editor | bit.ly/wevideo378 | ★★★★★

FEATURES ★★★★☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★★

What we liked:



WeVideo makes combining separate video clips to create a professional-looking movie incredibly straightforward. Open the app and you're presented with shortcuts to choose a theme, soundtrack and title, then a tap of the plus icon lets you select the clips you want to use from your device or Google Photos.

Unlike our Gold Award winner, WeVideo uses a vertical timeline, which gives you the option of trimming clips by tapping them and dragging their start and end markers to the required positions. Reordering clips is as easy as dragging and dropping them, and if you want to delete one you simply swipe it to the left. There's no need to worry about adding individual transitions, as these are included with the theme you choose. We were initially unsure about this kind of restriction, but the WeVideo themes were the best we tested and there are lots to choose from.

Like Kinemaster, the app lets you record your own audio commentary, and you can save your movie to your device before sharing it with any of your apps.

How it can be improved:

WeVideo lacks some of the more advanced tools offered by other apps, and the free version adds a watermark to your videos. You'll also be limited to creating just five minutes of video a month unless you upgrade to a Premium subscription, which costs £4.57 per month or £22.87 a year.

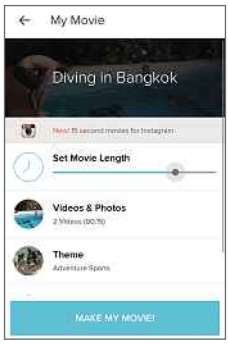
OUR VERDICT

Although it doesn't offer the same range of tools as KineMaster, WeVideo has all the essentials to help you create a professional-looking movie quickly and easily.

Magisto Video Editor & Maker | bit.ly/magisto378 | ★★★★☆

FEATURES ★★★☆☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
EASE OF USE ★★★★★

What we liked:



Magisto offers something altogether different from the other apps on test in that it edits your videos automatically. Select the photos and videos you want to use, choose an editing style and soundtrack, give your movie a title and say how long you want it to be, and Magisto does the rest.

We were a bit cynical of this approach at first, but the quality of edits that Magisto produces is impressive and you wouldn't guess they had been put together by a computer. It's perfect for jobs like quickly compiling holiday photos and videos into something more dynamic. The app lets you share your movies to Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram, but it also operates its own social network, so you can share videos to your public timeline and see how many times they've been watched. Another standout feature is Surprise Me, which automatically makes videos from your recent photos and videos without you having to do a thing!

How it can be improved:

Magisto's automatic nature means there's little you can do if you don't like the editing decisions it makes. It also adds watermarks and limits how many videos you can save without a monthly (£3.20) or annual (£12.80) subscription.

OUR VERDICT

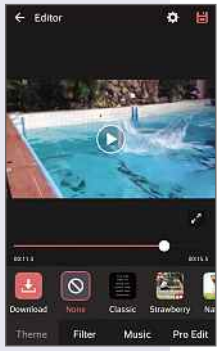
Magisto deserves its top-three spot because of its foolproof nature alone, but if you want something that gives you control over your edits, go for our Gold or Silver award winner instead.

BEST OF THE REST

VideoShow

bit.ly/videoshow378

VideoShow is a fully featured video editor with separate tools for creating movies and image-based slideshows. The movie editor has shortcuts for adding a theme, filter or music to your clips and there's a more advanced menu for trimming and adding transitions, subtitles and commentary. The app only just missed out on winning an award, especially since its Pro version costs a mere £2.32, but its default themes didn't impress us and we preferred the timeline interfaces used by Kinemaster and WeVideo.



VivaVideo

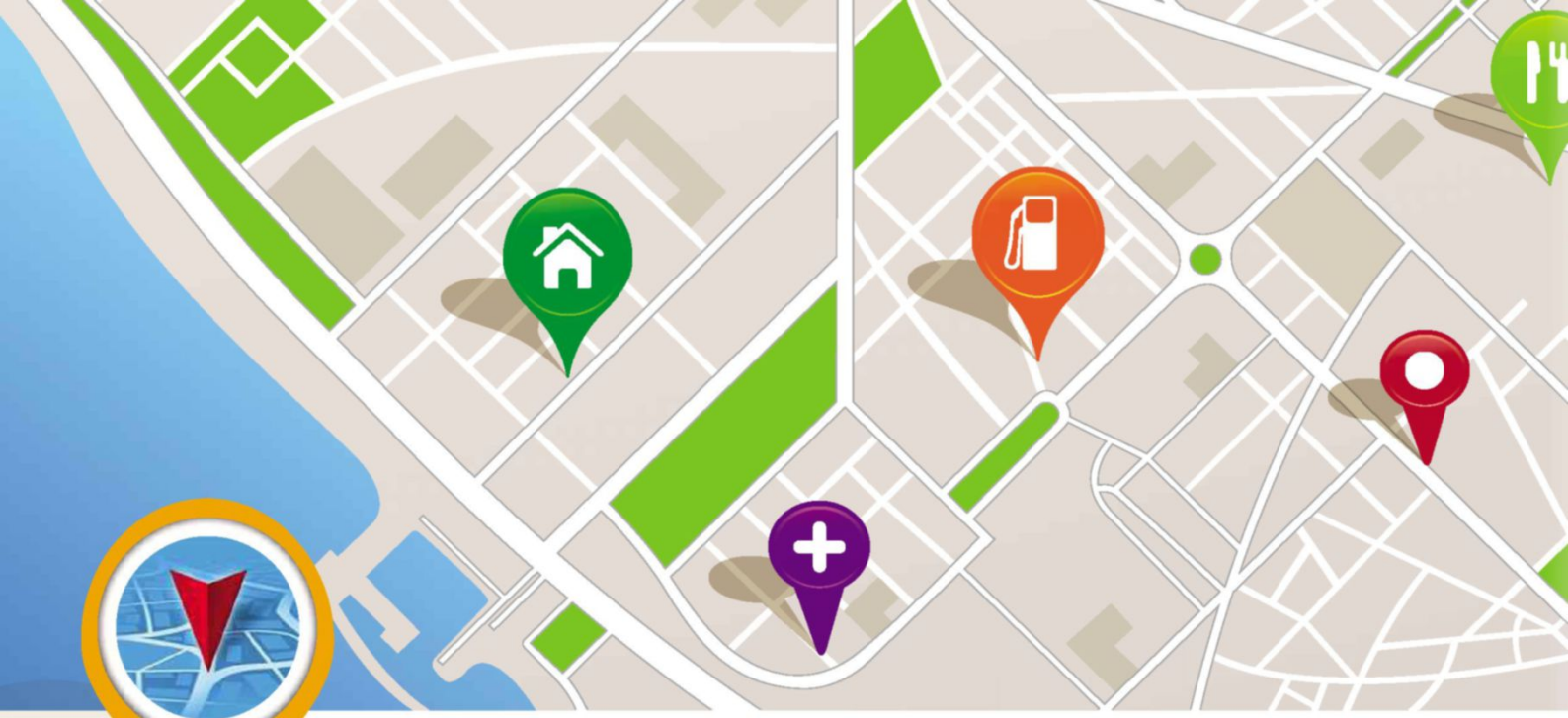
bit.ly/vivavideo378

VivaVideo is very much like VideoShow, with separate tools for video editing and creating slideshows, and a video editing interface that's organised in much the same way. Although it's a powerful app with plenty of tools, we found its unlabelled icons confusing. It also lacked decent effects and themes. The Pro version of the app is available for £1.99.

VidTrim

bit.ly/vidtrim378

VidTrim is a the perfect tool for making a wide range of changes to your video clips, including trimming, transcoding, merging and extracting audio. However, it's not really designed for making movies, with no options to add a soundtrack or transitions. For a one-off fee of £1.58 you can upgrade to VidTrim Pro, which unlocks all the app's functions and also removes watermarks and ads.



BEST NEW MAPPING TOOLS

We'd be lost these days without Google Maps, but there are plenty of other good mapping tools that offer features it lacks. **Robert Irvine** directs you to the best

Try the new and improved Bing Maps

Microsoft's mapping service (www.bing.com/maps) has always been overshadowed by Google's, but it recently relaunched with a much-improved design that makes it faster and easier to use. Indeed, it was our 'Site of the Fortnight' in Issue 376 (bit.ly/webuser376). Bing Maps lets you switch instantly between road, aerial, birds-eye and street-level views; see real-time traffic information, including roadworks, closed lanes and accidents; save collections of your favourite places; and get accurate directions and journey times based on traffic and transport conditions. If you haven't checked Bing Maps for a while, you'll be pleasantly surprised.

Use Google Maps on a Windows Phone

Windows Phone's Here Maps app (recently sold by Nokia to a consortium of German car manufacturers) has its fans, but if you'd prefer to use Google Maps you can install an unofficial version called gMaps (bit.ly/gmapsapp378). This offers many of the same features as the 'real' Google Maps, including turn-by-turn directions for driving, walking, cycling and public transport; nearby attractions and amenities; and traffic information. The basic version of gMaps is free, but if you want the full set of features – including, impressively, Street View – and to remove the ads, you can buy gMaps Pro for £1.89. (bit.ly/gmapspro378).

Install the ultimate free sat-nav app

Although Google Maps now offers spoken navigation that can turn your phone or tablet into a sat-nav, it can't compare to Navmii (navmii.com) as the perfect driving companion. Available for Android, iOS and Windows Phone, this amazing free app is packed with useful features, including voice-guided navigation, automatic rerouting and the invaluable ability to use it offline. Your personal dashboard keeps track of where you've been, the mileage driven and overall driving performance, while data from other Navmii users helps you avoid congestion, accidents and other hazards. You can pay £1.49 to remove the ads from the app.

Discover the best walking and cycling trails

Get off the road and explore places on foot or by bike using the brilliant ViewRanger (www.viewranger.com). This provides outdoor trails for countries all over the world, which you can browse by distance, level of difficulty and whether you want to walk, hike, cycle, canoe, ride and more. Its GPS maps and routes are available offline, so you won't get lost if you lose your mobile signal, and you can record and share your progress, and find nearby points of interest and accommodation. ViewRanger is free to use, both online and as an Android and iOS app, but the most detailed Ordnance Survey and topographic maps are a paid-for extra.

Explore maps of every country offline

Roaming costs in the EU are thankfully to be scrapped in 2017, but in the meantime using Google Maps when you're abroad can cost you a fortune. Maps.me (maps.me) offers a much smarter way to find your way around a foreign country because it lets you browse complete area maps offline, without sacrificing detail. The free Android and iOS app covers every country in the world, "from the largest city to the smallest village", so all you need to do is download the relevant map while you have an internet connection. Maps.me features millions of points of interest, including restaurants, petrol stations and cash machines, and provides directions from wherever you are to anywhere on the map. Cleverly, it compresses map data to keep file sizes small and lets you share a pin of your current location with friends via SMS and email.

Beat the traffic and save money on petrol

The 'Live traffic' overlay in Google Maps does little more than show you whether traffic is currently fast or slow in an area, which is useful but vague. For more accurate info on what's happening on the roads, turn to the wonderful free app Waze (www.waze.com), available for Android, iOS and Windows Phone. This uses up-to-the-minute data from its community of drivers to inform you of accidents, hazards, jams, police, road closures and more, as well as letting you report them yourself. Users can also share their current speeds, which is a more precise method than Google Maps', and maps are constantly updated to provide reliable navigation, including automatic rerouting. You can even find the cheapest petrol stations on your route, thanks to other drivers' pump reports.

Also worth a look is BBC Travel (www.bbc.co.uk/travel), which relaunched last year as a constantly updated map showing traffic incidents, congestions and roadworks, which are handily colour-coded by severity.

Get directions from people who've tried them

Although Google Maps provides detailed directions to get you from A to B, they're not always completely accurate and sometimes fail to take variables into account, such as how you're likely to proceed more slowly up a hill than down one. A more reliable alternative is OpenStreetMap (www.openstreetmap.org), which recently added directions for driving, cycling and walking. Because the site sources data from real people, its directions are mostly tried and tested by registered users, so you won't end up in a duck pond. Simply enter your starting point and destination, and click Go to view turn-by-turn directions. You can then switch between car, bicycle and foot, although annoyingly distances are only given in kilometres and not miles.

FIND WI-FI HOTSPOTS AROUND THE UK

If you can't get a mobile signal or you're wary of using up your data allowance, there are several free apps that pinpoint the nearest Wi-Fi hotspots on a map. For Virgin Media Mobile customers, there's Virgin Mobile WiFi Buddy (bit.ly/virgin378), which has just launched on iOS and covers more than 22,000 connections. BT has offered a free Wi-Fi app for years (www.bt.com/freewifi), which is available for Android, iOS and Windows Phone, and usefully provides you with precise directions to the nearest hotspots on a Google map.

If you don't want to rely on a particular network, there's WifiMapper (www.wifimapper.com), which maps a claimed 500 million hotspots all over the world and helpfully tells you what kind of venue the hotspot is located in, how reliable the connection is and even the quality of the coffee!

Share your apps with other people

You can let your friends and family enjoy your favourite mobile and Windows apps without needing to pay for them again. **Robert Irvine** explains the easiest ways to share

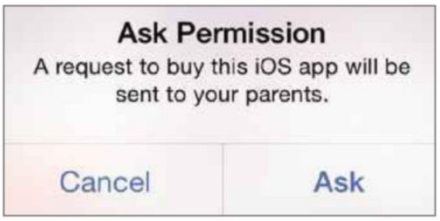
Share iPhone and iPad apps with your family

There are a lot more paid-for apps for iOS than there are for Android, but Apple makes it easier than Google to share the apps you buy with other people. The Family Sharing feature was introduced with iOS 8 and lets you share purchases from iTunes, iBooks and the App Store with family members, without them needing to pay again for the item.

To set up Family Sharing on your iPhone or iPad, go to Settings, iCloud and tap Set Up Family Sharing. Confirm that you want to be the family organiser and sign in with your Apple ID, then follow the onscreen instructions to complete the setup. Once this is done, you can invite people to join your family group by going to Settings, iCloud, Family and tapping Add Family Member. Enter the person's name (if they already share your Apple ID) or their email address, and tap Next to send them an invitation.

You'll be notified as soon as they accept, and any apps, books, music and other content you buy will be shared via the Purchased section of the relevant store. Likewise, you can access their purchases by tapping their names in the Purchased section. Any apps purchased before you set up the group will also be available to all members, as long as the app supports Family Sharing.

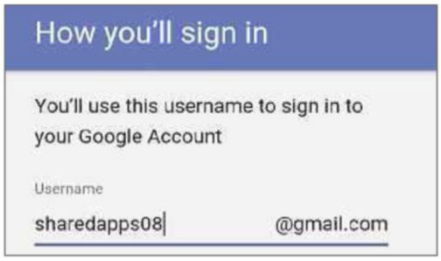
Obviously, Family Sharing is aimed at families, but there's no reason you can't add friends to your group (you could split the cost of your purchases) – just make sure you trust them not to run up a huge bill on your credit card! You can activate the 'Ask to Buy' option to prevent unauthorised purchases by younger users.



Share Android apps with friends and family

Unlike iOS, Android doesn't offer a built-in means of easily sharing apps with your family and friends. However, there are a couple of workarounds that will save you all paying to use the same app.

One is to create a dedicated Google account solely for sharing apps between a set group of people. This means that specific apps will be available to everyone, but others are kept private in personal accounts, and you won't have access to anything else on each other's phones and tablet. This setup will also create a central Gmail inbox, where you can discuss the apps you've purchased or installed, or plan to. To add another account to your Android device, go to Settings, Accounts, tap 'Add account' and select Google. Choose 'Or create a new account'; enter a name, username and password for your shared account; and set up payment info. Pass these details to the people you want to allow access to your apps.



Once this is done, you can browse the Google Play app on your Android device, tap the settings menu in the top-left corner and choose the shared account instead of your usual one. Any apps you install will then be saved to this account and be available to everyone through 'My apps'.

Another method is to only share individual apps with other people, using the free app MyAppSharer (bit.ly/myappsharer378). This lets you share

a direct link to an app or the actual APK file (the app's full package) with friends via text message, Gmail, Facebook, Dropbox, QR code or Bluetooth. The easiest option, however, is Android Beam, which uses NFC to transfer files from one device to another when you touch them together (typically back to back). Simply launch MyAppSharer, find the APK file on your phone or tablet and choose your desired sharing method. Select the recipient and tap Share to send them the app.

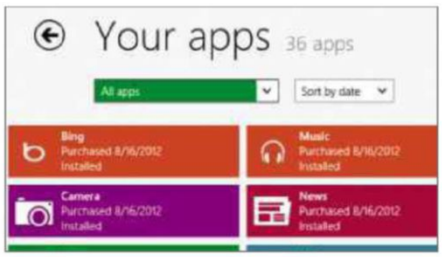
Share Windows 8+ and 10 apps across accounts

Windows now encourages you to set up a separate account for everyone who uses your computer, but this means that any app you buy from the Windows store (bit.ly/windows378) is restricted to the account you buy it from. Fortunately, there is a way around this in Windows 8+ and 10 that lets you share your purchased apps and games across different user accounts, so family and friends can enjoy them, too. It simply involves adding the details for your Windows Store account to the user accounts you want to share apps with, by logging into them (with permission, of course!) and launching the Store app.

Press Windows+I to open Settings and choose 'Your account', then click 'Change user' (if it's a Microsoft account) or 'Sign in' (if it's a local one). You then sign into the Windows Store using your primary user account details.

The login details you provide here will only be used for the Store, so the current user won't be able to access anything else in your account. If the other account is held by a child, consider selecting the option 'Always ask for your password when buying an app' to ensure they can't make purchases without your permission.

Note that when you are sharing paid-for apps in this manner, they still need to be downloaded to each account



because they won't appear automatically. To review all the apps and games you have installed, visit the Windows Store and choose 'Your apps' (or press Windows+Z).

Share Kindle books and apps with someone else

One of the advantages of physical books over digital ones is that you can easily lend them to other people once you've finished reading them. If you want to do this with an ebook, you can either trust someone with your beloved Kindle for a few days, or you can sign up for Amazon's Family Library (bit.ly/family378). This lets you link your Amazon account with that of another adult in your household so you can easily share Kindle books and apps across your Amazon devices and Kindle reading apps. Shared content appears in the Cloud tab of each of your devices, and each adult has their own settings for that content, such as furthest page read, notes and annotations.

To use Family Library, you need to create a virtual 'household' on Amazon. Go to 'Manage Your Content and Devices', sign into your account and click Settings. Select Invite Adult under 'Households and Family Library', and have the other person sign into their Amazon account to join your household and share your Kindle library.

SHARE CHROME EXTENSIONS WITH FRIENDS

If you're particularly proud of, or pleased with, the useful extensions you've installed in Chrome, you can share the tools with other, less web-savvy people to help them make the most of the browser. Share Extensions (bit.ly/chrome378) lets you generate a list of all your add-ons, or just select your favourites, and share it with friends via email or Twitter, or post it on a website, blog or forum. To use it, click the toolbar icon to view your installed extensions (both enabled and disabled), then click the star

icon next to those you want to share. Select the format to export the list in, such as HTML or Text,and then copy and share the generated code.

Broadband Deals

Call FREE on 0800 083 2357 to switch your broadband

	Provider	Package name	Monthly price	Contract length	Broadband speed	Allowance	First-year cost*
							CHEAPEST
1	plusnet	Plusnet: Broadband & Calls	£9.99 (FREE for 12 months)	18 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£0.00
2	sky	Sky: Broadband & Calls	£10.00 (FREE for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£0.00
3	TalkTalk	TalkTalk: Broadband	£5.00 (HALF PRICE for 12 months)	18 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£30.00
4	EE	EE: Broadband & Calls	£9.95 (£2.95 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited **	£35.40

Terms & Conditions apply - see ISP sites for details
*First-year cost does not include line rental. Cost is calculated at monthly price x12 with all introductory offers subtracted. Additional charges incurred outside of free inclusive calls not included in first-year cost. ** Fair-usage or restriction policy applies.
Data supplied by www.broadbandgenie.co.uk. Correct as of 7 August 2015.

Ofcom
Broadband Genie's helpline is powered by Simplify Digital, the Ofcom-accredited switching service

In the next issue of our sister title Computeractive...

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Take a Screen Break

Give your eyes a rest from your browser by taking our fiendish fortnightly challenges. New from this issue, we've got a web-themed word search and an emoji quiz

WEB USER WORD SEARCH

Can you find the following web companies in the grid on the right? The words may appear vertically, horizontally or diagonally

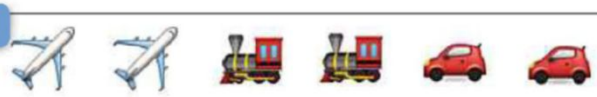
AMAZON
APPLE
FACEBOOK
GOOGLE
MICROSOFT
MOZILLA
TRIPADVISOR
TWITTER
WIKIPEDIA
YAHOO

R	F	M	U	E	P	G	Y	C	T	T	O
P	O	Z	O	X	L	A	P	Z	F	W	O
F	J	S	Y	Z	R	P	B	P	O	I	H
H	V	E	I	N	I	A	P	A	S	T	A
W	I	M	O	V	M	L	I	A	O	T	Y
I	P	X	W	A	D	D	L	W	R	E	S
P	C	K	Z	M	E	A	G	A	C	R	E
C	C	O	X	P	H	B	P	O	I	N	I
M	N	Z	I	M	J	X	J	I	M	S	P
O	M	K	E	L	G	O	O	G	R	M	J
I	I	F	A	C	E	B	O	O	K	T	F
W	F	L	R	V	Q	Q	X	X	F	Q	T

CAN YOU IDENTIFY THESE FILM TITLES FROM THE EMOJI?

1

2

3 

4

Get the answers online at www.webuser.co.uk/quiz378

COMPETITIONS

WIN 1 OF 3

Netgear Nighthawk AC1900 Extender

WORTH £130 EACH

Netgear's Nighthawk AC1900 Extender won the Gold Award in our Wi-Fi Extenders Group Test in Issue 376, coming top in all our speed tests. It is future-proofed because the next generation of devices is likely to come with Wi-Fi standards that make use of the Nighthawk's advanced tools. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'nighthawk' in the subject line. For more info visit www.netgear.co.uk and follow @NETGEAR_UKI on Twitter.

WIN 1 OF 2

Safeguard HD home security camera

WORTH £99 EACH

Kitvision's new Safeguard range of security cameras come with everything you need to keep an eye on your home when you're away, using an Android or iOS device. We're giving away the HD model, which has 1,280 x 720p video resolution and a built-in mic and speaker. To enter, email your address to webusercomp@dennis.co.uk with 'safeguard' in the subject line. For more info visit kitvision.co.uk and follow @KitvisionUK on Twitter.

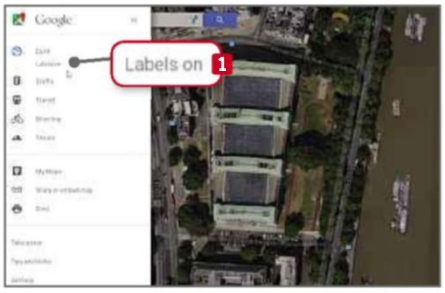
Make your own offline maps

maps.google.co.uk

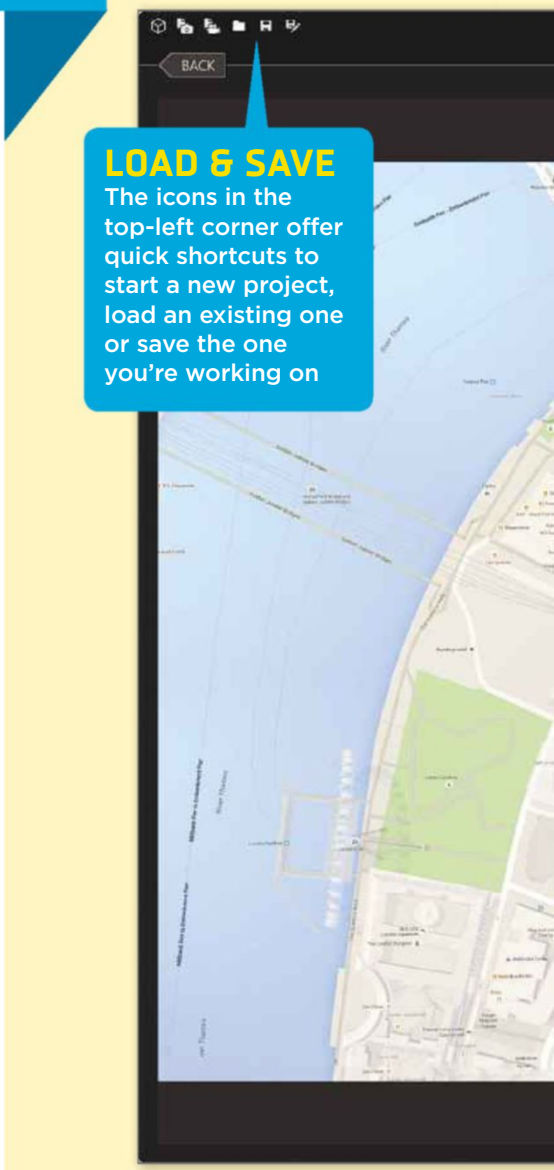
Web-based mapping services such as Google Maps are great, but you have to be online to use them. Here's how to create large, highly detailed maps that can be viewed any time, any place

If you want to get directions to a place, or find out what facilities there are in a local area, then online maps are the perfect tool. However, there may be times when the maps they offer don't meet your particular needs. You might, for example, require a much more detailed map that you can use offline while you're on holiday, or on a trip to a remote destination where the internet connection is patchy or non-existent. Or you might simply want to create detailed wallpaper for your PC or a poster for your wall. This involves stitching together sections to make one big map, which is very easy to do.

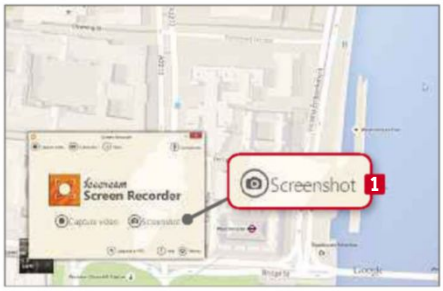
1 To begin, open your choice of online mapping service. We'll use Google Maps, but Bing Maps works just as well. Navigate to the first place you want to include in your offline map. Use the controls to zoom in and out as required. 1 You can also switch between Maps and Earth (satellite imagery) views. 2



2 If you choose the Earth view – which will make for an attractive poster or Windows wallpaper – you may wish to toggle the location labels off. Click the top-left menu button and click 'Labels on'. 1 There's no way to remove the controls or search box but don't worry, that won't be a problem.

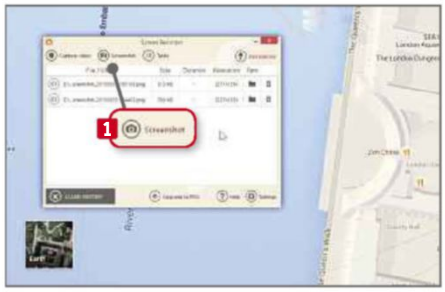


LOAD & SAVE
The icons in the top-left corner offer quick shortcuts to start a new project, load an existing one or save the one you're working on

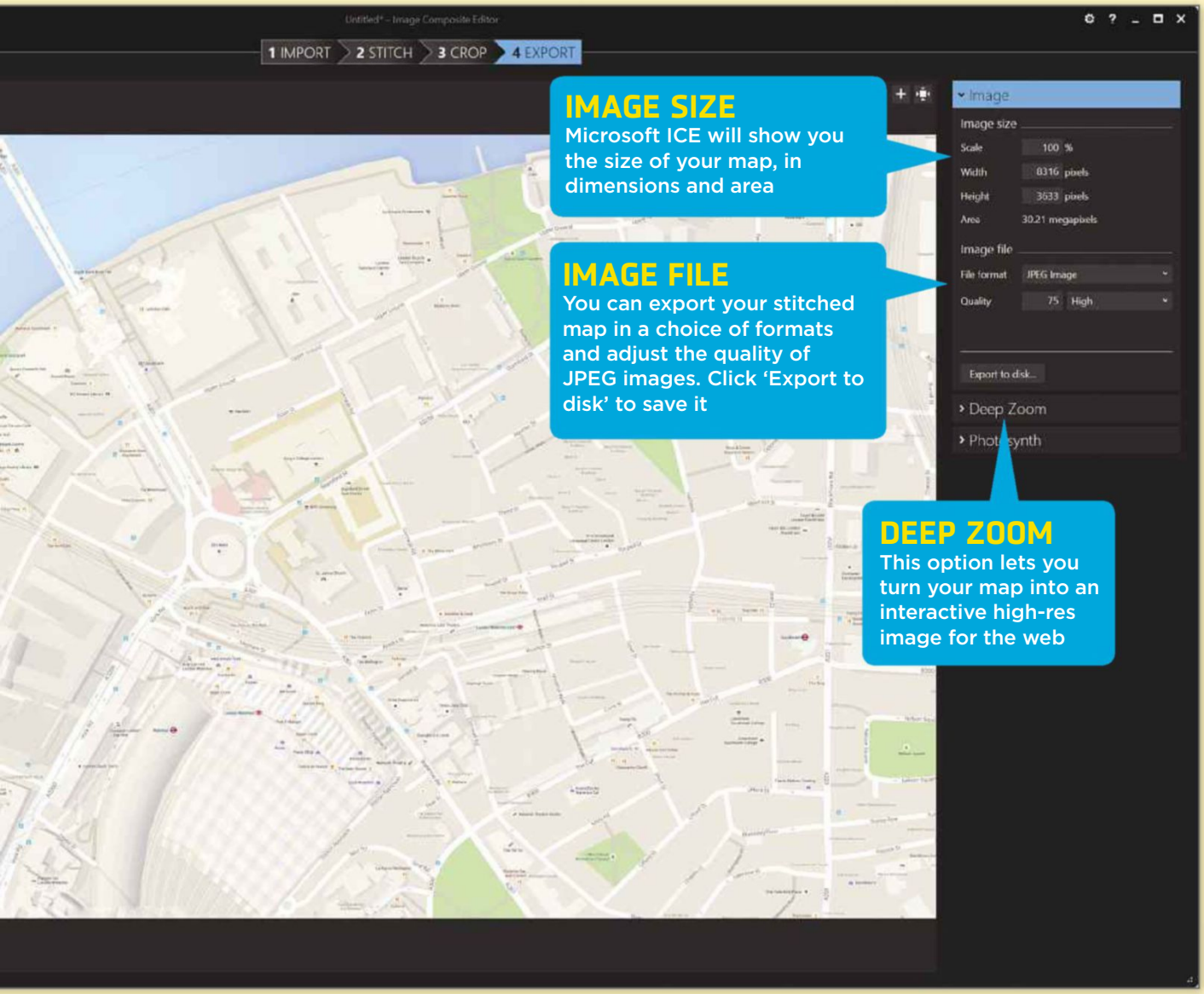


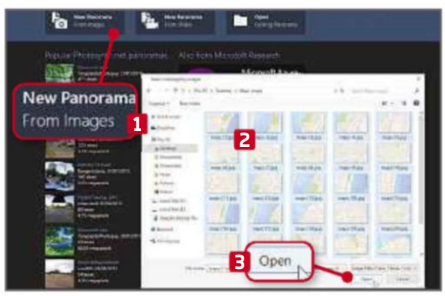
3 Now we need to take a screenshot of the map area. Use whatever program you like (Windows 8 and 10 come with a free Snipping Tool). For the sake of this Workshop, we'll use Icecream Screen Recorder (bit.ly/screen378). Get your map into position and click the Screenshot button. 1

4 Click and drag on the area you want to capture, making sure you only select the map, 1 and not the controls, search box, any of the browser furniture or your mouse cursor. Click the Screenshot button 2 to save the grab. This will be stored in the default save folder.

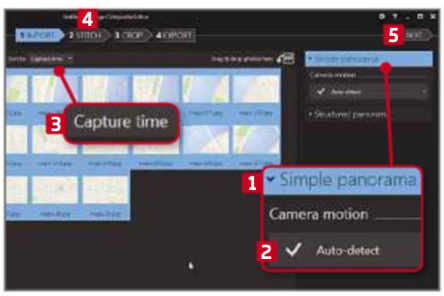


5 Pan around the map and take another screenshot by clicking the button. 1 Keep doing this – panning up and down as well as left and right – until you have covered the entire area you want included in your map. Make sure there's plenty of overlap (repeated area) in each of the screens.

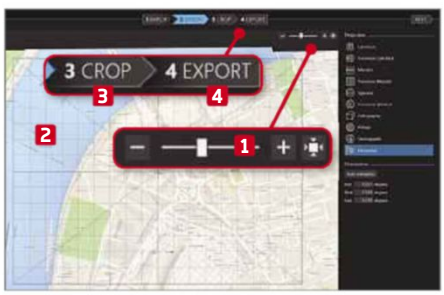




6 Once you've captured the entire area, you need to stitch your map together. We're using Microsoft Image Composite Editor (bit.ly/msice378). Launch the program and click New Panorama From Images. 1 Browse to where your screenshots are saved, select them all (Ctrl+A) 2 and click Open. 3



7 A Simple panorama 1 with Auto-detect 2 will work. You can sort the images by name or capture time, 3 but it's not important because the software will work out where they should go. Click either Stitch 4 or Next 5 and the program will go to work aligning and compositing the screen shots.



8 The stitched map will be displayed. You can zoom in and out using the controls. 1 Clicking and dragging inside the grid 2 lets you pan around; outside the grid will let you rotate the map. Click Crop 3 and use the handles to select the area you want (or just click 'Auto complete') and then export the map. 4

Find your best Wi-Fi settings using your Android device

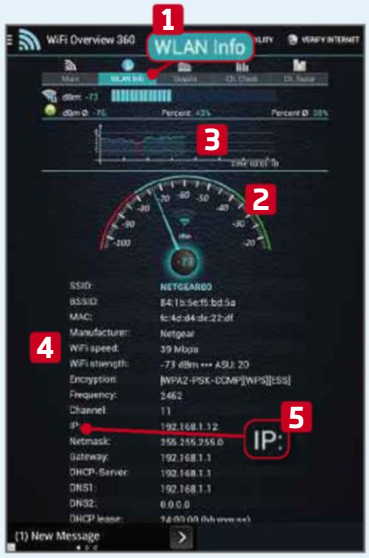
WiFi Overview 360: bit.ly/wifi378 | 10 mins | Android

Setting up Wi-Fi is a straightforward task, with most ISPs and router manufacturers making sure you have to do little more than plug your router into your phone socket and turn it on to start wirelessly connecting devices.

However, this ease of use can be at the expense of Wi-Fi quality. If you haven't had the opportunity to select things like the wireless channel settings, how do you know your Wi-Fi is working to its full potential? If all your neighbours are also using their default settings, you could all be sharing the same network frequency and clogging up the airwaves, while other, empty channels could be giving you a stronger signal.

This makes it well worth performing a regular check that you're still getting the best signal. This is a quick and easy job if you use an Android app called WiFi Overview 360, which scans the airwaves around your network to check that your settings are optimised for maximun performance.

1 When you first open the app you'll see a list of all the networks the app has found around you, 1 ordered by the strength of their signal. The one you're connected to is highlighted in green. 2 If you have dual-band and another of your networks is higher up the list, you may not be connected to the fastest network.



2 Tap the connected network or the 'WLAN info' tab 1 to view more information about the network you're on. The meter 2 shows the current signal strength, which feeds into the graph 3 to show stability over time. There's also handy information such as speed 4 and IP addresses. 5

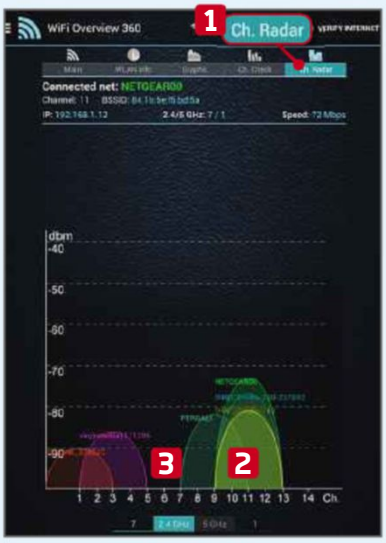
3 Tap the Graphs tab 1 and you'll see similar graphed information about the strength of networks around you. 2 This can help you establish which of your networks is the most stable as you move around your house, so it's worth checking in different rooms.

4 The 'Ch. Check' 1 tab recommends which channel you should be on. The bigger the bar, 2 the clearer the channel is and the better your connection will be. The valuation of your current channel is listed at the top 3 along with the best channels available. 4 If there's more than one, choose the middle one, since channels overlap.

EXPERT TIP

ANDY SHAW SAYS

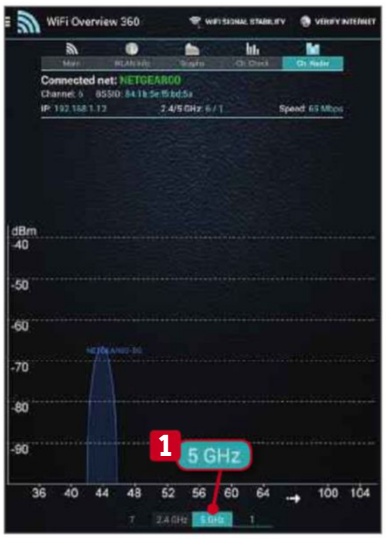
Tap the Wifi Signal Stability button to get a constantly updated stream of Wi-Fi strength data, shown on a meter. You can use this to move around your house and see where the signal drops off. This is particularly useful if you're locating a good position to put a Wi-Fi extender, such as the Linksys RE6700, reviewed on page 22.



5 For a more visual representation of the channel congestion, tap the 'Ch. Radar' tab. 1 Here you can see the build-up of traffic around channel 11 2 and the relative clear air around channel 6, 3 which would appear to be a better place for a network to sit in this instance.

6 To change your channel, log into your router. Open a browser and type the Gateway address from the 'WLAN info' tab into the address bar. Log in and find the channel settings, which should be in a wireless settings section. 1 Change the channel to one recommended by the app. 2

7 Going back to the 'WLAN info' tab we can see that switching channels has significantly improved the connection. The signal strength is boosted 1 and the stability of the graph is much better, 2 making for a better overall connection.



8 If you've got dual-band you can switch to analysing this from the 'Ch. Check' or 'Ch. Radar' screens by tapping the 5GHz button. 1 5GHz networks aren't as common as 2.4GHz networks and they don't reach as far. Check in the places where you get a poor signal that there aren't any fighting for your channel.

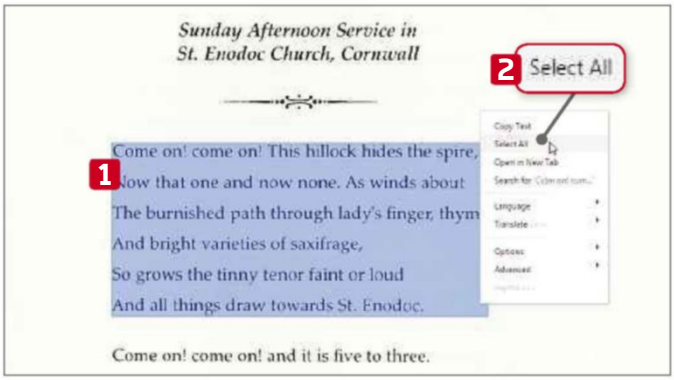
9 If you've set your network not to broadcast its SSID, you can add it manually. Tap the menu button 1 and select New Network. 2 You'll be asked to type in the SSID name, select the security type and enter the password.

10 You can change the look of the bars in the app so they use a traffic light gradient instead of light-blue blocks. 1 Tap the menu button and choose Settings. Flick the switch next to 'Color bar' to its On position. You can also change the network encryption description settings if you want to see more detail.

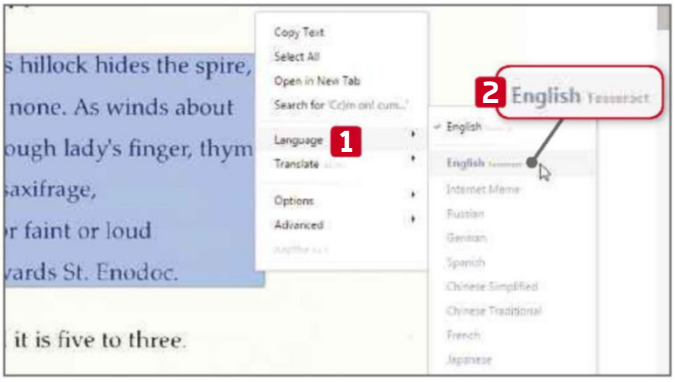
Copy text from images with a handy Chrome add-on

Project Naptha is an optical character recognition (OCR) extension for Google Chrome that converts text in images, screenshots and photographs into editable form. With the help of your phone camera and web browser, you can also use it to scan letters, bills, newspaper articles or anything else with text in. If you're looking to covert a PDF or longer document, see our online converting tip on page 69.

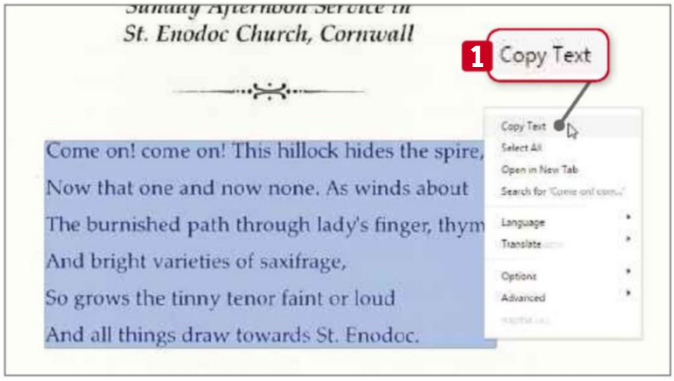
Project Naptha: bit.ly/nap378 | **10 mins** | **Chrome**



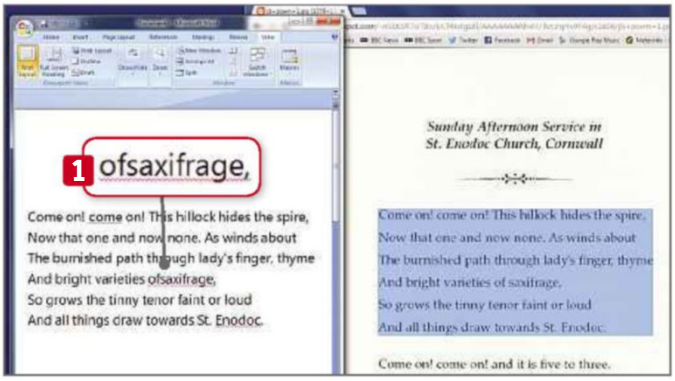
1 Install Project Naptha for Chrome and navigate to an image you want to copy text from. When you hold your cursor over a passage of text, a text-selector appears. Highlight the selection you want to copy 1 or right-click and choose Select All. 2



2 By default, Project Naptha's language is set to Ocrad.js, but we found a much better transcription was obtained using the Tesseract option. To switch, right-click the text, select Language 1 and choose 'English Tesseract'. 2

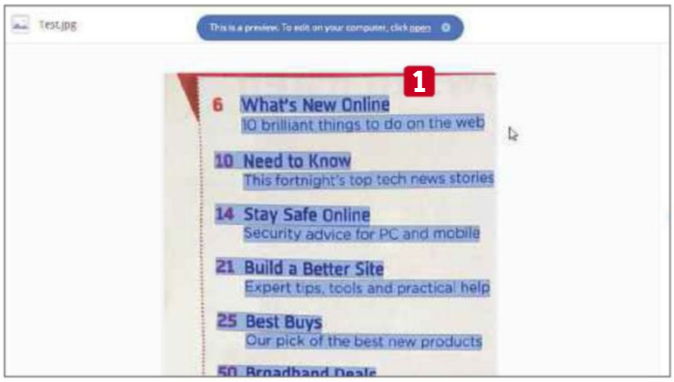


3 Wait for Project Naptha's scanning animation to stop, right-click your selection again and click Copy Text 1 to copy the passage. You can paste your selected text from the clipboard to any program in which you want to use it.



4 After pasting your text, check it against the original, as Optical Character Recognition is rarely perfect. Double-spaces and missing spaces 1 are particularly common errors. You'll find the number of errors will depend greatly on how clear the original text is, and how decorative the typeface.

5 To copy text from an external source or document that isn't already on your PC or the web, take a photo of it using your smartphone camera and upload it to Dropbox. From Dropbox.com's preview screen, 1 you can use Project Naptha to scan any text as per the instructions above. 2



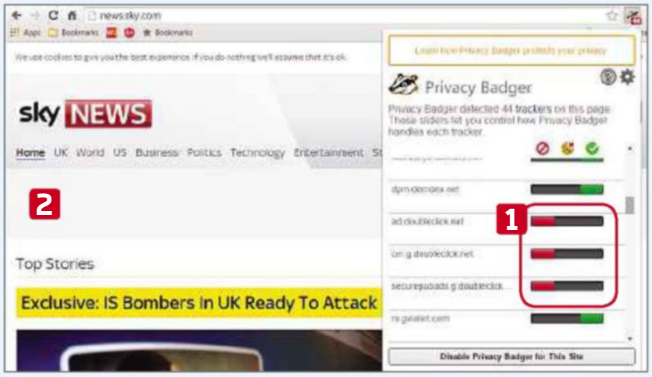
6 Project Naptha processes images based on how they appear in your browser, regardless of the actual resolution of the files. For more accurate results, try cropping your images more tightly, 1 so that the text is larger and clearer on screen.

Stop 'super cookies' tracking you online

The Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF, www.eff.org) has launched Privacy Badger 1.0, an add-on for Chrome and Firefox that prevents websites from tracking you online. It even blocks 'super cookies', which are stored in plug-ins and local storage, well away from the standard cookie storage. This makes them immune to the basic cookie-cleaning tools that come with your browser.

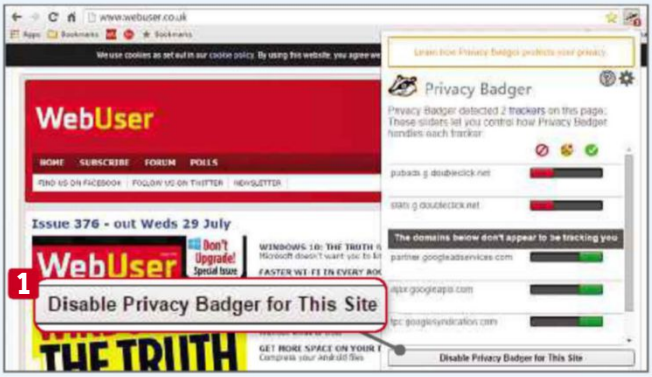
Privacy Badger: bit.ly/badger378 | 10 mins | Chrome, Firefox

1 When you start the add-on and load a web page, the Privacy Badger icon will show the number of trackers it finds in the page's HTML code. 1 Click it to see more details. 2 The trackers won't attempt to follow you until you move on to a new site, so the switches will still be green. 3

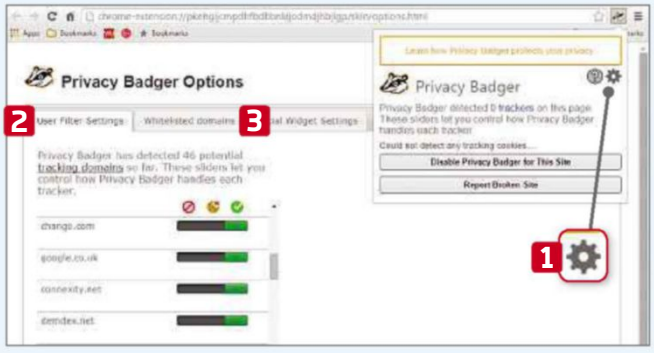


2 Once you move to a new site and Privacy Badger detects the trackers following you, it will automatically start blocking them, moving the sliders to the left and turning them red. 1 As a result, adverts or other visual elements on the page may no longer display properly. 2

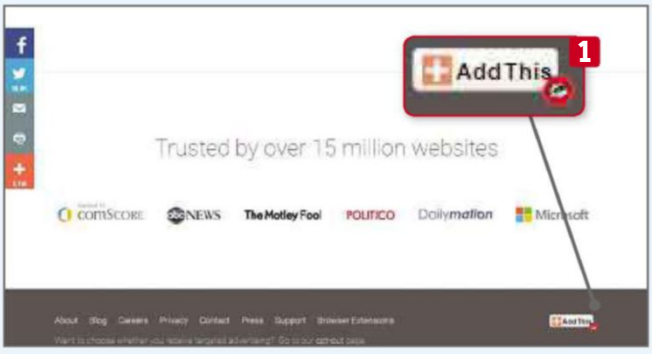
3 If you're unhappy with the results, you can control trackers individually by moving the switches yourself. Aside from red and green, there is also an amber setting, 1 which blocks only the cookies rather than the whole ad or widget. Click the arrow 2 to revert to the default setting.



4 Changing the switches changes the settings for that particular tracker across all sites on the web. To stop Privacy Badger from blocking things on one specific site, click 'Disable Privacy Badger for This Site'. 1



5 Clicking the icon only shows trackers for the page you're visiting. To see all the trackers that Privacy Badger has detected, click the cog. 1 Here you can alter global settings for each tracker. 2 The 'Whitelisted domains' tab 3 lists all the sites you've asked Privacy Badger to ignore.



6 Privacy Badger also keeps a lookout for social-networking buttons that track you in more ways than they should. Any suspect ones will be replaced by a new button featuring the badger icon. It still links to the service but doesn't track your movements. 1

Weekend Project

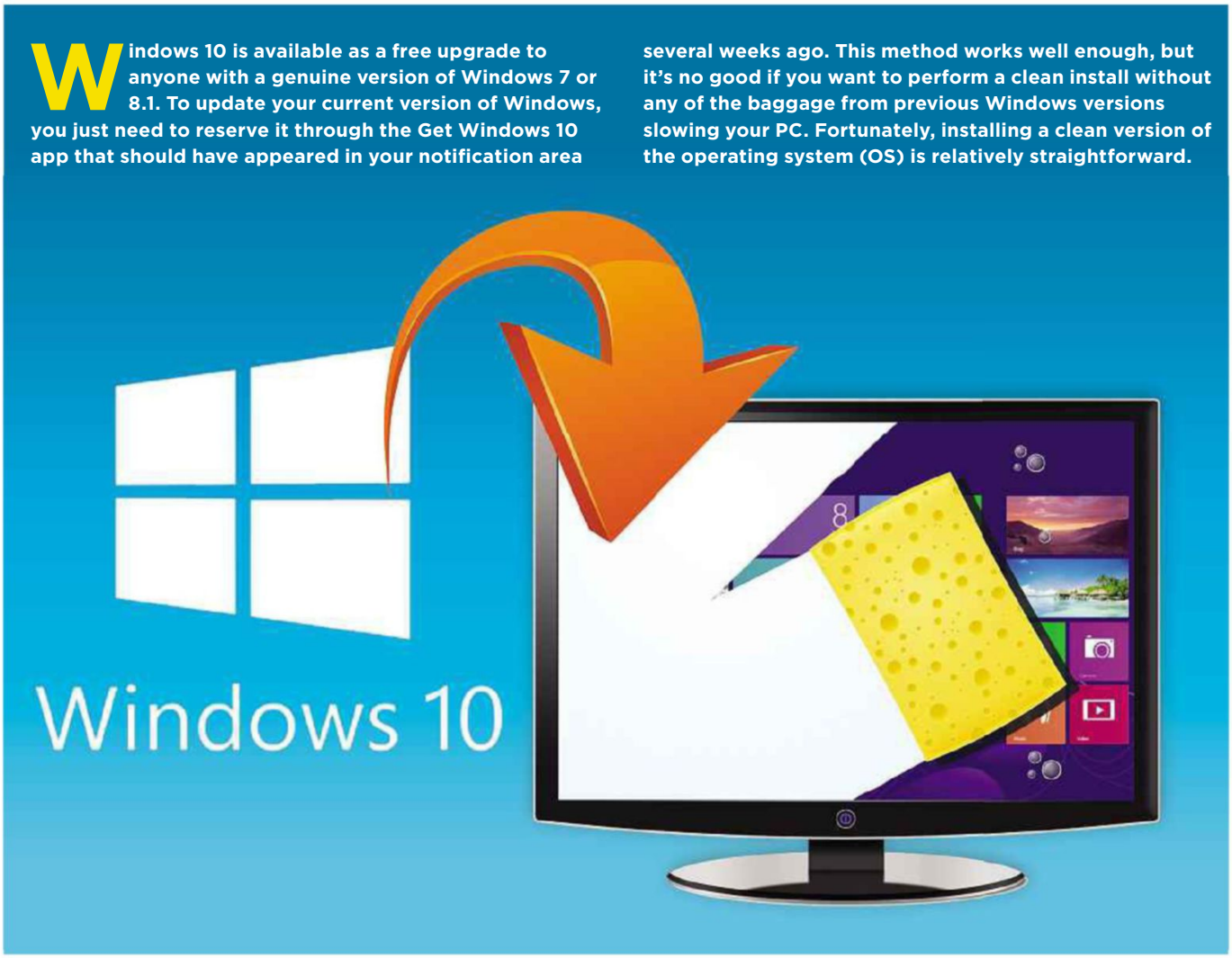
Get to grips with some serious PC DIY to boost your computer's performance

How to...

Install a clean copy of Windows 10

Installing a fresh copy of Windows, rather than upgrading, can improve your PC's performance. **Wayne Williams** shows you how

Windows 10 is available as a free upgrade to anyone with a genuine version of Windows 7 or 8.1. To update your current version of Windows, you just need to reserve it through the Get Windows 10 app that should have appeared in your notification area several weeks ago. This method works well enough, but it's no good if you want to perform a clean install without any of the baggage from previous Windows versions slowing your PC. Fortunately, installing a clean version of the operating system (OS) is relatively straightforward.



Use the free Media Creation Tool

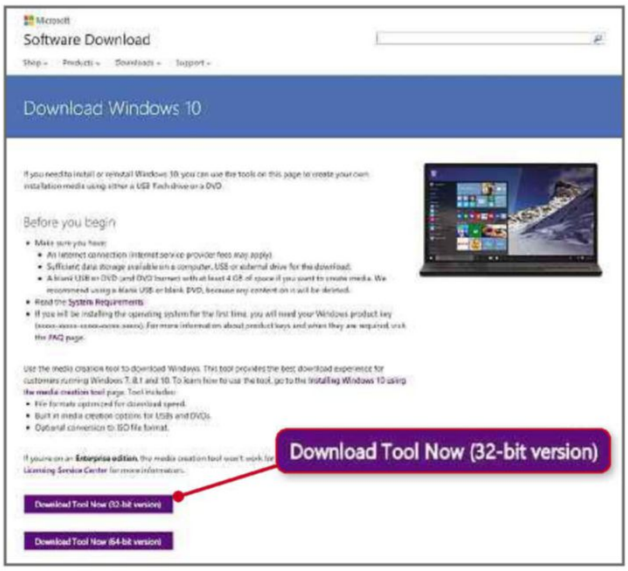
Microsoft has released a special tool (bit.ly/download378) designed to let you create a Windows 10 installation DVD or USB flash drive, which means you can install the new operating system on any PC. There are 32- and 64-bit versions available. The same tool will also let you immediately upgrade an existing version of Windows, in case there's been a delay and you're still waiting for Microsoft to send your update.

With a straightforward upgrade, the new operating system is copied over the old one, so all your software, personal files and system settings are preserved. This may sound like good news, because you'll be able to pick up where you left off once the upgrade is complete. However, all the junk you've accrued over the years will still be there, slowing down your PC. If you want Windows 10 to run as speedily as possible, with fewer

problems, it's best to perform a clean installation.

It's important to understand what you can and can't do when installing a fresh copy of Windows 10. If you update a PC running Windows 7 or 8.1, the installer will use your current valid Windows licence and upgrade your system. This will convert the licence key into one that works with Windows 10, and automatically store it in the cloud. If, in future, you want to wipe your hard drive and install Windows 10 from scratch, this converted key should work, provided you use it on the same PC.

Before you start using Windows 10, you'll need to check that the upgraded OS is activated by going to Settings, Update & Security, Activation and making sure you see the 'Windows is Activated' message. You will need to ensure that you log into the Windows account linked to Windows 10. If you're not sure sure what this is, you can check it under Settings, Accounts, Your Account.



Use the Media Creation Tool from Microsoft's website to create an ISO file you can install from

You may need to first upgrade your OS to get an activated Windows 10 product key

If you don't update an existing version of Windows, and attempt to install Windows 10 just using the setup media that the tool creates, you'll run into problems because it won't recognise an unconverted Windows 7 or 8.1 key. In this instance, you are left with two choices: you can either buy a Windows 10 licence, which isn't cheap, or you can first install either Windows 7 or 8.1 on that PC, upgrade it to Windows 10 to get a new Windows 10-compatible licence, and then install a clean version of the new OS. The second option is much more time-consuming than the first, but at least it will save you having to spend any money.

Back up everything

When you perform a clean installation, everything on your PC will be wiped. This includes installed software, personal files, settings, browser bookmarks, passwords and more. It's important, therefore, that you first back up a copy of everything you will want to use on your upgraded PC.

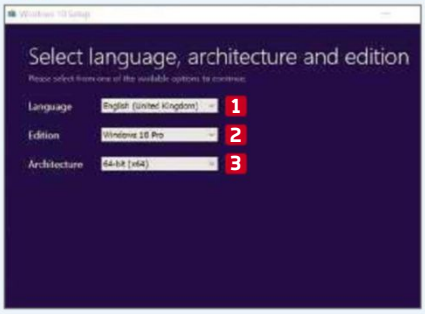
You can back up your Firefox settings using an add-on such as FEBE (bit.ly/febe378), which can back up your extensions, themes, bookmarks, preferences, passwords, cookies and even your entire profile.

Chrome can be backed-up using your Google account. Click the menu button and select Settings. Under 'Sign in', click the 'Advanced sync settings' button and choose whether you want to sync everything or only selected items. We recommend the former option in this case.

Personal files, such as documents, photos and music tracks, can be copied to a new location or backed up using any reputable backup program. Todo Backup Free (bit.ly/todo378) is a good option.

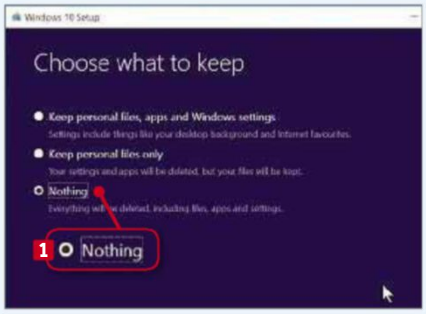
CloneApp (bit.ly/cloneapp378) is a useful portable tool that can create a backup of all of your app settings from relevant Windows directories and the Registry. Run it on the PC that you'll be installing a fresh version of Windows on, to display a list of the installed programs that have configuration files it can back up. There's a custom tool you can use to

MINI WORKSHOP | Use Microsoft's Media Creation Tool



1 Download the tool from Microsoft (bit.ly/download378), then run it and choose to 'Create installation media for another PC'. Select the language 'English (United Kingdom)', **1** the Edition **2** and Architecture. **3** You'll only be able to install the version of Windows that's equivalent to the key you have. Check which version you need on the download page.

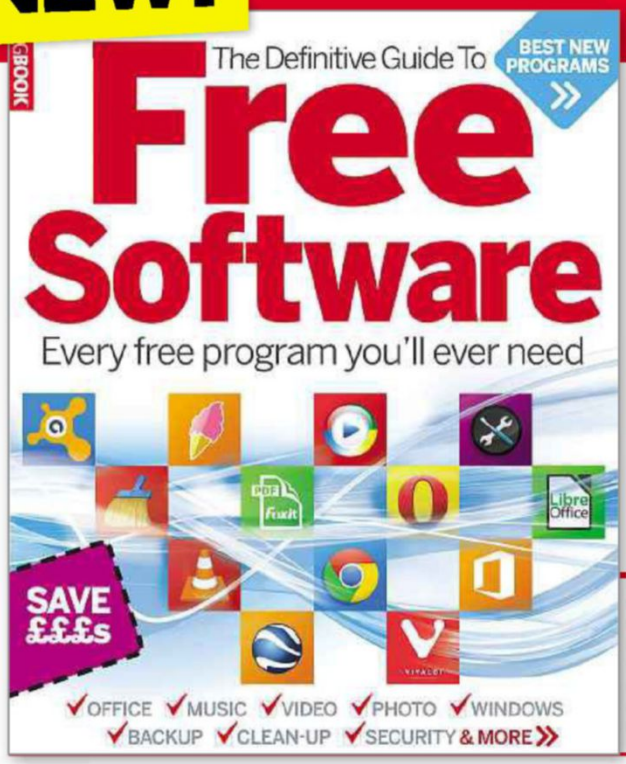
2 Choose if you want to create the installer on a USB flash drive **1** or save it as an ISO file for burning to DVD. **2** We'll select the former option. Click Next, and the tool will start downloading Windows 10 and build the installation media for you. You'll be able to use this to install a fresh copy or upgrade a PC.



3 Insert the drive into a PC and run the setup.exe file on it. The upgrade process will start. Click 'Change what to keep'. Updates download from the internet and you can agree to the terms and conditions. When you see this screen, choose to keep nothing. **1** Complete the installation and enter your Windows 10 key when prompted.

WebUser Bookstore

NEW!



THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO FREE SOFTWARE

Free software always sets off alarm bells. Will it be as good as paid-for packages? Will it try to sneak junk on to your PC? Will it constantly nag you to update to a premium version? In our new 148-page book *The Definitive Guide to Free Software*, we recommend only the very best free programs that deliver high-quality features and no nasty surprises (no junk – guaranteed!). It's packed with step-by-step tutorials and how-to guides for safe downloads – plus you'll learn which free anti-virus you should use. In short, it contains every free program you'll ever need.

BUY IT NOW FROM AMAZON
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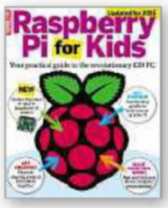
RASPBERRY PI FOR KIDS



The Raspberry Pi is the incredible £20 British computer that's taking the world by storm. It's ideal for children of all ages to experiment, play games and learn valuable skills. We've updated this 148-page book for 2015 to include instructions on mastering the new Pi models (A+ and B+).

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In the 164-page *The Definitive Guide to Google Hidden Tools*, we lift the lid on Google's most popular tools with more than 430 ways to make them more efficient, useful and tailored to your needs. These include clever add-ons for Chrome, amazing free apps for Android and stunning sights in Google Maps.

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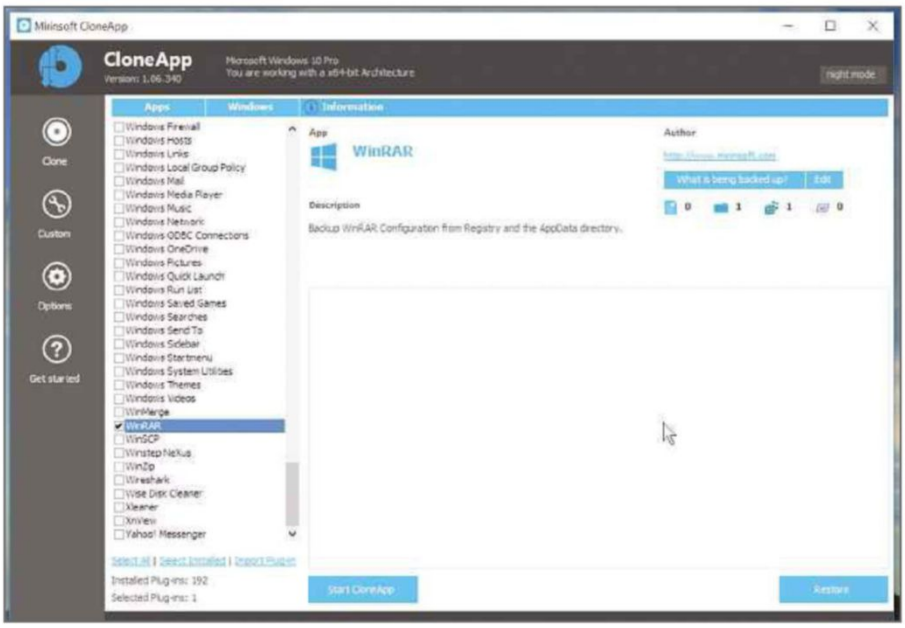


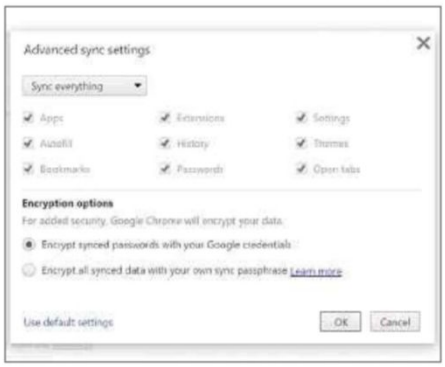
CloneApp will back up the settings for many of your installed programs

back up the settings for programs that CloneApp doesn't support. Select any software that has personal settings you want to keep. This won't be every program because some, such as CCleaner, you'll only be able to download and reinstall on your new OS.

Once you've backed up the settings, you can install Windows 10 using the relevant method detailed in our Mini Workshops. We show you how to refresh a PC that already has Windows 10 in our Mini Workshop on page 59, and how to reinstall from scratch using the Media Creation tool, below. You can then reinstall your missing software and, when that's done, run CloneApp and click the Restore button. All your backed-up settings will be restored.

What's my Windows key?

If you haven't installed Windows in a long time (or ever) and don't have your original installation media to hand, you might not know what your Windows key is. Fortunately, ProduKey (go to www.nirsoft.net and search for it) can provide this information without needing to be installed. Run it to display the key used to activate your current version of Windows, as well as your current version of Microsoft Office, if you've got it installed.



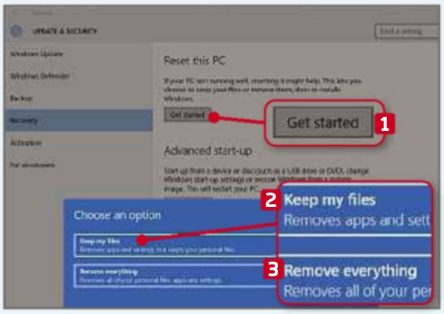
The best way to back up Chrome settings is to sync them with your Google account

Don't have a Windows 10 key?

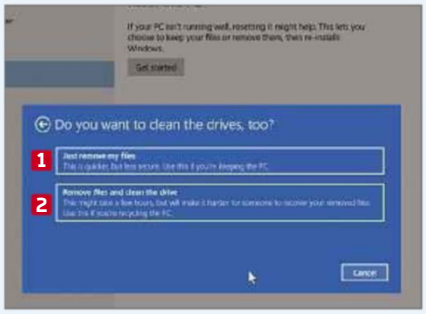
You don't need a valid licence to install Windows 10 from scratch. If you choose to skip the step where you're asked for your key, the OS will still install without any problems. It won't be activated, and you will only be able to use Windows 10 for a short while, but you can worry about a key later. If you want to avoid using a key altogether, you can join the Windows Insider program (insider.windows.com). This will put you on the cutting edge testing program, with access to new builds of the OS as soon as they become available. You won't need a key (because you'll be granted a temporary one), but bear in mind that you may be running a build that's potentially buggy and unstable.

MINI WORKSHOP | Refresh a Windows 10 PC

1 If your PC is running Windows 10, you don't need to perform a clean install as such – instead, you can simply refresh the system. This will wipe everything and install a fresh copy of the operating system. Make sure you've backed up all your personal data, then go to Settings, Update & Security and click Recovery. 1



2 You'll see an option to 'Reset this PC'. Click the Get Started button. 1 You'll be presented with a selection of options. You can choose to 'Keep my files' 2 or 'Remove everything'. 3 Some PCs will also offer 'Restore factory settings'. Because we want to start afresh, we've clicked 'Remove everything'.



3 Choose the drives from which to remove your personal files – either your main hard drive or all drives. Next, select the option to 'Just remove my files'. 1 'Remove files and clean the drive' 2 is useful if you're planning to sell your PC. Finally, click the Reset button on the next screen and it will go to work.

NEXT ISSUE **How To...** Create a Raspberry Pi media centre

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Web User's Top Tips

Is your browser running slower than it used to? Our experts explain how to speed it back up

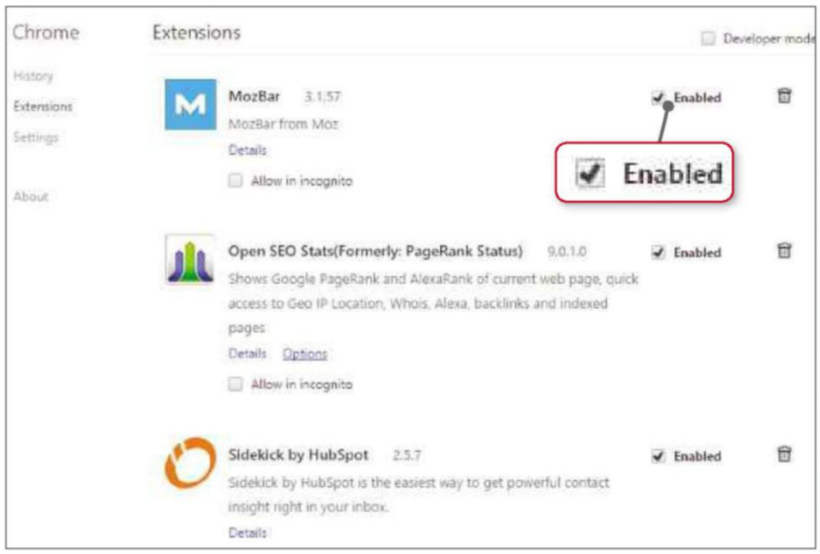
TOP TIPS FOR SPEEDING UP YOUR BROWSER

Disable extensions that you rarely use

Browser extensions and add-ons use memory and processing power, and some consume as much as 100MB of your available memory. If you have more than two or three running, you should disable the ones you use less often so that the browser can run better.

In Chrome, go to the menu button, hover over 'More tools' and click Extensions. There is a tick box to disable each add-on and a trash can to delete it. You don't need to delete them – simply disabling them provides all the benefits of memory reduction and speed increase. That way, if you need an add-on, you can quickly return to the tools and re-enable it.

If you are a Firefox user, click the menu button and select Add-ons, then click the Extensions tab. Click the Disable button against any you can live without.



Having too many extensions slows your browser, so disable any you aren't using

Suspend unused tabs

Tabbed browsing lets you keep multiple web pages open, so you can follow links without losing the current page. Each tab uses valuable memory, though, and when a lot of them are open, Chrome's memory usage can exceed a full gigabyte. This can cause problems on computers with 4GB or less of memory, particularly if other programs are open at the same time.

The Great Suspender (bit.ly/suspend378) is a Chrome add-on that temporarily suspends tabs. This releases the memory they are consuming and stops them using processing power and the internet connection. The web page on a suspended tab is replaced with a simple message stating that it's suspended. Click anywhere to reload it and carry on browsing.

When you install the add-on, the Settings page is displayed, but it can be accessed at any time by right-clicking the toolbar button. There is an option to automatically suspend tabs you haven't accessed for a length of time, which ranges from 20 seconds to three days. A setting of about 10 minutes should get you started.

Right-click The Great Suspender icon to suspend any tabs you aren't currently using

The add-on has some built-in intelligence, so it won't suspend tabs containing forms you might be filling in, but you can also whitelist any websites that you never want to suspend. For example, if you use webmail such as Gmail, Outlook or Yahoo, you might want to keep them open. Just right-click The Great Suspender icon and select 'Never suspend this site'.

Turn off background apps

Chrome is more than just a browser and it can run apps, too. For example, you might have a Gmail checker that alerts you when a new message arrives. These apps run in the background without showing web pages and some continue to run when Chrome isn't being used. Even when you close Chrome, they can continue to use memory and processing power.

How useful they are depends on what other apps and add-ons you have installed. You can choose whether they run by going to the menu and selecting Settings. Click the 'Show advanced settings' link and, in the System section, clear the tick next

If you see words that `look like they've been typed in a typewriter`, follow the instructions and type them exactly as they appear, paying close attention to spaces and punctuation.

Some apps run even if Chrome is closed. You can stop this in Settings

to 'Continue running background apps when Google Chrome is closed'.

Click to run

Many browser speed-up tips involve removing or disabling non-essential functions. One way to do this is to make your plug-ins click-to-play. This means that Flash videos and adverts, PDFs and other items that use plug-ins won't automatically appear in your browser but will be replaced by a grey box. You won't miss out on anything important because you can click or right-click the box to run the plug-in as normal. You only see what you want, which speeds up page loading.

In Chrome, go to the menu and choose Settings. Click 'Show advanced settings' and, in the Privacy section, click 'Content settings'. Scroll down to Plug-ins and select 'Let me choose when to run plug-in content'.

If a web page uses plug-ins, such as Flash video, a plug-in icon with a red cross appears at the right of the address box. Click it and you can choose to always allow plug-ins on that website. If you want to continue blocking plug-ins across the site but want to see the content on the page you're on, select 'Run all plug-ins this time.' Leave the page or simply refresh it and the setting is forgotten.

If you use Firefox, go to the menu, choose Add-ons and select Plugins on the left. Set them all to 'Ask to Activate' so that you can click if you want to see them.

Don't let plug-ins run automatically; select 'Ask to Activate' in Firefox

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave

Use Firefox's new cache

Browsers store frequently accessed pages in a cache, and Firefox has an alternative to its regular one that might work faster for you. Type `about:config` into the address box and type `browser.cache` into the search box. Double-click 'browser.cache.use_new_backend' and change the value from 0 to 1. Restart Firefox afterwards.

Keep an eye on the size of your browser's cache by going to the menu, choosing Options, then Advanced, then the Network tab. There is an 'Override automatic cache management' option, which you can set to a lower limit if too much hard-drive space is being used.

Advanced Chrome settings

Chrome flags are advanced browser settings that are accessed by typing `chrome://flags` into the address box. Find the entry 'Maximum tiles for interest area' and you'll see a menu with the options Default, 64, 128, 256 and 512. If your computer has plenty of memory, setting this to 512 may speed up Chrome.

Find 'Number of raster threads', which is a setting used for drawing images in web pages. Changing this from the Default setting to the maximum in the menu might make images display faster in web pages. This is best if you have a processor with four cores.

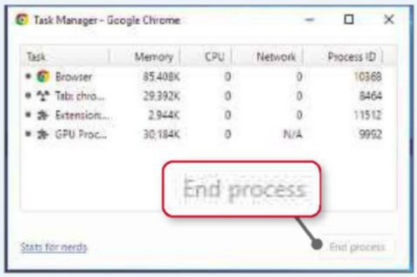
Disable offline Google Drive

Some Chrome apps have their own background processes you can switch off. For example, there is a background page for Google Drive, which supports the offline use of the word processor, spreadsheet and presentations tools, but do you ever use them offline? If you don't, you can reduce the browser's processor and memory usage by disabling this tool.

Go to drive.google.com, click the Settings button and clear the tick next to Offline. The background page closes and you can regain over 150MB of memory. This doesn't affect your online use of Google's tools but you won't be able to use them without an internet connection.

Use Chrome's Task Manager

Like Windows, Chrome has a Task Manager that shows you what's running. Go to the menu and choose 'More tools', then 'Task manager'. It shows the CPU and memory usage of tabs, add-ons, background pages and more. Look for anything that is using a lot of CPU or memory and close the tab or disable the add-on. This reduces Chrome's workload and make it more responsive.



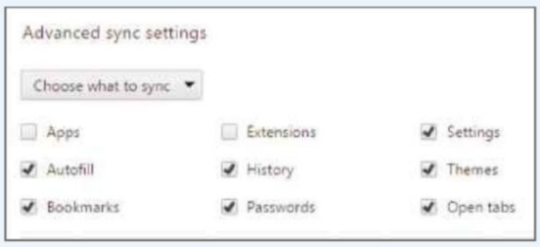
Chrome has its own task manager to monitor and shut down tabs and apps

Limit syncing

Chrome syncs with the copies of Chrome you use on other computers. If you have one at work and one at home, for example, it would result in add-ons used for work being installed at home, and ones used at home being installed at work. Stopping syncing for your add-ons reduces memory use and speeds up the browser.

Go to the menu, click Settings and click 'Advanced sync settings' under 'Sign in'. Select 'Choose what to sync' from the drop-down menu and clear the ticks against Apps, Extensions and anything else you don't want to sync.

Chrome Beta installs and runs separately from ordinary Chrome, so you could install both versions – one with lots of extensions, synced settings and so on, and one with no extensions or syncing. The plain browser will use less memory and have fewer extras slowing it down. Get it from bit.ly/beta378.



Beware of syncing apps and extensions that you don't need on every computer

Ask the Expert

Roland Waddilove, computer programmer and PC journalist since 1981, answers all your technical questions. Email us for help at webuser@dennis.co.uk

GENERAL PC

Can I upgrade to Windows 10?

Q I have a Packard Bell Dot S netbook with 2GB of memory, an Intel Atom N4550 processor, the Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 3150, a 1,024 x 600 pixels screen and a 160GB hard drive. It runs Windows 7 Starter. Can you tell me if I will be able to upgrade it to Windows 10?

Rod Bellis, via email

Some Packard Bell netbooks should be capable of running Windows 10, but it might not run particularly well

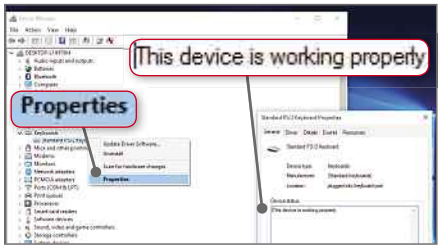
A You should, in theory, be able to install Windows 10 but it's not a great idea, for several reasons. We recommend 4GB rather than 2GB of memory – it will install with less, but perform poorly. The Intel Atom N4550 is a low-powered processor, which would also cause Windows 10 to run slowly. Microsoft says 800 x 600 pixels is the minimum resolution but it'll be a bit pokey on a screen that small. So our advice would be to stick with Windows 7 if you are happy with the netbook or, if you really want Windows 10, sell the netbook on eBay and put the money towards a new Windows 10 computer.

HARDWARE

Some keys aren't working

Q I have a four-year-old Toshiba C660 laptop, which I use mainly for web surfing. About a fortnight ago, I had a minor computer breakdown and after I eventually managed to get the computer working normally again, I found that several keys on the keyboard had stopped working. I can no longer use the 0 on the numeric keypad, the question mark/slash key and the Z key. The keyboard is clean, with no rubbish or dirt in the keys. What's happened?

Jon Smith, via email



If your keyboard keys aren't working, check its properties for problems

A It sounds like a keyboard hardware problem but, just to make sure, try these fixes first. Switch off the laptop and remove the power cable and battery. Hold down the power button for around 10 seconds, then reinsert the battery and power cable, and start the computer. This type of reset for laptops can fix all sorts of problems.

If the keys still don't work, go to the Control Panel and open Device Manager. Expand the Keyboards section, right-click the keyboard entry and select Properties. On the General tab, it should say that the device is working properly. On the Driver tab is a button to update the driver. Try it.

The most likely cause of keyboard problems is a faulty keyboard and there are two solutions. A very simple one is to plug in a USB keyboard. A Google search for 'USB keyboard' turned up suppliers selling them for under a fiver. This is perfect for a desktop computer, but it is inconvenient to use a separate keyboard with a laptop, so you might want to consider replacing it. You can buy a Toshiba C660 keyboard from Amazon (bit.ly/tosh378) for around £11 (including delivery) and there is a YouTube video at bit.ly/repair378 that shows you how to replace the old one.

BROWSERS

Remove unwanted Firefox add-on

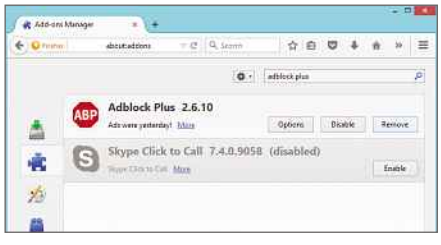
Q I installed Adblock Plus (adblockplus.org) in my Firefox browser but I really don't like it. How do I uninstall it? It doesn't seem to show up anywhere. I now have an annoying page open in addition to my homepage when I log into Firefox.

Gwyn Williams, via email

A Adblock Plus adds an icon to the toolbar in the top-right corner of the Firefox window, but it is possible to hide it. It doesn't show up in 'Programs and Features' in the Control Panel, so you have to uninstall it from within Firefox.

All Firefox add-ons can be removed in the same way. Click the menu button and select Add-ons. Select Extensions on the left to see what is installed. Next to each one are Disable and Remove buttons. Click Remove to get rid of any you do not want.

It's possible that another an add-on or extension is opening the extra page on startup, but it may be that it has been set to automatically open in Firefox's options. Click the menu button, select Options and select General on the left. The menu next to 'When Firefox starts' should say 'Show my home page'. The Home Page box should have the address of the page you want to see first, such as www.google.co.uk.



Remove unwanted add-ons in Firefox by going to Add-ons, Extensions

GENERAL PC

Text is too small

Q I have an HP Pavilion with a 17in screen running Windows 8.1. The text and web pages have recently got much smaller. How can I restore these to a sensible size that is readable? I tried System Restore, but it didn't work.

Michael Tomlin, via email

A Is it only text within web pages that is small or the text everywhere? Web browsers have a zoom feature that make the content of web pages larger or smaller and this could be on the wrong setting. In Chrome and Firefox, click the menu button and use the plus and minus keys to get the zoom percentage back to 100 per cent (or higher, if you like). In Internet Explorer, click the gear icon and select Zoom from the menu.

If text everywhere – not just on web pages – is small, then the problem could be with your screen resolution. Try right-clicking the Desktop, click 'Screen resolution' and select a lower resolution from the drop-down list. If the screen is 1,920 x 1,080 pixels, for example, try 1,600 x 900 to make everything larger.

There is a way of keeping the high-resolution display but increasing the size of text without changing other elements, such as images. Right-click the Desktop, select 'Screen resolution', then click the link to 'Make text and other items larger or smaller'. There is a slider with Smaller at one end and Larger at the other. Drag it to the right to make text larger.

Adjust the size of text using the slider in this tool in the Control Panel

GENERAL PC

Cleaning up an old computer

Q I've had my laptop for five years. Although I've tried to maintain it using software and tools recommended by *Web User*, such as CCleaner (www.piriform.com/ccleaner), it seems to be running a lot slower than it did initially. A PUP (potentially unwanted program) appeared recently, which my McAfee Plus software wasn't able to remove, but thankfully Emsisoft Emergency Kit (bit.ly/emsis378) did the job.

I'm tempted to reset the laptop to its factory settings in the hope of going back to basics but, having done this several years ago with a previous PC, I know it isn't as easy as it sounds. It took me days to update its programs, only to realise that I had lost information I thought I'd backed-up.

Is there a program that will get my laptop back to basics, but retain the essential updates? Or a way to install Windows 10 so I can start afresh?

M Woolley, via email

A If you're looking for a tool to do the job for you, SlimWare Utilities (www.slimwareutilities.com) has two: SlimCleaner and SlimComputer. Clean-up tools work for most people but, occasionally, they can cause problems. It's best to first make a full backup of your PC to an external hard drive, so if something goes wrong you can restore it and put everything back the way it was. You should read the comments in SlimWare's forums before using its tools.

If you have a few hours to spare, you can clean up the computer yourself, but you'll need a bit of technical knowledge. Use a program such as Wise Program Uninstaller (www.wisecleaner.com) to remove as much software as you can bear to live without. Run Disk Cleanup (from the Start menu, select All Programs, Accessories, System Tools). After scanning the drive, click 'Clean up system files'. This finds and lists junk files, allowing you to select and delete them. Then use IObit Smart Defrag (bit.ly/defrag378) or Wise Disk Cleaner to optimise the hard drive.

If you use Chrome, go to the menu, hover over 'More tools', click Extensions and remove any extensions you can live without. In Firefox, go to the menu, click Add-ons and clean up unused extensions in the same way.

You can wipe your PC and install Windows 10 from a clean start – see our Weekend Project on page 58 for guidance.

SlimCleaner is a powerful tool for cleaning and optimising the PC

GENERAL PC

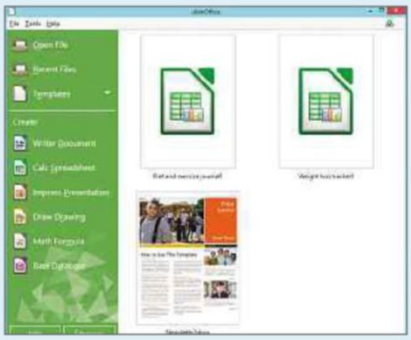
Office software compatibility

Q I dislike Microsoft Office and normally use Lotus 1-2-3 and Word Pro to create documents. I'm currently using Vista on a laptop and Windows 7 on a desktop PC without any problems. If I upgrade the desktop PC to Windows 10, will Lotus still work?

John Chambers, via email

A The Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet software and Word Pro word processor work on the 32-bit version of Windows 7, but are not recommended for the 64-bit version. We've not tried it, but we'd expect this to be true of Windows 10, too, so make sure you don't switch to the 64-bit version on when you upgrade. A PC running Windows Vista is likely to have limited processing power, memory and storage compared to today's computers, so it may not be suitable for Windows 10.

Both Lotus 1-2-3 and Word Pro are no longer produced or supported, so sooner or later you will need to switch to a more modern office suite. For free alternatives, take a look at LibreOffice (www.libreoffice.org) and Kingsoft Office Suite (kingsoftstore.com). Also, try the online office suites from Google (docs.google.com) and Microsoft (onedrive.live.com), which offer word processing, spreadsheets and presentations in your browser.



LibreOffice is a popular alternative to Office that works in Windows 10

This fortnight Roland spent six hours upgrading to Windows 10, but he now knows all the tricks to get it working.

Your Top Tips

Our pick of the best advice from our readers. To get help or offer it to others, visit forum.webuser.co.uk

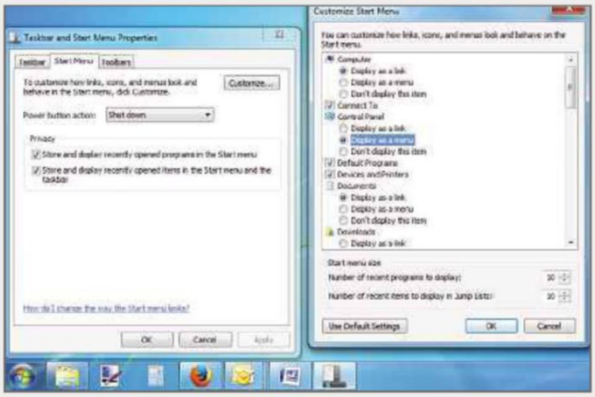
TOP TIP

£25 winner

GENERAL PC

Make a Control Panel menu

I won't be sticking with Windows 7 for much longer, but for those that are, here is a useful tweak. If you need to access something in the Control Panel, you can reduce the number of steps required by turning the Control Panel into a Start menu item. Right-click the Start button and select Properties. Click the Customize button and then under Control Panel, select 'Display as a menu'. Click OK on both windows to close them.



The Start menu properties can be used to turn the Control Panel link into a full menu

Now you have a menu of all the Control Panel tools available from the Start menu. To take things a step further, you can easily create Desktop shortcuts, too. Suppose you frequently access 'Programs and Features'. You can create a direct shortcut to it on the Desktop. Go to Start, mouse-over Control Panel to show the menu, then click-and-drag any item (such as 'Programs and Features') off the menu and drop it on the Desktop. Now you can open it with a double-click.

B Kennedy, via email

IOS

Let your friends use your iPad securely

If you want to let someone use your iPad or iPhone without giving them access to your apps, photos and other personal information, there is a handy feature built into the operating system called Guided Access. This useful tool locks your device within a single app and also lets you control which features are accessible within that app.

Guided Access lets you lock your iPhone or iPad within a single app

To set up Guided Access, open the General Settings menu, tap Accessibility and Guided Access and use the slider to switch it on. Now open the app you want to lock your device to, and triple-click the Home button. A few options will appear, letting you choose which hardware buttons are available, set a time limit and circle any areas on screen you'd like to lock. You can even disable touch control altogether, which is useful if you want to leave someone watching a movie you've already started playing, for example. Once you're happy with the settings you've picked, tap the Start button and you'll be asked to set a passcode. To exit the feature, triple-click the Home button and enter your passcode and your device will be fully usable again.

Ed Wright, via email

EMAIL

Block junk emails

One of my biggest computing frustrations is the volume of junk email that constantly seems to be threatening to clog up my inbox. When I sign up for a service, even after I've clicked to unsubscribe in the promotional emails I receive, the companies often persist in contacting me about special offers and the like. For this reason, I downloaded MailWasher (mailwasher.net), a free spam blocker that works with Gmail, Outlook .com, and several other email programs.

The software has automatic spam filters, but you can also manually blacklist any email addresses that frequently evade detection. Unfortunately, the free version of the program only lets you protect one email account, but it has a clean, easy-to-use interface and there are mobile apps for Android and iOS, which is very handy.

Felix Yates, via email

HARDWARE

Another side of the router/ holiday debate

In Issue 375 The Badger asked if it's safe to switch off his router when he goes on holiday, and I thought the answer he was given, saying that it could cause problems, was totally erroneous. Why would you leave any appliance switched on for two weeks when it's serving no purpose and is a possible fire risk?

I have used a router ever since they were first available about 15 years ago and I switch mine off every night before turning it back on in the morning. Needless to say, it's off when I'm on holiday. I also advocate the same routine to all my friends and relatives and so far I've not heard of any of them having router problems. Obviously, if it's being used for the likes of Sky downloads or home security, it must stay on, but otherwise turn it off!

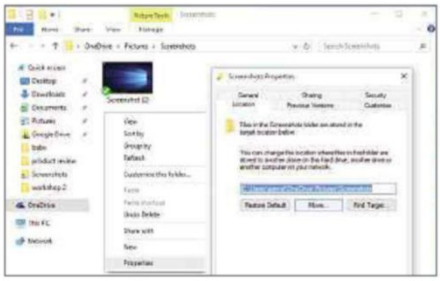
Peter Northrop, via email

GENERAL PC

Save shortcut screenshots anywhere

Windows 8 has a screenshot facility, which is handy when you want to save what is on the screen as an image on your hard drive. For example, I save my weekly lottery ticket purchase as a screenshot. To do this, hold down the Windows key and press Prnt Scrn. The images are saved in a Screenshots folder within your Pictures folder. To save the pictures elsewhere, open the Screenshots folder, right-click in an empty space in the window and click Properties. Select the Location tab and the current location will be displayed. Click the Move button and choose a more suitable location to store your screenshots.

Paul Johnson, via email



The Screenshots folder can be moved to a different location on the hard drive

SOFTWARE

Convert printed text to editable documents

I'm in the midst of scanning a lot of typewritten short stories to PDF to save space and I'd like to convert them into an editable format too, if possible.

I researched a lot of free 'PDF to Word' sites, with mixed results, but the best service I found is the optical character recognition tool Online OCR (www.onlineocr.net). It lets you convert 15 pages per hour into editable text free of charge, recognises 46 languages and you can convert from PDF, TIF, JPEG and BMP into any Microsoft Word or Excel format, as well as RTF and plain text.

There's a 100MB file size limit per conversion, so I've found it's best to scan and store everything as single page documents, since it's easy enough to copy and paste all the separate Word pages into a single document at the end. Depending on the condition of your typewritten sheets, you might need to edit some typos and add extra spaces, but it's still a lot less work than retyping.

OnlineOCR lets you turn scanned PDFs into editable text files

Registering for a free account gives you access to a few extra tools, such as automatic image rotation. If you're scanning larger documents, you might decide it's worth buying some extra pages so you're not restricted to just 15 pages per hour. Prices start at 50 pages for $4.95 (around £3.30), 100 pages for $6.95 (around £4.64) and run in increments up to 10,000 pages, which costs $199.95 (around £134).

Alasdair Watt, via email

***Web User* says:** If you use Chrome you can also use an add-on called Project Naptha – we show you how to use it in our Workshop on page 56.

GENERAL PC

Make selected windows more prominent

Sometimes it's quicker to use the keyboard than the mouse. For example, when you're filling in a form online, using the Tab key to toggle between text entry boxes means you don't have to take your hands off the keyboard.

The downside to using the Tab key in this way is that sometimes it can be difficult to see which box or button is currently active. However, there's a Control Panel setting that can make this easier. Open 'Ease of Access Center', and click 'Make the computer easier to use'. Near the bottom you'll see the option to 'Make the focus rectangle thicker'. Click this and you'll find it much easier to see which windows you're working in at any time.

James Crowley, via email

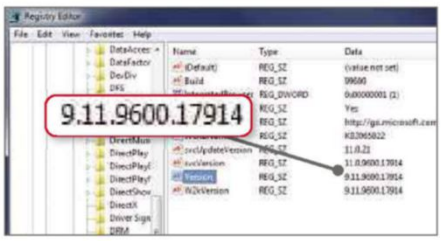
Change the thickness of Windows' focus rectangle from the Control Panel

SOFTWARE

Make Microsoft Money run in Windows 10

Microsoft Money doesn't work in Windows 10, because it needs to have Internet Explorer 6 installed, which means it won't run in compatibility mode, either. There is, however, a simple fix if you're happy to make a couple of tweaks to the Registry. To do this, type `regedit` into the Start menu and click the program to run it. Next, go to:

`HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Wow6432Node\Microsoft\Internet Explorer`



Change IE's 'Value data' in the Registry to make Money work in Windows 10

On the right-hand screen, double-click Version. The Value data shown will be 9.11.10240.16384 (the last five numbers may vary). If you change the 'Value data' to `9.11.10240.0` and click OK that will do the trick and you'll be able to use Microsoft Money in Windows 10.

Jack, via email

GENERAL PC

Fix Windows problems

After upgrading to Windows 8.1 recently, I encountered several serious problems with my laptop. The audio refused to work, the screen kept reorienting when I put it on my lap and it threw up an error messages and shut itself down whenever I tried to open software. Luckily, the screen was a quick fix by right-clicking the Desktop, selecting Screen Resolution and un-ticking 'Allow the screen to auto-rotate'. From there, you can also click on the current rotation and change it back to your preferred setting. The audio and the shutting down issues weren't too difficult to fix, either: by opening 'Windows Update' from the Control Panel and choosing to install all available updates, all the problems were resolved when my PC restarted. If you have any kind of problems with your PC, it's worth checking Windows Update, even if you think you've only just finished installing the latest round of updates.

Felix Yates, via email

GENERAL PC

Uninstall Windows apps

In preparing my PC ahead of upgrading to Windows 10, I have been uninstalling software I no longer use. Windows 8 apps on the Start screen can be removed by right-clicking them and selecting Uninstall, but this led me to wonder how effective the uninstallers are and whether they leave files and Registry settings behind. Some uninstallers do not show Start screen apps installed from the Windows Store, but IObit Uninstaller (bit.ly/uninst378) does. Using this to uninstall apps showed that the regular uninstallers leave a lot behind, sometimes hundreds of files and Registry settings, while IObit Uninstaller removes them all.

Terry Candlish, via email

Readers' Helpdesk

Our pick of the best solutions posted on our reader forums. Visit forum.webuser.co.uk – it's friendly and free!

GENERAL PC

How do I bypass the Windows login screen?

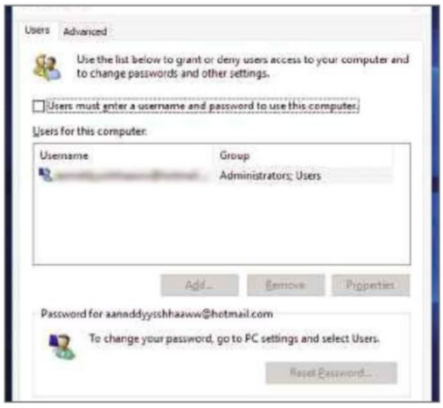
Q I'd like to set Windows to bypass the login screen when I start my laptop. I've done it before with the help of an article in *Web User*, but I can't remember how. Can anyone tell me, please?

slickstar, Web User Forums

A You can automatically log into Windows 8 or Windows 10 by opening Run (press Windows+R). Type `netplwiz` into the text box and click OK or press the Enter key. In the box that appears, untick 'Users must enter a username and password' and click OK. After entering your password and clicking OK to confirm, you can restart your PC. You will no longer be prompted to enter your password to log in.

Remember, however, that although this speeds up the booting process, it could allow someone else to access your files more easily.

Moonshine, Web User Forums



You can skip the login screen in Windows 8 and 10

MOBILE BROADBAND

How do I improve my mobile internet dongle's connection?

Q I have a Pay As You Go mobile internet dongle from Three, but I keep losing my connection. Can anybody help?

theoldsoldier, Web User Forums

A USB dongles are prone to slowing down and dropping their connections. In my experience, I find they can be disrupted even by passing traffic outside my house, and finding a good signal is not always easy due to the limited length of the USB cables provided.

The best solution I've thought of is to plug the dongle into a portable 3G wireless router and place that where the 3G signal is strongest in your home – usually high up on top of a bookshelf. The router will then be able to provide Wi-Fi to all your devices around the house and, if it has an Ethernet connection, you could even use a HomePlug to extend it further.

I use a TP-Link Portable Battery Powered 3G/4G Wireless N Router (TL-MR3040), which is available for £39.99 from Maplin (bit.ly/wireless378). Because it's battery-powered, you can easily move it to find the best signal, but you'll need to recharge it after every four hours of use.

NikoBold, Web User Forums

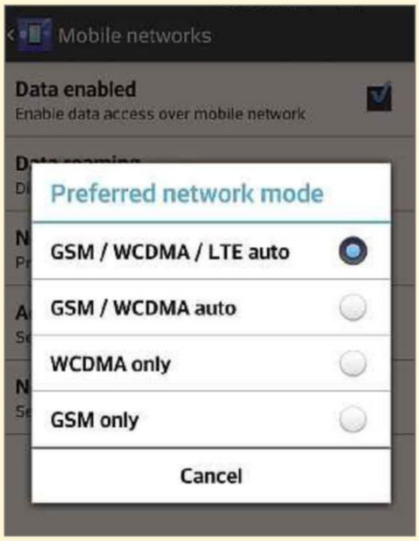
A portable wireless router lets you move your dongle to where the signal is strongest

ANDROID

Which network mode should I use on my phone?

Q On my Samsung Galaxy phone, I usually connect to the internet via Wi-Fi, but sometimes I use mobile data. In the mobile network settings menu, when I open 'Network mode', there are three options: 'WCDMA/GSM auto', 'WCDMA only' and 'GSM only'. I'm currently using the first option but wondered if there is a lot of difference between the modes and which is the best for me to use?

awam7, Web User Forums



Changing the type of network your device joins could save battery power

A With a Samsung Galaxy, you're right to choose 'WCDMA/GSM auto', because it gives you the best of both worlds (by providing access to both 3G and 2G). The phone will automatically pick the best network available at any time. If, however, you know that your service provider only uses 3G and faster networks (as is the case with Three) then you might as well select 'WCDMA only'.

My understanding is that 'WCDMA/GSM auto' uses a bit more battery power because it is looking for both 2G and 3G networks, so by changing this setting your phone battery might last a little longer.

Remember, though, that if you decide to do this, you should switch back to 'WCDMA/GSM auto' before you go on holiday abroad, or you might be unable to pick up a 2G signal if you're somewhere out in the sticks!

jak, Web User Forums

Inbox

Star Email

£25 winner

Reflecting on the web of 10 years ago

The other week I came across an old installation CD to set up broadband on our computer (now sadly no longer with us). I worked out it was probably 10 years ago that we'd decided to go down the broadband route. So I decided to remember (good or bad) what was around in those days.

Around that time, free AOL installation discs were starting to be phased out. Sadly, this also meant the end of the AOL TV ads starring Connie, who I had a bit of a crush on. Google was around then but also available were the options to ask an English butler (Ask Jeeves) or a dog (Lycos) to search for things for you.

Many of us dreaded a member of our household saying: "I've downloaded IncrediMail because it makes my emails look nice!". We then

spent hours uninstalling that lovely email program. It was a nightmare.

Social networking was mainly MySpace, I do hope Tom from MySpace is doing okay now. There was also Friends Reunited, which was mainly aimed at finding old school friends. The downside was that there was a fee to pay to be able to reply to messages sent to you. Of course, you could get around this by editing your profile message to show your email address in your profile. ITV then spent £120 million buying Friends Reunited just as Facebook was about to take off. Wisely Friends Reunited dropped payment fees, but by then it was too late.

I could go on reminiscing, perhaps comparing eBay back then to the way it is now. I do remember letters to *Web User* constantly complaining that the magazine had too much eBay content. These days, I can't remember the last time *Web User* ran a feature about eBay.

How things have changed!

Andrew Williams, via email

Windows 10 has much to recommend it

I thought I would forward my comments about the installation of Windows 10 that I recently undertook.

After two days I got fed up of waiting for my turn to start the upgrade to Windows 10 Home, having already registered my intention to upgrade from Windows 8.1. I located the download on the Microsoft site and used the download-to-USB installation method.

The installation was uneventful and took a couple of hours. As I upgraded and did not carry out a clean install I was really impressed that every single feature that was present in 8.1 was working faultlessly in the new system, except for one thing and that was the inability of Outlook 2010 to send emails. The test email from the setup panel worked fine, but the sending of a normal email failed with an inability to find a network. After some research on the internet, the `sfc/scannow` procedure solved the problem and Outlook is now functioning okay.

Overall, the boot time in Windows 10 is marginally slower, but that has never worried me. The lack of control over updates is not to my liking but I can see the benefits for Microsoft and in fairness it is no different to what other operating systems do.

The feel and colours of 10 are superb and Edge is excellent and faster that Internet Explorer, although IE11 is still there to use if I want. The larger sizing and shading of the window panels is excellent and far better than previously.

I have installed Windows 10 on two PCs to date without any hitches, except for the Outlook issue. For a free upgrade, which I was quite happy to pay for, Microsoft has to be congratulated.

For those Windows XP and 7 whingers, get a better life and upgrade. Windows has never been better.

Paul Hildreth, via email

My problems with upgrading to Windows 10

I thought I would relate my first experiences with Windows 10. About six attempted installs failed, which was not a good omen, I then used Microsoft's tool for downloading, which performed well, on the third attempt, and after around seven hours Window 10 installed.

The first problem was when it informed me that my printer driver was not

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present and to reinstall it. I did as requested and then Windows asked for a "restart". I obliged and that's when everything went pear-shaped, because the restart stayed in a permanent loop. I was completely flummoxed and nothing I did could break the loop. Switching off and disconnecting my laptop's battery made no difference. I swapped the hard drive for an XP-loaded drive and booted up, then replaced the original hard drive back and finally got it working.

When I checked my usual programs, they were all fine except Money 2006, which wanted me to install IE6 – not likely! – so I searched the web and found a solution. I ran CCleaner to check for leftovers in the Registry, but it was fairly clean. However, when I ran RegSupreme to check, I found over 3,600 useless entries, which I removed. After all that, I find that Windows 10 has similarities to Window 7. I'm happy with that.

Jack (an old grey), via email

Web User was right about Windows 10

If ever there was a case for purchasing *Web User,* it was the contents of page 42 in Issue 376: 'How to downgrade from Windows 10 to Windows 7'.

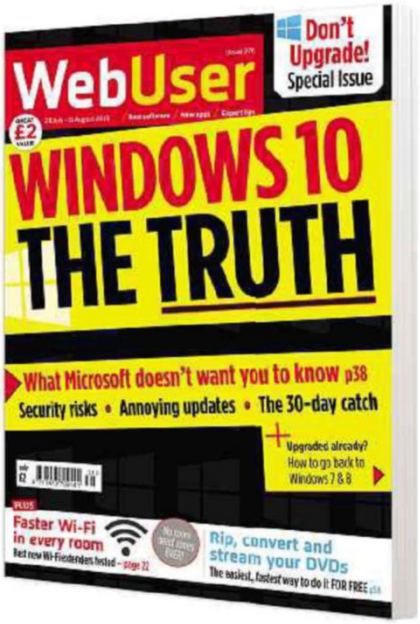
Yesterday (30 July), Microsoft flashed up that I could download Windows 10. Unwisely, as I was soon to find, I decided to accept the invitation. After a seemingly interminable period everything downloaded successfully.

Then I began to have my doubts that I'd done the right thing. I accepted there would be changes to the screen. However, there was a noticeable slowdown in performance from my version of Windows 7. Then I wanted to print a document – but where was the printer? Presumably lost in the ether.

My IT-minded neighbour was away so without wishing to make things worse I decided to wander into town. I needed a paper, so popped into WHSmith where I saw copies of your magazine – and the cover headline. Oh Lord, I thought. With trembling hands and a sinking heart I read the truth! The rest you can imagine.

Top marks for completing the loop by advising how to downgrade from Windows 10 to 7, which will remain on this particular laptop. Oh yes, I have 8.1 on another machine and that's going to stay 8.1 until Microsoft irons out bugs such as speed and loss of printers.

Richard Gallimore, via email



In support of Windows 8 (yes, 8!)

I can't understand all the bad press received by Windows 8. I have used all versions of Windows since Windows 95 and I think Windows 8 is one of the best so far. People keep praising Windows 7 and saying it was the best, but I had it on my desktop PC, on my laptop and on my wife's laptop and it crashed more times than Jeremy Clarkson.

I have now upgraded to Windows 10 on my new laptop for a week or so and so far I am not impressed. It's just

a mixture of Windows 7, a bit of Windows 8 and God knows what else. Stick to Windows 8, that's my advice.

James Sprott, via email

A good ISP these days is hard to find

A couple of recent articles in *Web User* hit close to home: the FAQ about switching your ISP in Issue 375 and Barry Collins' entertaining rant about shoddy customer 'service' in Issue 376. Unfortunately, switching one's ISP isn't always as easy or satisfying as it sounds.

We were so angered by Virgin Media's customer service in 2009 that we changed to Sky, but we changed back within a fortnight because Sky was even worse! Broadband speed – which wasn't checked prior to installation – was so poor that I couldn't even update my anti-virus. This was apparently the fault of BT (according to Sky) or Sky (according to BT). When BT wanted another 20-odd pounds from me, I referred them to Sky.

With Virgin Media, although I have occasionally spoken to a competent helpline staffer whose English I could understand, the standard service is by a long way useless even if one manages to speak to a human after negotiating a prolonged set of robotic telephonic menus. Attempting to report a fault via the website is even worse because, after negotiating a ludicrously labyrinthine path to the correct page, one is directed back to the contract page!

Recently, we lost broadband service seven times in less than four weeks – two of those within 12 hours of each other. They sent an extremely patronising letter to which I responded. Thus far, I have yet to receive even the courtesy of an acknowledgement, let alone a response or apology – unless one considers

notification that the price is increasing for the second time in seven months a response!

John Lockett, via email

EE service is an uphill struggle

Do I agree with Barry's column in Issue 376, 'The huge rewards of shoddy service'? You bet I do. EE provides the 'service' for my mobile phone (if you can call it that). I get no signal at all at my home address and yet if I go to EE's website and put in my postcode, it tells me that I should get three bars. The explanation is simple. I live at the bottom of a hill – those at the top of the hill with the same postcode get a signal. So EE chooses to use them as the standard. That's like saying because some people live to 100 we will all do so.

I complained to EE, and was told that I was wrong. Eventually I managed to get them to agree to send someone round to check. I'm still waiting, months later. I haven't contacted Ofcom so far, but will do so now.

John Gough, via email

There's no excuse for costly phone charges

Well done to the EU for scrapping roaming charges (Need to Know, Issue 375), but it's a little too late. In this throwaway society, we have many things that break and we just get rid of, including circuit boards that are needed to run the switching centres of mobile phones. What goes wrong is pulled out and replaced in seconds, so there is no real need for major maintenance and man power, so why do we have high prices on mobiles, landlines and other services? If the government can cut off a person's benefits with a flick of a switch, why can't private companies work faster and cheaper, or give us a better service for the vast amount of money they charge?

Terry Bradley, Milton Keynes

What you say...

WHAT MARK OUT OF 10 WOULD YOU GIVE WINDOWS 10 SO FAR?

Nine. Not found any glitches or bugs so far. Much quicker than 8.1 and no stupid tiles.

Si Mellor

Nine. For context, I'd give OS X a five.

Peter Silva-Jankowski

I'd give it an eight. It made my Windows 7 laptop run faster. I like the style and layout. Just had a few problems with Xbox on it. And can't get Cortana to work.

Sam Higgins

Nine. Love it. But the Edge browser isn't ready yet.

Jason 'Boz' Bowyer

Seven, because while I like it, it still will need further work.

Jason Smith

Five. Will be good but released too early. Too many silly bugs and installation failures.

Steve Ellis @gb022621

Zero. Tried four times to install. I keep getting a 'Memory Management' error.

jamie @aguyintheuk

Seven for me. I've had three successful installs, but they all needed attention. Once running, it's a great OS.

Rich @rich835

ON WHAT DEVICE DO YOU DO MOST OF YOUR WEB BROWSING?

Laptop or desktop PC. If I'm out and about, then I use the phone as a phone, and only as and when I need to. I can manage to tear myself away from the internet for hours at a time.

Martin Puk

Smartphone out of office hours 90 per cent of the time, but PC in the day (during work breaks)

Chris Armstrong

iPhone, PC then iPad, in that order.

Ian @Hemeloid

Laptop and PC. I don't like iPads or phones – I prefer something more substantial.

Lynn Sharpe

HAVE YOU BEEN PUT OFF USING CARPHONE WAREHOUSE FOLLOWING THE HUGE HACK?

No, I was put off using them long before by their poor service and broken promises.

John McGarvey @johnmcg

As a TalkTalk broadband customer I was tempted to join its £12 SIM-only deal, but seeing that Carphone Warehouse run their mobile operation, forget about it.

Martin Phillp

Yes I have. I always try not to store any credit-card information online with any company.

Ian Phipps

WILL YOU USE FIREFOX 40 (bit.ly/firefox378), WHICH HAS BEEN BUILT FOR WINDOWS 10?

Updated it this morning. I've used Firefox for years and it's always been the best for me.

John Wells

Yes, I just won't make it the default browser just yet. Currently that's Edge, but I'm not on Windows 10 full time (my desktop PC is still Windows 7).

Jack Schofield @jackschofield

Absolutely, I wouldn't use anything else. As with most things, when you get used to an app or product, it's very hard to go elsewhere (Chrome or Edge, etc).

Neo @WAFLNeo

Page 404

Barry Collins warns that you always end up paying, even for "free" OS upgrades

The hidden cost of Windows 10

It wasn't so long ago that Apple and Microsoft routinely got away with charging for upgrades to their operating systems. Now, the very idea of paying to update Windows or Mac OS X seems as ludicrous as making Wayne Rooney the poet laureate.

We're all suckers for a freebie. As soon as an alert pops up informing us that there's a new version of an OS for our phones, tablets or computers, we eagerly tap the 'Update' button... and then spend the next eight hours regretting it while swearing at slow-moving progress bars.

Every OS update makes our devices incrementally slower. My HTC One smartphone ran like a spritely young gazelle when I first brought it home from the shop 18 months ago. Now, after two major upgrades to Android and Lord knows how many different app updates, it runs like a gazelle after an encounter with a Minnesota dentist. I've honestly missed calls altogether because my phone is now so unresponsive it sometimes takes a couple of seconds to even register a tap on the Answer button. And this was one of the most powerful smartphones (a considerable sum of) money could buy when I first got it.

> "What happens when Windows 10 starts to surpass the capabilities of your hardware?"

It's the same with my iPad 2. A once perfectly alert piece of hardware has been reduced to a cumbersome crawl by successive updates to iOS, each of which has taken a little bit more out of the tablet's performance. It will allegedly work with iOS 9 which is due out in a couple of months, but I'm loathe to update it, in case this is the straw that snaps the camel's spine.

Now, Microsoft is trying to tempt PC users with the "free" upgrade to Windows 10 – the first time it's ever made a whole new version of Windows a free upgrade, and most probably the last, considering that Microsoft now plans to issue rolling updates to Windows 10 instead of releasing major new versions every few years. Anyone with a PC running Windows 7 or 8 now qualifies for the free upgrade, and because the system requirements for Windows 10 are almost exactly the same as they were all those years ago for Windows 7, your existing hardware should be able to cope. For now.

The question is: what happens when Windows 10 (like iOS and Android) starts to surpass the capabilities of your hardware? Those rolling upgrades to the Home versions of Windows 10 are compulsory – unlike Android, iOS or even previous versions of Windows, you can't choose to sit them out. As the licence agreement for Windows 10 states: "The software periodically checks for system and app updates, and downloads and installs them for you... By accepting this agreement, you agree to receive these types of automatic updates without any additional notice."

As Microsoft adds more and better features to Windows 10, the demands on your hardware will increase. You will inevitably reach a point where your hardware can't cope with Windows 10 and you'll be forced to upgrade it, whereas if you'd stuck with Windows 7, you could have conceivably carried on going until the computer conked out.

I'm not saying you shouldn't upgrade to Windows 10 or that Microsoft will turn the screw anytime soon. But it will. It must do. Only then will the true cost of that "free upgrade" become clear.

• See this issue's cover feature on page 38 for more about the great Windows 10 'swindle'.

Illustration: Andrew Torrens

Do you agree? Let us know at webuser@dennis.co.uk

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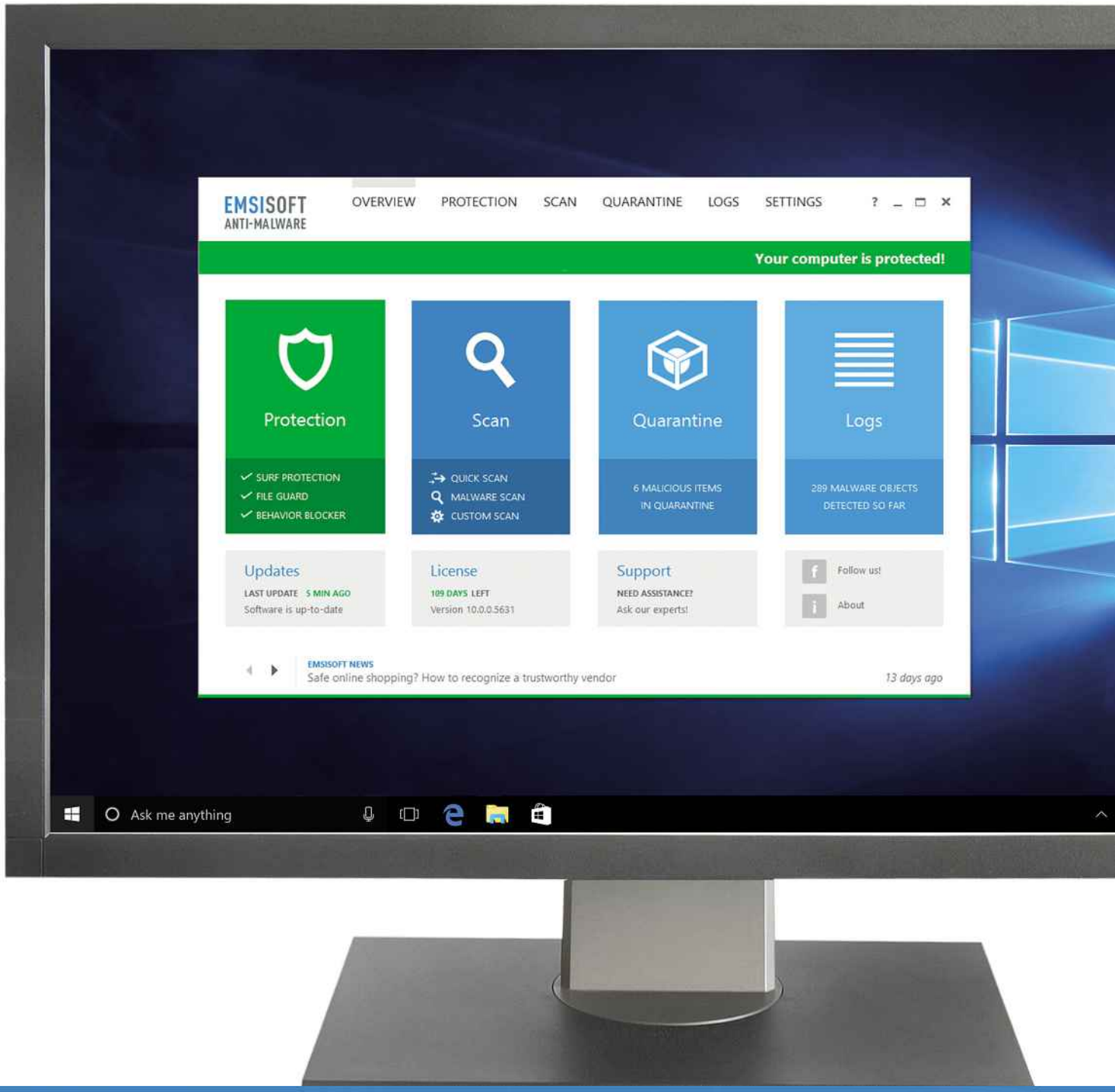
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