Issue 418

WebUser

8 - 21 March 2017

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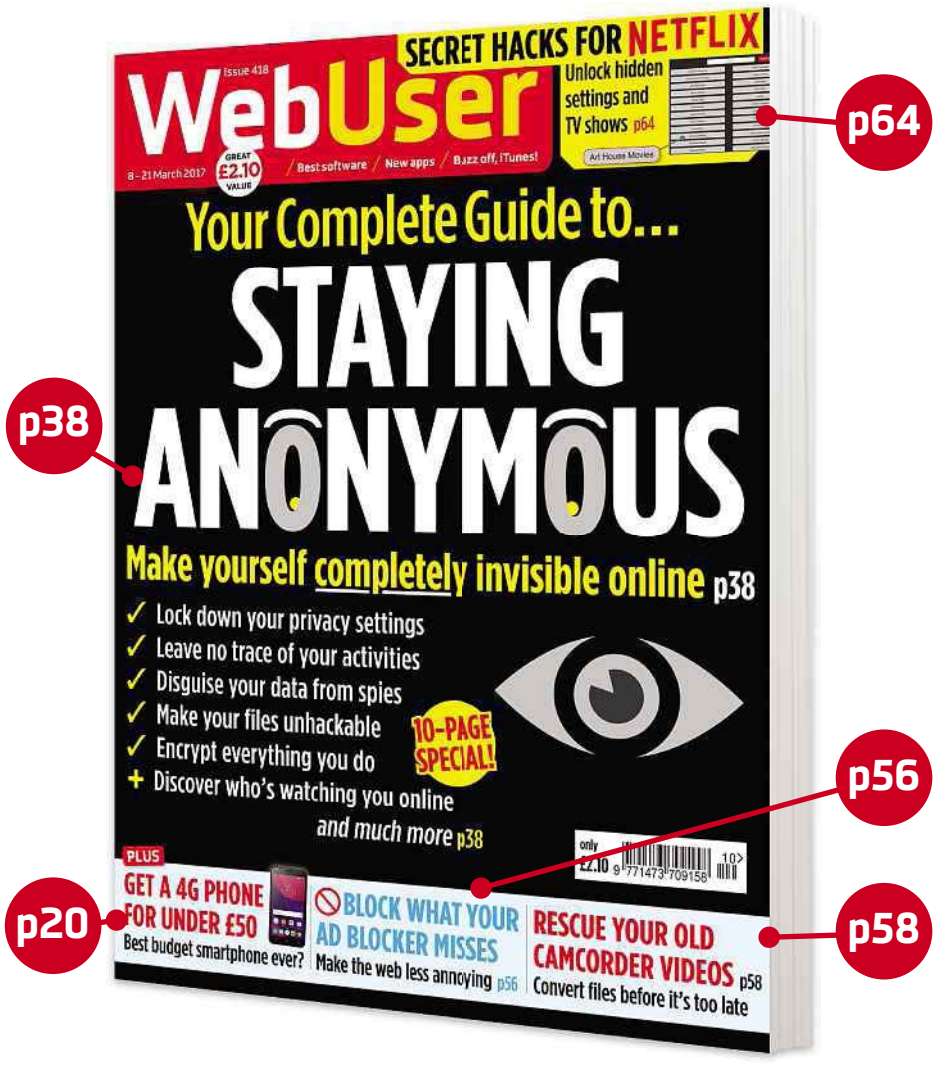
Laughing all the way to the blank

It's difficult to be anonymous when you're on page three of a best-selling national publication. I can't even leave the office without being accosted by people demanding to know if Kodi is *really* legal or asking the answer to number 5 in the emoji quiz* (see page 51). I've even taken to wearing a paper bag on my head. Still, we're all in the same boat online, where everyone is being watched all the time.

Until now, that is, because in this issue's exclusive 10-page cover feature, we explain everything you need to know about staying anonymous on the web. We reveal how to lock down your privacy settings, which tools to use to protect your identity, how to reclaim your data from Google, and much more. We also tell you exactly who is tracking you online and how worried you should be. By following our advice, you'll soon be laughing in the face of online spies as you go about your business incognito.

**This has never happened*

Robert Irvine
robert_irvine@dennis.co.uk
#webuser



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WEB USER
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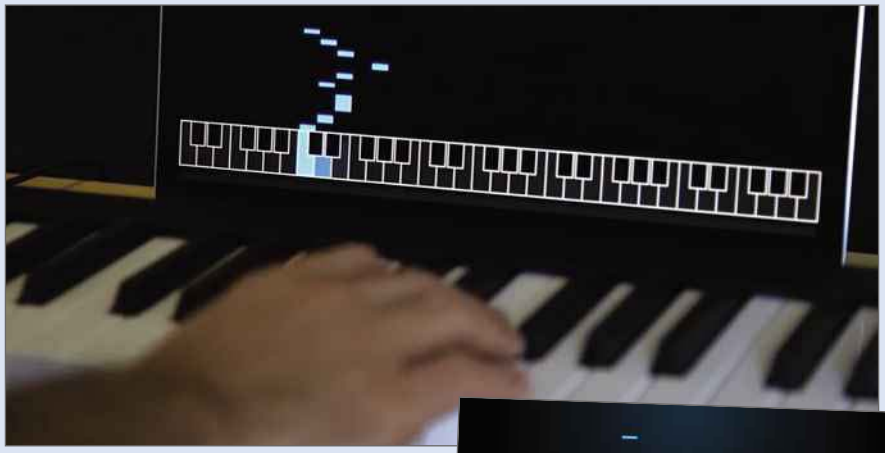
What's New Online

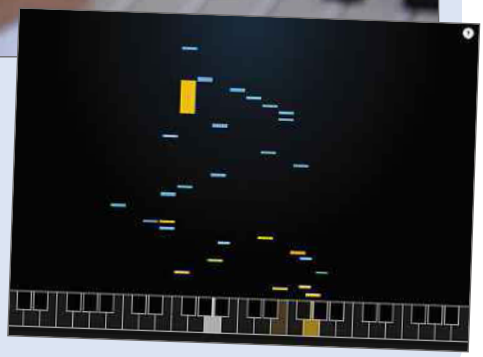
Play a duet with your computer

Whether or not you're an accomplished pianist, Google's intriguing new experiment in artificial intelligence will be music to your ears. AI Duet lets you play a tune by clicking the onscreen keyboard or pressing keys on your physical one, then picks up on your melody and works out a musical response so it can play along. This creates a duet with your computer and, although it's seldom perfectly in tune, it uses the power of neural networks to improve over time.

To do this, the online app has learned scores of melodies, including keys, rhythm and timing. Built by Yotam Mann in collaboration with Google's music and art project, Magneta and Creative Lab, it can also be used with a MIDI keyboard if you want to take things to another level.

AI Duet is fundamentally about machine learning and pushing the technology to ever greater heights.

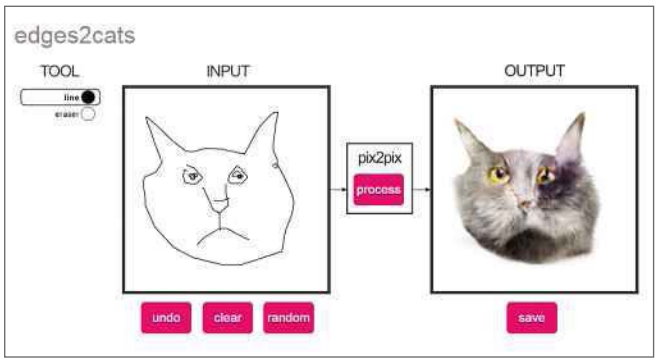




In that sense, it complements other AI musical experiments such as The Infinite Drum Machine (bit.ly/drum418), which lets you play around with endless drum-sound combinations, and Giorgio Cam (bit.ly/giorgio418), which cleverly lets you capture a photo to generate the lyrics of a song.

bit.ly/duet418

Create cat-filled artwork



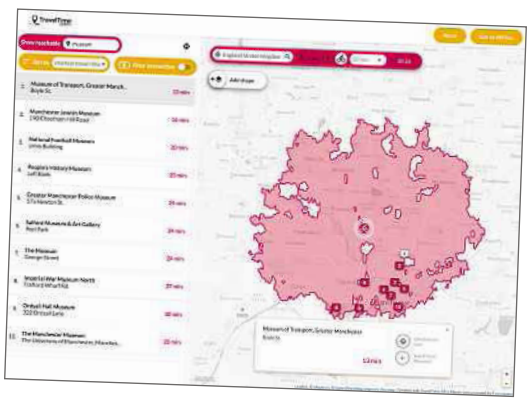
bit.ly/cats418

As if the internet didn't have enough cats, this feline generator adds a bunch more. Draw a cat in the left-hand box, then click the 'process' button and the software will sift through 2,000 stock images of moggies to fill in your outline. Some results look very strange indeed and many users are already saving and sharing their images on social media. But the experiment isn't just confined to cats: you can do the same thing for building facades, shoes and handbags. The tool makes great use of TensorFlow, the open-source software library for machine intelligence, and we have to tip our hat to Christopher Hesse for creating these highly addictive image-to-image demos.

See how far you can travel

bit.ly/travel418

Rather than finding out how long it will take you to get to a particular location, TravelTime Maps shows where you can travel to within a set amount of time. Type in your location, select a mode of transport – be it train, car, bike or your own two legs – and indicate how long you've got (between 15 and 90 minutes). The tool will then calculate your boundary and you can tell it what you'd like to do, such as visit a museum, cinema or coffee shop. It will list the destinations within reach, taking into account the time constraints, and give you the option to get directions. You can also set up multiple starting points and perform another search from each destination, which is particularly handy when you're planning a whistle-stop tour of an area or want to find a spot to congregate with friends.

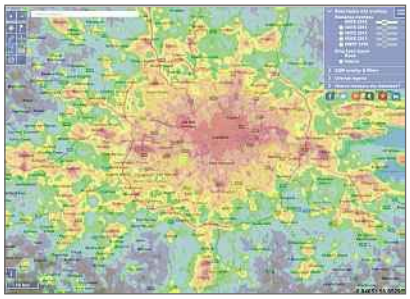


We pick the 10 best things you must do on the web this fortnight

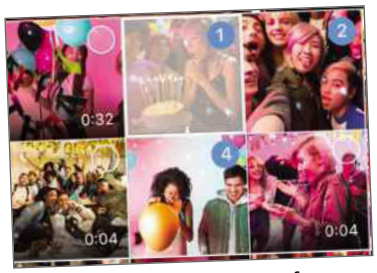
View the effects of light pollution

bit.ly/light418

The high levels of light pollution in our towns and cities stop us getting a clear view of the stars and sky. This map lets you see just how bad the problem is, using different colours to indicate light radiance. Zoom in and out, print map images, discover the radiance at particular points and use a tool to measure distance. There are country-by-country statistics to look at, too.



Share multiple photos in one Instagram post



bit.ly/insta418

One of the most annoying things about Instagram – aside from users who think they are God's gift to modelling or photography – is that you can only upload one thing at a time, which makes sharing your holiday highlights incredibly tedious. Thankfully, that irritation has now been removed, and the updated Instagram app lets you combine up to 10 images and videos in a single post. When uploading, just tap the new icon to select multiple items, then tap and hold to change their order, apply a filter to everything or edit photos one by one.

Get instant fun facts on Google

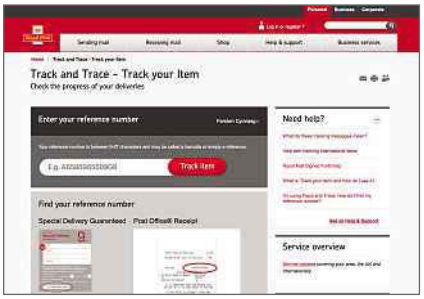
www.google.co.uk

Not content with finding the stuff you want on the web, Google is injecting even more fun into your searches. You can now look for frivolous bits of information on a host of topics by typing in the name of the trivia you're after followed by the words "fun facts" (for example, "cat fun facts"). Play around and you'll discover that the largest fish is the great whale shark, spiders are found on every continent bar Antarctica and 165,000 cars are produced every day. Each fact appears at the top of the search page.

Get delivery confirmation for parcels

bit.ly/track418

Buy first- or second-class postage for small and medium parcels on the Royal Mail website and you'll now get a notification when your item has been delivered or if an attempt to deliver has been made. Simply enter your reference number into the Track Item field on the website. You can't track the parcel on its journey, though.



5 TO FOLLOW ON TWITTER

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Get to see a different, quirkier side of the US space agency

@HalfOnionInABag
A very funny feed created solely to get more followers than Trump

@filmclickbait
Want the gist of a movie-related story? Get an instant précis here

@ChampionsLeague
The road to Cardiff continues as the Champions League heads into the quarter finals

@vindiesel
The *Fast and Furious* actor recently joined Twitter

Insure yourself with a chatbot

kevinsured.com

Sign up to Kevinsured and you can ask chatbot Kevin to cover you against fraud, theft, scams, fakes and more when you're buying on sites such as Cragslist and Gumtree. It's free to use and you're protected up to the equivalent of $100 (£80).

Lighten up your emails

bit.ly/emotion418

The Emotional Labor extension for Gmail scans your emails to make your messages more friendly. Created to be more satirical than useful, clicking the smiley face adds exclamation marks, informal greetings and 'lols'.

Get Alexa on your television

www.amazon.co.uk

Amazon's digital assistant Alexa is now available on the Amazon Fire TV Stick, allowing you to launch apps, control content and search on your television using your voice. To find out more about Alexa, turn to our FAQ on page 36.

Tell us your favourite new things at forum.webuser.co.uk

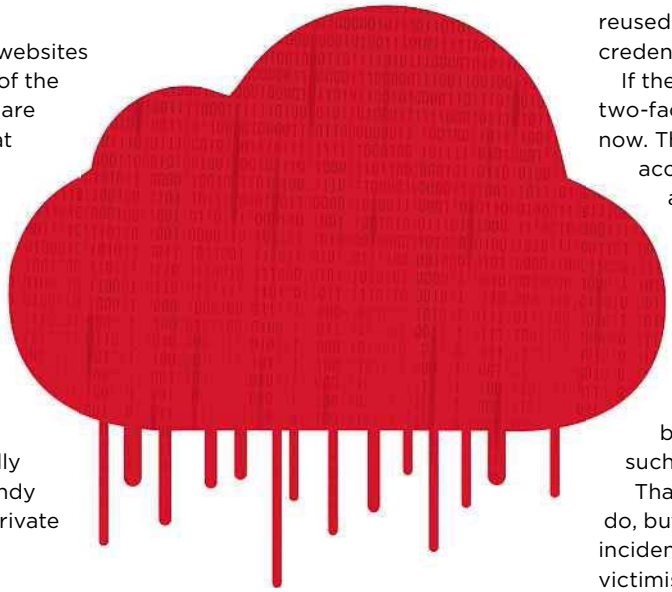
Need to Know

Cloudbleed security breach threatens thousands of sites

What happened?

Passwords for a host of major websites were leaked after the systems of the web-services company Cloudflare suffered a far-reaching bug that allowed data to slip out of secure areas.

The memory-leak bug, dubbed 'Cloudbleed' in reference to the infamous 'Heartbleed' breach in 2014, was spotted by Google security researcher Tavis Ormandy, who revealed that bits of data that should have been secured were actually being saved and leaked. Ormandy said that he was able to view private messages from dating sites, password-manager data, hotel bookings and more.

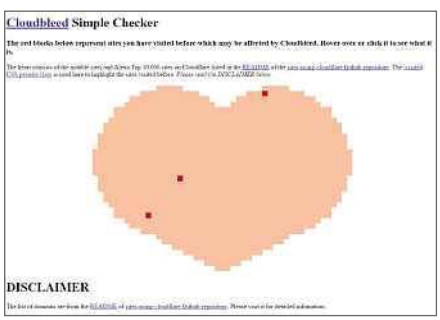


The bug is in a tool from Cloudflare that is supposed to securely send data such as login details between browsers and websites. Anyone aware of the flaw could in theory harvest the data, and Cloudflare said as many as 120,000 websites were affected. The bug was around for at least six months, but Cloudflare patched it in under an hour after being made aware of it.

How will it affect me?

First of all, don't panic. Because the bug was spotted by an industry researcher – rather than a hacker – it's unlikely that any leaked data has fallen into criminal hands.

If you have an account with a site that uses Cloudflare, you may want to consider changing your password. Affected companies include Uber, Fitbit and OkCupid, but because Cloudflare's services are widely used by online companies, many more are likely to be affected. 1Password data was also leaked, but the password manager has stressed that its user information was safe.



Use Cloudbleed Simple Checker to see if any sites you've visited are affected

Unlike a traditional hack or password leak, Cloudbleed hasn't led to a tranche of login credentials being dumped online or held by criminals. Instead, random bits of data were leaked, such as usernames and passwords, photos and the security details for sending such information.

There remains the threat that hackers were indeed aware of the bug over the six months it was leaking data and managed to collect some of it. Plus, some of the leaked information was cached by search engines, so it's possible it could be harvested, though Cloudflare has worked with Google and Bing to purge that data.

In such instances, all you can do is change your password for any affected sites, and update passwords on other sites where your login details are reused, so hackers can't try the credentials across all your accounts.

If the services and sites you use offer two-factor authentication, enable it now. This will prevent a new device from accessing your account and stop any hacking attempts.

For sensitive sites, such as dating services, that don't offer extra login protection, it may be worth contacting the company to say you'd appreciate an added layer of security. You could also consider buying your own two-factor key, such as Yubico's Fido.

That aside, there's very little you can do, but the good news is that this incident is unlikely to lead to any online victimisation. You can check if any sites you've visited recently are affected by Cloudbleed by using Cloudbleed Simple Checker (cloudbleed.github.io).

What do we think?

This incident highlights the perpetual difficulty with staying safe online. Even if you use sites with HTTPS and have strong and complex passwords that you regularly change, you can still be caught out by mistakes made not only by the company you choose to work with but also by the suppliers they hire. All the companies in the chain need to do a better job, but there's little any of us can do to make sure this happens. Even if you stop using Uber because of the security breach, plenty of other sites and services you use will be Cloudflare customers, too.

Of course, as much as companies can be a weak link, so too can users. Do what you can to stay safe by using secure passwords, not reusing them across sites and enabling two-factor authentication where possible. Beyond that, all you can do is stop worrying – there's no point fearing such attacks when they're unlikely to affect you and there's nothing you can do to avoid the repercussions in the first place. So stay vigilant, but don't panic.

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

Lords want 30Mbps broadband for all

What happened?

The House of Lords has suggested that the government raise its minimum broadband pledge from 10Mbps to 30Mbps. Reading through the Digital Economy Bill on its way to becoming law, peers argued that the 10Mbps universal service obligation (USO) wasn't enough – especially as the guarantee won't come into force until 2020.

Regulator Ofcom has previously said that 10Mbps is a suitable USO for current broadband use, but high-quality video streaming and other data-hungry uses will eventually mean that minimum speed will need to be pushed higher. In his proposal to the House, Labour peer Lord Mendelsohn said: "This [10Mbps] may be sufficient today, but not by the time the USO is proposed to be delivered".

How will it affect you?

The amendment may still be removed by the government, meaning the USO will slide back to 10Mbps. Either way, by 2020 Brits will be guaranteed the right to request a line of whichever minimum speed is decided upon, meaning broadband providers will have to step up and roll out the necessary infrastructure to the 1.4 million people around the country on speeds below 10Mbps.

What do we think?

Regardless of the figure the government eventually decides on, those Brits on speeds below 10Mbps – and some are well below that – should remain the priority. While 10Mbps is far below what many of us already expect from broadband, getting those 1.4 million people who suffer snail-pace speeds up to a connection that can support BBC iPlayer and Skype is more crucial than boosting those on already usable speeds to something faster.

ISPs shouldn't wait for the Lords and MPs to sort out the figure, either. Much effort has been made to get more UK households on superfast lines – officially, those over 24Mbps – but more should be done for those suffering on the far side of the digital divide, with all but useless connections.

Nokia relaunches classic 3310 phone

What happened?

Sick of smartphone frailty and poor battery life? Perhaps it's time you got yourself an old classic phone such as the Nokia 3310. The best-selling handset was officially relaunched at Mobile World Congress 2017 and looks more or less identical to the original device, with a few notable differences.

For starters, the old Nokia 3310 didn't have a camera of any sort, but the 2017 model features a 2-megapixel rear snapper, plonked just above the Nokia logo on the back. It also has a 2.4in colour display and boasts 22 hours of talk time and one month of standby time on a single charge. That's a lot of games of Snake.

The Nokia 3310 will cost around £50 and is available in four colours – Warm Red and Yellow, both with a gloss finish; and Dark Blue and Grey, both with a matte finish.

How will it affect you?

If you feel nostalgic for your old Nokia phone, which slipped easily into your pocket and lasted for days without charging, then the revival of the 3310 is sure to delight you. That said, you should be aware that the specs aren't great: there's no 3G or 4G, the camera is poor and it runs Nokia's proprietary Series 30+ software.

Although the new 3310 has Opera Mini installed alongside Snake, don't expect to get access to apps such as Facebook or Snapchat. This handset is all about the battery life.

What do we think?

With its limited features, we don't see many Android and iPhone users switching to this handset – not even hipsters! Nostalgia aside, the Nokia 3310 is only likely to appeal to complete technophobes on an extremely low budget who baulk at managing the bells and whistles that clutter modern phones. Still, it would make an ideal spare handset, and you may feel it's worth the £50 asking price for Snake alone.

Fewer web users taking up ad blockers

What happened?

Installations of ad-blocking software had skyrocketed in recent years, but the use of the add-ons to avoid seeing online advertising has now flatlined at about 22% of web users. That's according to the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB) – which, naturally, has a stake in the fight and releases a research report into ad-blocking software every year.

From 2015 to 2016, use of tools such as Adblock Plus, uBlock Origin and Ghostery leapt from 15% to 21%, but over the past year it's climbed by only a single point to 22% of those surveyed. The IAB said that's partially down to publishing companies banning users from accessing their sites when ad blockers are enabled.

The figures come as Shine, an ad-blocking tool that Three trialled across its mobile network last year, has revamped its business model from banning ads to offering them. Now rebranded Rainbow, it no longer bans ads but verifies which ones are good enough to show to consumers, in an effort to improve online advertising.

How will it affect you?

Shine isn't the first ad blocker to switch sides. Last year, Adblock Plus started whitelisting ads it deemed "acceptable" and – rather hypocritically – started selling ad space itself. Ad blockers siding with advertisers makes it difficult for users to find a tool that truly blocks all marketing material. We look at two of the best tools in the final section of our cover feature on page 46.

What do we think?

On one hand, advertising is the main way that journalists and content makers get paid online, and ad blockers put a dent in that income. On the other hand, online advertising is intrusive, slows page-load times and has even been known to spread malware, so it's understandable that people are keen to block them. Making advertising less annoying is one solution, but the less intrusive it is, the less effective it's believed to be.

Paying directly for content is another route, but web users have shown they're not always keen to shell out for access. The good news from the IAB's report is that use of blockers has flatlined – although no publisher will happily ignore losing 22% of their ad income. Still, the fact that blocking is no longer increasing at the same rate at least buys companies more time to solve the advertising conundrum.

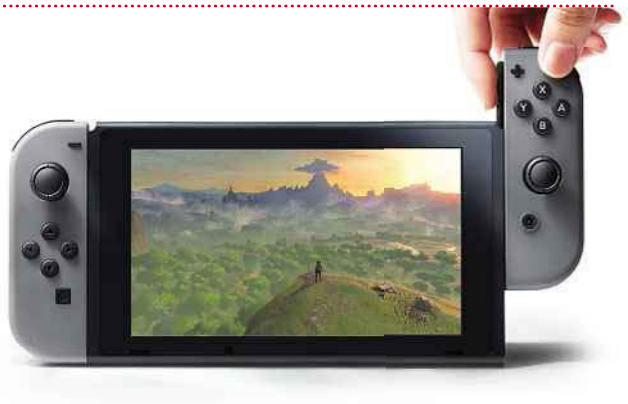
FIRST LOOK

Nintendo Switch

nintendo.com/switch

Versatility is the name of the game with the Nintendo Switch – a console like no other that blurs the line between couch gaming and on-the-go play. If you're at home, you can just slip it in its TV dock, grab a controller and use it as a TV-connected console; when you set off on your travels, simply lift it out of its dock, slide the pair of controllers into either side and you're all set to enjoy the full console experience in the palm of your hand, playing Zelda on an otherwise tedious train journey.

The Switch dispels any doubts about its ability to manage the transition between living-room and mobile gameplay. Moving from the big screen to its surprisingly bright 6.2in, 1,280 x 720-pixel resolution display is seamless. There are no load times and no pause as your game reloads at the different resolution, whether you've just docked or undocked the console. We've had almost a week to play around with it (albeit with no games) and our initial impressions are fantastic.



You get plenty of stuff for your £280 outlay, including the Switch itself, its dock, a pair of Joy-Con controllers (with straps) and the controller grip. There's also an AC adapter and an HDMI cable.

Our main concern is the limited line-up of games that will be available at launch. If it wasn't for the flagship, system-selling title Zelda: Breath of the Wild, there would be nothing much to get your teeth into. In time, however, we're confident that the Switch will deliver plenty of family-friendly competitive gameplay.

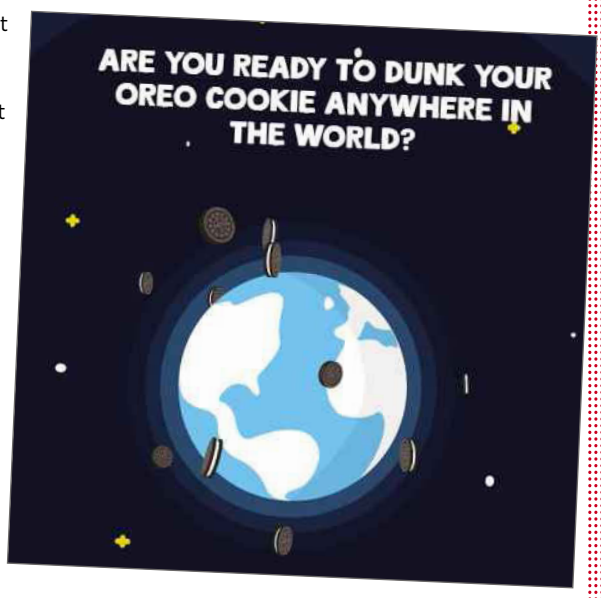
WHAT'S THE RUMOUR

Will the next Android version be called Oreo?

Although Android 7.0 Nougat is only just out of the gates, the focus of attention has already moved on to the next version of Android, which will be the eighth major release of the world's most popular mobile operating system. If Google's past penchant for alphabetising is anything to go by, it's very likely that it will be colloquially known as 'Android O'.

As for its full name, in keeping with the tradition of sweet-treat inspiration, it's rumoured that Android 8 will be called Oreo. Indeed, Google has already teamed up with the US biscuit manufacturer on a game called Oreo Dunk Challenge, in which you throw a virtual Oreo cookie around the world to try to dunk it in a glass of milk. You can play the game by visiting the website (oreospacedunk.com) and scanning an Oreo cookie with your phone's camera. The game asks you to swing your phone in your hand to chuck the Oreo into earth's orbit and around the planet.

What isn't clear is whether this is the entire cause for the leaks and rumours surrounding an Oreo-Google partnership, or if there's something deeper going on that will tie into Android O later.



Other than speculation over the name, we don't yet know much about Android 8, but considering that most phones are still waiting for Android 7, this is hardly surprising.

LIKELIHOOD RATING

✓✓✓✓✓

It seems logical that Google would choose Oreo as the name for Android 8, even if the brand isn't as well known here as it is in the US. After all, what other sweet treat could the company use – oatmeal? Orange? Ovaltine?

What's new on Kickstarter

Our favourite new project on the crowdfunding site

Capelli

bit.ly/capelli418 | From £10

When you need an emergency haircut, but can't face the trip to the barber's, you can now arrange one through this innovative mobile service. Like an Uber for your hair, Capelli lets you quickly find and book a barber in your area via its mobile app, then call them out to your home, hotel or workplace. You can earn £5 a head by referring friends to the service and choose from a range of professional hairdressers. Capelli eventually hopes to cover every major city in the UK. Help it reach its £10,000 funding target by 23 March.

WEBOMETER

WE LIKE...

Google brings Assistant to more Android phones

Google's voice-activated assistant will soon be available on phones running the latest versions of Android, including the new LG G6. Until now, the assistant was only available on Google's Pixel devices.

Sony introduces super-slow-motion phone

The Sony Xperia XZ Premium can capture video at up to 960fps (frames per second), four times the rate possible on Apple and Samsung's flagship devices.

WE DON'T LIKE...

Windows 10 is the 'least secure' version

Windows 10 had 40% more security vulnerabilities than any other version of the operating system in 2016, according to security firm Avecto. The research was based on analysis of Microsoft's security bulletins from last year.

Facebook suffers two outages within 48 hours

Users of the social network reported that they were logged out of its app and were unable to log back in. Facebook said a problem affecting a "small set of people" had been fixed while other sources claimed the fault affected millions of users.

Stay Safe Online

News about the latest threats and advice from security experts

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

Chrome malware poses as missing font

A security researcher has discovered a new hacking tactic in Chrome that manipulates websites into displaying missing font prompts in order to trick users into downloading malicious files. The infection was first spotted on an unnamed WordPress website by Mahmoud Al-Qudsi, a researcher at cybersecurity firm NeoSmart Technologies, who detailed the process in a blog post. The attack involves a hacker exploiting JavaScript to alter the rendering of content on a webpage, causing it to resemble mis-encoded text, which appears as a jumble of symbols and shapes.

The code then prompts you to download the missing fonts through a Chrome language pack to decipher the text. Clicking Update results in a file being downloaded and you're then invited to run the file, which all the while appears to be a perfectly safe Chrome download. The attack is particularly well disguised and makes every attempt to look like a legitimate Chrome pop-up.

Al-Qudsi has forwarded the discovery to Google's security team, but pending an update patch, at the time of writing, Chrome still fails to identify the file as malware.

bit.ly/chrome418

Microsoft patches critical Flash flaw

Microsoft has released a critical update to Adobe Flash Player, which could allow hackers to use it to perform remote-code execution processes if left unpatched. "This security update resolves vulnerabilities in Adobe Flash Player when installed on all supported editions of Windows 8.1, Windows Server 2012, Windows Server 2012 R2, Windows RT 8.1, Windows 10 and Windows Server 2016," Microsoft said. It added that the update should be installed immediately, but will require a restart to take effect.

The update was supposed to be rolled out in February's Patch Tuesday security update, but that was delayed due to a "last minute issue". The updates scheduled for release will now be rolled out in the 14 March update instead. However, this part of the update has appeared much sooner, presumably because it could cause major problems if left unpatched.

bit.ly/flash418

Security Helpdesk | Your questions answered by security specialists

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT: Robert Capps, VP of business development at NuData Security (nudatasecurity.com)

Q Why can't more be done to stop phishing scams stealing our money?

Alan Holloway, via email

A It's not surprising that phishing scams are still a valid concern. The internet is awash with stolen consumer data ripe for malicious use, providing fertile soil in which fraudsters can grow innovative attacks using purloined black-market data.

Victims of stolen data are a natural target for phishing, since most major data breaches target login credentials, email addresses and passwords. This data allows cybercriminals to concoct nearly flawless phishing attacks, often by impersonating major organisations or financial institutions that victims normally interact with online.

Educating people about online risks is an uphill battle,

> "Even the savviest web user can be ensnared by a fraud scheme"

and one that inevitably finds even the savviest web user ensnared by some fraud schemes.

As such, we need to take a step back and start respecting that may people cannot be expected to learn how to avoid clicking something designed specifically to lure them in and empty their accounts.

Instead of blaming the victims, who are unlikely to become more adept at protecting their data, we security companies must find ways to do our jobs better. We need to draw on our collective ability to innovate and invent solutions that don't cost consumers the money that fraudsters are suckering them into giving up.

In fact, there are many solutions out there right now that could render most phishing attacks obsolete by devaluing any benefit the fraudsters get out of them. Let's get on with it and stop this threat for good.

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

NEW

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fasthosts

Best New Websites

Site of the Fortnight

SOCIAL

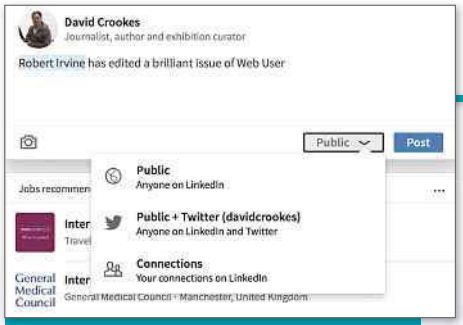
RELAUNCH

LinkedIn

www.linkedin.com

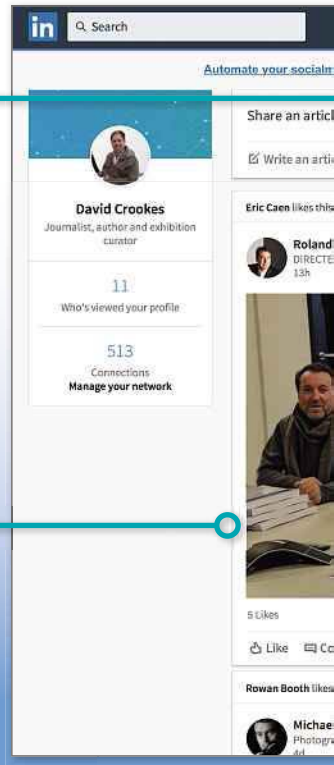
LinkedIn's revamp is obviously inspired by Facebook, but given how familiar most of us are with that social network, this is no bad thing. A thorough declutter has resulted in a streamlined navigation bar, a more personalised news feed and a single search engine for people, jobs, companies, groups and schools. It's now possible to chat to people in real-time via a pop-up messaging window and you're better able to see who is looking at your content, which helps you gauge how effective it is. Thankfully, it's still easy to configure your privacy settings and there are helpful suggestions for improving your profile and expanding your network.

Our rating ★★★★★



EASY POSTS
Write posts and share images while controlling who is able to see them

NEWS FEED
The news feed combines relevant posts with curated content from LinkedIn



NEW

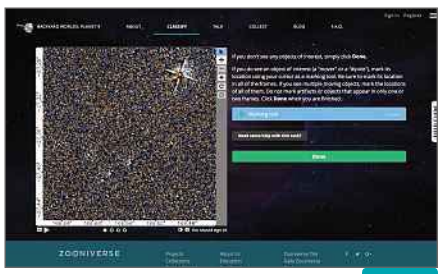
PHOTOGRAPHY

William Henry Fox Talbot Catalogue Raisonné

foxtalbot.bodleian.ox.ac.uk

Having snapped up the archive of Britain's pioneering photographer William Henry Fox Talbot in 2014, the Bodleian Library in Oxford is using this stunning site to showcase 1,000 examples of his work. This lets you view some of the earliest photographs taken during the Victorian era and read more about Talbot's life, while providing links to his personal archive and online resources. The comprehensive catalogue can be filtered in several ways including by year, size and location; while the image viewer lets you zoom in to inspect details. You can also compare photos side by side and add them to your 'favourites' for future reference.

Our rating ★★★★★



NEW

SPACE

Backyard Worlds

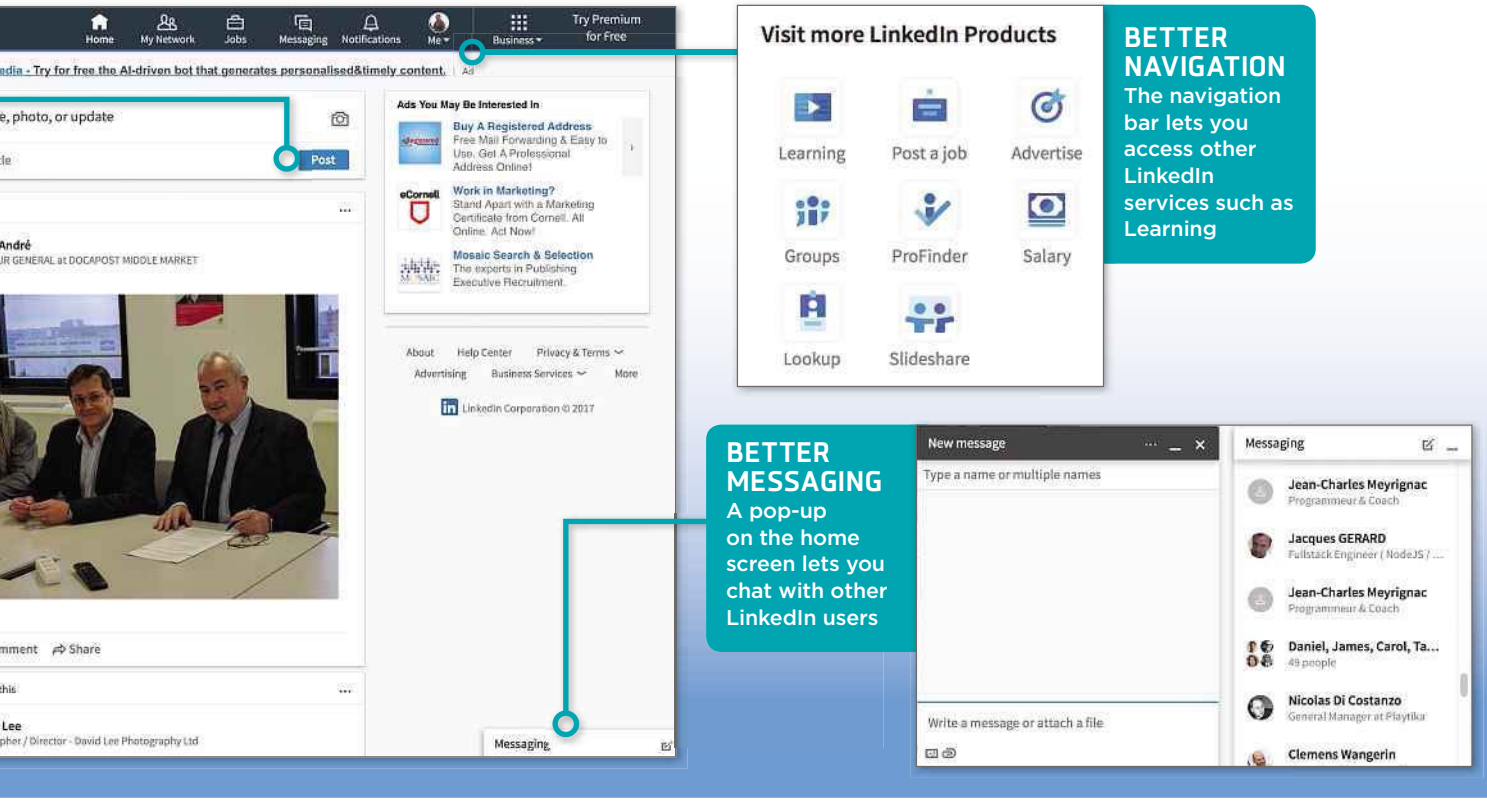
www.backyardworlds.org

This NASA-funded site wants your help to discover a new planet. It shows you a series of mini-movies consisting of still images and asks you to mark moving objects using your mouse. The project hopes that human eyes will cut through the fuzzy visuals and recognise new brown dwarfs and the elusive Planet 9, and will include contributors' names in scientific papers and posters. We love the slick design and visuals, the opportunity to discuss potential finds and the simple classification tools. The tutorial is also very clear, making the search for a new world accessible to all.

Our rating ★★★★☆

Reviews by David Crookes

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



NEW

TECHNOLOGY

RetroGear

retrogear.co.uk

Retro Gear sells old consoles, computers and software, and its numerous images of classic machines will certainly trigger nostalgia among many gamers. However, navigation feels cumbersome because several sections are empty and include unnecessary submenus. On the plus side, the site includes live customer support, a currency converter and a newsletter that flags up new products. You can buy expertly refurbished machines, along with books and 'chiptunes', as well as handcrafted 'tributes' made using polymer clays, which pay homage to many great retro games.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

NEW

MUSIC

Strawberry Field

www.strawberryfieldliverpool.com

To mark the 50th anniversary of The Beatles' song *Strawberry Fields Forever*, campaigners are looking to create a heritage and education centre at the location that inspired it. This site outlines the ambitious plans for the former Salvation Army children's home in Liverpool, including visuals of the new building and a flavour of what visitors will be able to do there. It doesn't reveal much about the song itself but it does explain John Lennon's childhood link to the site. You can make a donation, become a volunteer and buy Strawberry Field merchandise from the online store.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

SPORT

Sporting Life

m.sportinglife.com

Sporting Life embraced all things digital 19 years ago and is now looking to go the distance with a redesigned mobile site. This keeps its content tightly organised by listing news items by headline and intro, and provides fast-loading live football scores with improved statistics as well as in-play gambling via Sky Bet. Signing up to My Stable lets you know when a chosen horse is running and the Fast Results racing section is now speedier than ever. Add videos from Racing UK and At The Races into the mix, and a good selection of photo galleries, and you've got an odds-on winner.

Our rating ★★★★☆

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

NOW ON SALE!

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2016 BACK ISSUES DISC

Our **2016 Back Issues Disc** containing all 26 issues from last year is now on sale from Amazon

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You can still buy our 2015 Back Issues Disc from bit.ly/wudisc15

RELAUNCH

RECREATION

Day Out With the Kids

www.dayoutwiththekids.co.uk

Finding activities to entertain children is no mean feat but this beautifully designed website makes light work of it. Aside from suggesting fun things to do at home, it offers a search engine for local attractions and lets you narrow the recommendations by category, age range, facilities and whether you want an indoor or outdoor venue. The results neatly summarise the important information about each activity, and let you click through for photos, a full description, a map and details of opening times and prices. Registering lets you write reviews and there are some good competitions to enter, too.

Our rating ★★★★☆

RELAUNCH

ROWING

Durham Regatta

durham-regatta.org.uk

Designed to promote Durham's annual rowing regatta, this revamped site gives a great flavour of what you can expect on 10 and 11 June. Its smartly presented pages let you discover what's on, read the latest news and check out a map of the course. You can also find out how to get involved and absorb yourself in the 183-year story behind the event. The site tells you everything you need to know about the racing, including an explanation of the sport and last year's results. There are also lots of details about the accompanying classic-car rally and plenty of information about the beautiful city of Durham itself.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

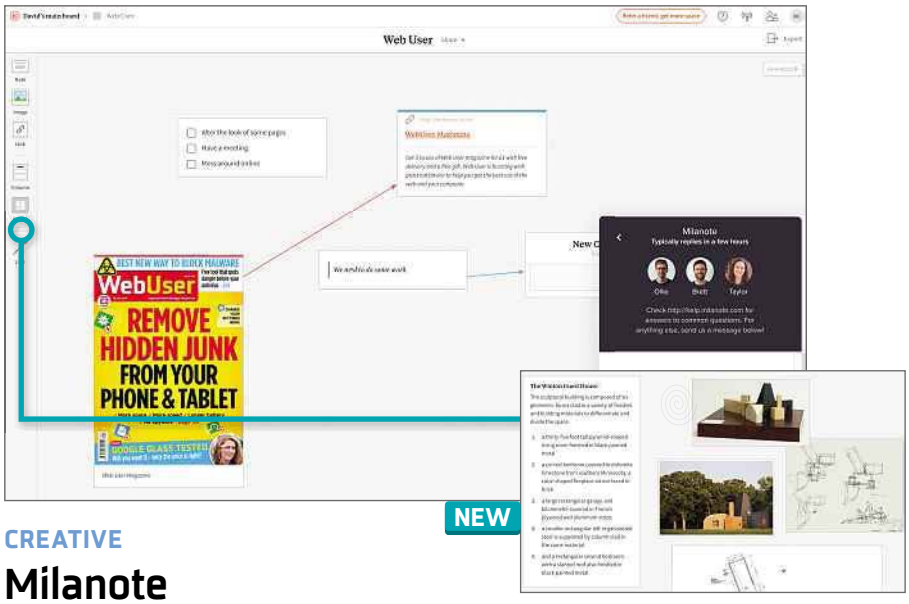
TRAVEL

Visit Kendal

visit-kendal.co.uk

Located just south of the Lake District, Kendal is perhaps best known for its Mint Cake, but it's also keen to show potential visitors that its other attractions are just as sweet. Here, you can check out the shops, get a taste of the nightlife, explore the great outdoors and enjoy a flavour of the local culture, thanks to a dizzying number of links and an insightful blog full of suggestions and insights. Visit Kendal certainly covers all bases, right down to downloadable visitor guides, planning essentials and search suggestions. But while the site is comprehensive and easy to navigate, it's sadly let down by some pages being slow to load.

Our rating ★★★★☆



NEW

CREATIVE

Milanote

milanote.com

If your creativity is bogged down by mundane administration, you should check out this new and intuitive note-arranging website. Similar to Google Keep, Milanote lets you pin text-, video-, image- and link-based notes to a board and move them around in any order you want. Different notes can be coloured and linked together using arrows while boards can be shared with other people for viewing or collaboration. It's extremely easy to use and there's plenty of help if you get stuck. You can also export your work as a PDF, plain text, HTML or Word document, and get more than the standard 100 notes by upgrading your plan or referring friends.

Our rating ★★★★☆

NEW

WILDLIFE

British Hen Welfare Trust

www.bhwt.org.uk/cockerels

Finding love could be a life-or-death matter for the cockerels on this bird-dating site. To help them find a new home, the British Hen Welfare Trust has set up "Cockerel Lonely Hearts", where owners can post one picture along with a 1,000-character description of their fowl for a PayPal donation of just £3. There aren't many posts yet and the site would really benefit from longer descriptions, a better layout and more photos because, sadly, it's currently nothing to crow about.

Our rating ★★☆☆☆

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

Build a Better Site

Specialist tips, top tools and practical help

Top Tips of the Fortnight

Make Wix more secure

Any Wix (www.wix.com) website can now be hosted using HTTPS, the more secure version of the web. While this is only strictly necessary if you're collecting information such as passwords or payment details from visitors, it's good practice to operate a secure site, not least because Google has hinted that it may start penalising sites that don't use it, causing them to drop down the rankings of a search result. For Wix users, setting up the service should involve nothing more than flicking a control-panel switch. The web-building tool has more help and advice on its support website at bit.ly/secure418.

Meet up with WordPress fans

If you're in or near London over the weekend of the 18-19 March, you might fancy picking up some last-minute tickets for WordCamp

(2017.london.wordcamp.org) at London Metropolitan University. A two-day pass costs £30 and provides access to a range of talks from WordPress experts and the chance to meet other like-minded people. You can check the schedule of speakers at bit.ly/sched418.

Deal of the Fortnight

eUKhost (www.eukhost.com) is offering a free domain with cPanel hosting packages. Choose from '.com', '.net', '.org', '.biz', '.info', '.co.uk', '.org.uk', '.me.uk' and '.eu'.

Web-building Helpdesk

THIS ISSUE'S EXPERT:
Edmund Turbin, WP Engine (wpengine.com)

Q WordPress has been around for years – is it still the best option?

Keith Walker, via email

A WordPress helps you create the site your visitors want. It's scalable and flexible, having grown from a simple blogging platform to an enterprise-grade web CMS trusted by tens of millions of individuals and companies, including Warby Parker and Network Rail.

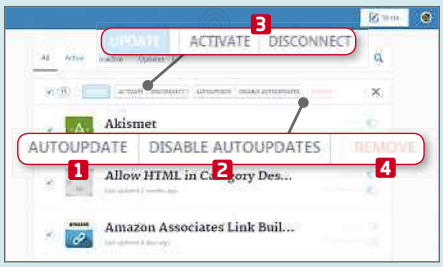
Users find WordPress simple to understand, and developers like it because they can use their skills to build a site quickly, reducing learning curves and improving timelines. WordPress is well known for its active user community and has more than 40,000 plugins, so it's easy to customise.

MINI WORKSHOP | Update WordPress plugins automatically

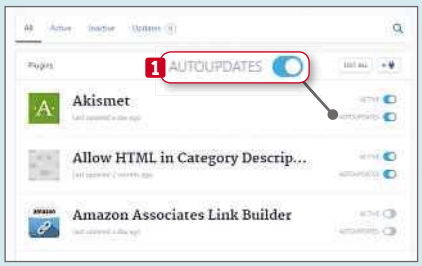
Jetpack: bit.ly/jetp418 | 10 mins | WordPress website

WordPress plugins provide access to tons of useful tools but they need frequent updating and doing this manually can be a chore. Jetpack (bit.ly/jetp418) lets you update plugins automatically via wordpress.com.

1 Make sure that you have the Jetpack plugin installed on your website. Sign into wordpress.com (even if your website isn't hosted there), select the site you want to update and choose Plugins from the panel on the left. 1 Click any that need updating 2 or use the 'Update X plugins' button 3 ('X' being the number of plugins to update).



2 Click the Edit All button. All your updates will be selected with a tick in the box on the left. You can use the buttons across the top to switch on automatic updates for every plugin, 1 or disable them again 2 if you find you're having problems. You can also activate, disconnect 3 and remove 4 plugins in bulk from here.



3 You might find that there are some plugins that you don't want to update automatically, perhaps because they've caused problems with your site in the past. From the main plugins screen, you can stop individual sites from updating by using the switches. 1

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Product Test

We test and compare the latest products

Alcatel Pixi 4 (5)

How little can you pay for a decent 4G-enbled phone? **Christopher Minasians** tests an Alcatel model you can buy for less than £50

The Alcatel Pixi 4 (5) is a 5in quad-core phone that comes with 4G connectivity, Android 6 Marshmallow and a microSD-card expansion slot. What really sets eyebrows rising, though, is that it can be bought on the High Street from just £44.99 (Argos, bit.ly/alcatel418, locked to EE). Even free of an operator contract, it's cheap, costing just £59 for an unlocked model from Giffgaff (www.giffgaff.com). That's more than £100 cheaper than the Motorola G4 budget smartphone, which we reviewed in Issue 404 (bit.ly/webuser404).

The Pixi 4 comes in different sizes and specifications, but Alcatel hasn't made it easy to distinguish between the different models. There's the Alcatel Pixi 4 (4), the Pixi 4 (5) and the Pixi 4 (6), all of which have different internal components and different sized screens (four, five and six inches, respectively).

To make matters even more confusing, there are also 3G and 4G models of the Pixi 4 (5). Here, we're reviewing the Alcatel Pixi 4 (5) 5045X 4G-enabled model.

Build and design

We found the 5in model provided a good compromise between a pocketable size and enough screen space for media browsing, videos and one-handed operation. However it is a tad heavy, weighing 148g, and chunky – 9.5mm from front to back – so it's not the most comfortable device to hold.

The screen is framed by a slim bezel, with three touch buttons positioned below. You'll find a microUSB charging and data port at the bottom; volume rocker and power button on the right; and a 3.5mm headphone jack at the top of the phone. The rear cover is made entirely out of plastic and is easily removed. Underneath, there's a removable 2,000mAh lithium-ion battery, along with micro-SIM and microSD storage slots. The phone has a single front-facing speaker which we found delivered an acceptable level of volume.

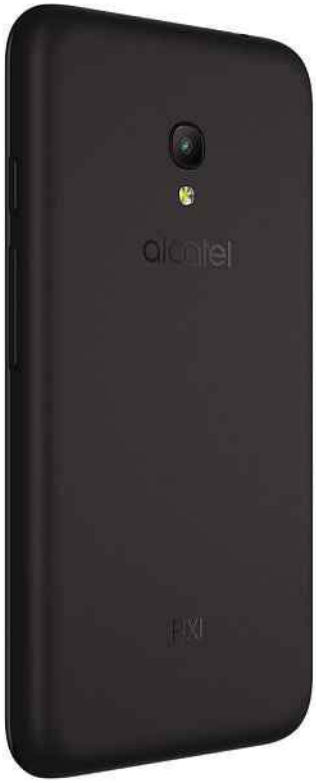
Disappointing screen

We expected a phone with a 5in screen to provide 720p resolution (720 x 1,280 pixels) but, unfortunately, the Pixi 4 only provides a disappointing 480 x 854 pixels, resulting in a low pixel density of 196ppi. This means you won't be watching those YouTube videos in HD, and will see pixelated text when reading web pages.

> "Given the very low price of this phone, we'd expect a screen that's a bit below par, but it's still disappointing"

A maximum brightness of 356cd/m² (candles per square metre) means that the phone is bright enough to be used outdoors, but you're not going to be able to read it in blazing sunlight. Also, it only managed to display 70.6% of the standard sRGB colours in our tests, which left images looking grainy and dull.

At maximum brightness,



the screen has an underwhelming 0.4cd/m² black level, and the 868:1 contrast ratio is poor. To cap it all, the colours shift when you view the screen from different angles.

Given the very low price of this phone, we'd expect a screen that's a bit below par, but it's still disappointing.

Performance, camera and battery power

The Pixi 4 (5) is a budget phone so it's no surprise that it performs like one. Housing a quad-core, 1GHz MTK6735M Mediatek processor and a scant 1GB of RAM, it only managed a score of 416 in our Geekbench 3 single-core tests and 1,173 in the multi-core tests. To put this into perspective, the Samsung Galaxy J5 (around £200) managed 555 and 1,948 respectively, while the mid-range OnePlus 3T (£399) scored an impressive 1,903 and 4,274 in these tests.

These results have a noticeable impact on the Pixi's performance and apps don't feel as slick as they would on faster phones.

Gaming results were poor, too, with GFXBench (gfxbench.com) recording a score of 5.4fps. That's nothing out of the ordinary at this price and is better than some larger-screened phones we've previously tested because the Pixi's smaller screen doesn't place as much strain on its graphics chip.

We weren't impressed with the battery either. It lasted only 8 hours and 17 minutes in our looping video test, so heavy users might end up running out of power before getting home.

We didn't expect the camera on the device to match those on flagship phones but the rear-facing 5-megapixel and front-facing 2-megapixel cameras were far from impressive. With or without flash, the Pixi 4 (5) struggled to take acceptable photos, and every shot we captured was marred by noise. The colours appear slightly washed out and it doesn't cope well with background shadows, unless your object is well lit.

Enabling HDR mode improved things a little, but no matter what the conditions, the Pixi 4 (5)'s photos looked grainy and murky. To make matters worse, you can't touch-to-focus, meaning you have to rely on the camera software to pick the correct spot to focus on, which we found to be hit and miss.

Android 6 Marshmallow

On the plus side, the phone comes with Android 6 Marshmallow. While this isn't the newest version of Google's mobile OS (Nougat is), it's very easy to use and has a slick interface that's responsive, even on the Pixi 4's relatively low specification.

Better still, the device doesn't hit you with an alternative Android skin or lots of bloatware.

It come pre-installed with Alcatel's OneTouch Launcher, which is the only extra supplied and can easily be changed if you wish. As with any standard Android device, you get the entire suite of Google apps pre-installed, including Maps, Gmail, YouTube and Google Drive.

OUR VERDICT

★★★★☆

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

It would be unreasonable to expect a phone at this price not to have some shortcomings. The big question is whether you're prepared to live with these problems in exchange for paying well below the standard price for a phone.

The Pixi 4 (5) has a 5in screen, works with 4G networks and performs reasonably well, but it falls short on the screen quality, camera and battery life, and you'll undoubtedly get a better phone if you spend a bit more. However, you can't have everything and the Pixi 4 (5) is a good enough device if you're on a really low budget.

PRODUCT INFO

Alcatel Pixi 4 (5)

Price: £44.99
Buy from: Argos, www.argos.co.uk

SPECIFICATIONS

- Quad-core 1 GHz MTK6735M processor
- 1GB RAM
- 8GB storage space
- 5in TFT-TN screen
- 480 x 854 pixels resolution
- 2-megapixels front camera
- 5-megapixels rear camera
- LED flash
- microSD memory-card slot (maximum capacity 32GB)
- 2,000mAh battery
- 802.11 b/g/n Wi-Fi
- Bluetooth 4.0
- 4G data connection
- Android 6.0
- 141 x 73 x 9.5mm
- 169g

FOR

- ✓ Very affordable
- ✓ Expandable storage
- ✓ Android 6 installed

AGAINST

- ✗ Sluggish performance
- ✗ Poor camera
- ✗ Low-resolution display

BETTER PERFORMER

Vodafone Smart Prime 7, £70
bit.ly/voda418

BEST BUDGET PHONE

Moto G4 2016, £159
bit.ly/moto418

Picture Keeper Connect

Andy Shaw tests a double-ended USB memory stick for solving mobile-storage problems

The storage on your phone or tablet can quickly fill up with photos and videos, and you can easily run out of room. Some Android devices have a memory-card slot so you can side-step the problem by moving your files across to a card and save them elsewhere. But if you have an Apple device or an Android phone with no expandable memory, you need to carefully manage your storage.

The Picture Keeper Connect is a USB memory stick designed to provide external storage for devices that don't have a memory-card slot. It looks like a standard USB memory stick with a full-sized USB connector at one end and a Lightning connector at the other to fit an iPhone or iPad. It also comes with a Micro-USB adapter to connect to an Android device.

We tested the Picture Keeper Connect on both an Android tablet and an iPhone. It requires you to install an app on your phone or tablet, but once you've done that, making a backup is relatively straightforward.

Picture Keeper Connect doesn't back up videos by default because they can quickly fill the device, but you can turn on the option via its menu. The app also lets you choose whether to back up all your files or select individual ones, including photos, videos, contacts, music and documents.

Once you set it running, the app keeps you informed of the backup's progress. Files transferred to the Picture Keeper Connect aren't deleted from your phone or tablet automatically but the option is there if you need it – for example, if you run out of space on your mobile device while enjoying a day out and need to free up storage to take more photos.

We ran into problems the first time we tried to transfer our images from the Picture Keeper Connect to a PC. The device comes with portable PC software installed but despite following the accompanying printed instructions to the letter, we couldn't see our Android backup at all. However, Exploring the device manually, we discovered that you can circumnavigate the software and access the files directly in Windows Explorer. This suggests that the pre-installed software is superfluous and is taking up room that could otherwise be used as extra storage.

When it comes to the crunch, this is an expensive device for the amount of storage you get. You're paying a premium for the Lightning connector and the link to the apps, both of which are mainly of use to Apple devices, and it's very expensive when you consider that a standard 16GB USB stick costs less than £10.

> "This is an expensive device for the amount of storage you get"

PRODUCT INFO

Picture Keeper Connect

Price: £112.99 (16GB), £134.99 (32GB), £169.99 (64GB)
Buy from Amazon:
bit.ly/pickeep418

SPECIFICATIONS

- 16GB, 32GB and 64GB options
- Works with Android OTG-compatible devices and iOS 6 or better
- Windows and Mac software pre-installed
- Mobile connection requires free app

FOR

- ✓ Easy way to back up mobile devices
- ✓ Works with iOS and Android

AGAINST

- ✗ Very expensive for the storage capacity
- ✗ Counter-intuitive instructions

OUR VERDICT

★★★☆☆

Managing a device that has very little storage and no expandable memory can be a hassle, and the Picture Keeper Connect is quick and efficient at creating backups so you can free up space and then move the content to your PC.

Its particulalrly useful for Apple devices, but this convenience comes at a price and it's one of the most expensive ways to get extra storage that we've seen.

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

GRAPHICS CARD

Asus AMD Radeon R7 250

£78.59 from bit.ly/250amd416
Tested: Issue 416

This graphics card provides enough power to make less challenging games run smoothly in 1080p resolution with high-detail settings enabled. It's very cheap and benefits from plenty of speedy stream processors.

KEY SPECS

2,048 stream processors ■ 128 texture-mapping units ■ 32 render-output units ■ 926MHz GPU frequency ■ 4GB RAM ■ Supports up to six displays ■ 4,096 x 2,160 pixels resolution ■ DisplayPort, DVI-D and HDMI video connectors

WI-FI REPEATER

TP-Link RE450

£44.99 from bit.ly/tpl414
Tested: Issue 414

The TP-Link RE450 provides a strong signal at a price that's hard to resist. It's better at extending the 5GHz network than the 2.4GHz, but it also acts as a bridge to transfer older devices to the newer network.

KEY SPECS

2 x 60mm, 1 x 42mm antennae ■ 3.8W power consumption ■ 2.4GHz (450Mbps) and 5GHz (1,300Mbps) ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ WPS button ■ Repeater and access point modes ■ 163 x 76 x 37mm ■ Three-year return-to-base warranty

MONITOR

AOC Q2781PQ

£299.99 from bit.ly/aoc412
Tested: Issue 412

This good-value monitor offers impressive image quality, a lovely design and 178-degree horizontal and vertical viewing angles. You won't need to calibrate it, either. If you're after a monitor with a resolution of 2,560 x 1,440 pixels, buy this.

KEY SPECS

27in flat screen ■ 2,560 x 1,440 pixels resolution ■ 1,000:1 contrast ratio ■ 350cd/m^2 brightness ■ 60Hz refresh rate ■ DisplayPort, HDMI, VGA inputs ■ 330 x 180mm base ■ Three-year collect-and-return warranty

BUDGET TABLET

Amazon Fire HD 8

£89.99 from bit.ly/8hd410
Tested: Issue 410

For its low price, Amazon's Fire HD 8 is a pleasant surprise: it's great for media streaming and web browsing, its battery life is exceptional and it's easy to use. Once it's integrated with Amazon's Alexa voice assistant, it will be even better.

KEY SPECS

Quad-core 1.3GHz processor ■ 8in 1,280 x 800 pixels resolution screen ■ 2-megapixels rear camera ■ 16GB storage (12.09GB free) ■ MicroSD memory card slot ■ Fire OS operating system ■ 214 x 128 x 9.2mm ■ 341g

CHROMEBOOK

Acer Chromebook R11

£229.99 from www.amazon.co.uk
Tested: Issue 409

The Acer Chromebook R11 laptop has a keyboard that flips behind its touchscreen, so it can also be used as a tablet. It's not hugely powerful but it runs all the web apps you might need and its battery lasted over eight hours in our tests.

KEY SPECS

Dual-core 1.6GHz Intel Celeron N3050 processor ■ 2GB of memory ■ 11.6in touchscreen ■ 1,366 x 768 pixels resolution ■ 16GB eMMC drive ■ 1 x USB 2, 1 x USB 3 ports ■ 802.11ac Wi-Fi ■ SD card reader ■ 295 x 203 x 20mm ■ 1.2kg

WINDOWS 10 LAPTOP

Acer Aspire One Cloudbook 14

£199.98 from www.pcworld.co.uk
Tested: Issue 407

The Cloudbook 14 is as good a laptop as you'll get for less than £200. It's not particularly fast and doesn't have a brilliant display, but it's fantastic value, especially because it includes a year's subscription to Office 365 Personal.

KEY SPECS

Dual-core 1.6GHz Intel Celeron N3050 processor ■ 2GB of memory ■ 32GB SSD ■ 14.1in non-touchscreen ■ 1,366 x 768 pixels resolution ■ 1 x USB 3, 1 x USB 2 port ■ 802.11n Wi-Fi ■ 339 x 235 x 17.9mm ■ 1.6kg ■ One-year return-to-base warranty

All prices correct at time of review

E-READER

Amazon Kindle (2016)

£69.99 from www.amazon.co.uk
Tested: Issue 405

The Kindle is lightweight, great for reading and matches pricier rivals for usability and content. There's no front light but it's the best e-reader for under £100.

KEY SPECS
6in E Ink Pearl screen ■ 800 x 600 pixels resolution, 167 ppi ■ Optical touchscreen ■ 4GB storage ■ 160 x 115 x 9.1mm ■ 161g ■ No front light ■ £10 less with Amazon Special Offers

BUDGET SMARTPHONE

Motorola Moto G4

£159 from www.amazon.co.uk
Tested: Issue 404

This fantastic smartphone offers better features and performance than any other phone of this price. Its screen, battery life and cameras are all excellent.

KEY SPECS
5.5in screen ■ Octa-core 1.5GHz processor ■ 16GB of storage, expandable by 128GB ■ Android 6.0.1 Marshmallow ■ 1,980 x 1,080 pixels resolution ■ 153 x 77 x 7.9mm ■ 155g

MEDIA STREAMER

Roku 3

£83.98 from www.very.co.uk
Tested: Issue 403

The Roku 3 has all the best elements of the previous models and is as close to a perfect TV-streaming device as you'll find. It offers all the terrestrial catch-up services.

KEY SPECS
HDMI video output ■ 1 x USB 3 port ■ 512MB internal storage with microSD slot ■ 802.11n Wi-Fi and Ethernet connectivity ■ Plex and UPnP streaming servers ■ 89 x 89 x 25mm ■ 142g

WINDOWS 10 PC

Palicomp AMD Avenger

£500 from www.palicomp.co.uk
Tested: Issue 401

The Palicomp AMD Avenger's case provides plenty of room to upgrade. Its carefully chosen components offer good performance, especially when playing games.

KEY SPECS
Quad-core 4.5GHz AMD Athlon X4 880K processor ■ 8GB of memory ■ 1TB hard drive, 240GB SSD ■ 2 x USB 2 ports, 3 x USB 3 ports ■ Ethernet ■ 485 x 420 x 235mm

SOFTWARE & SERVICES

INTERNET SECURITY

Kaspersky Internet Security 2017

£19.95 from bit.ly/kaspersky2017
Tested: *Computeractive* Issue 493

Kaspersky is rock solid at protecting your PC from the worst of the web, and has come top in nine of our most recent tests, blocking all malware with its robust defences. Use the URL above to save £15.04 on the software (normal price £34.99).

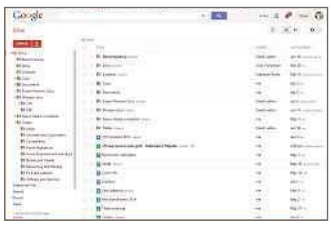
KEY FEATURES

Antivirus and firewall tools ■ Protects online shopping and banking ■ Identity and privacy tools ■ Dangerous-website alerts ■ New software updater ■ Secure-connection VPN ■ Advanced ad-blocking system ■ Multi-device version ■ Compatible with Windows 10

ONLINE STORAGE

Google Drive

From free from drive.google.com
Tested: Issue 389



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

16GB free storage ■ Web-based office software ■ Works with XP, Vista, 7, 8+ and 10 ■ Chrome browser add-on ■ Android and iOS apps ■ 100GB extra storage for £1.36 per month; 1TB for £6.01 per month; 10TB for £60.16 per month

WEB DESIGN

Xara Web Designer 11 Premium

£69.99 from www.xara.com
Tested: Issue 385

Xara Web Designer 11 is a great tool for anyone who wants a good-looking website without having to use HTML or CSS code. The interface is easy to use and the software includes all the tools you need to create flexible sites that change depending on the size of the screen.

KEY FEATURES

90+ templates ■ WYSIWYG design ■ Create responsive websites ■ Embed codes ■ Add HTML ■ Online editing ■ FTP uploader ■ Hosting (requires registration) ■ Browser preview (Chrome, Firefox, IE, Opera)

Web User Gold Award winners

SAFER-BROWSING TOOL

Webutation

NEW!

Free from www.webutation.net
Tested: Issue 417
The excellent Webutation combines a reliable blocker with a database built on trusted services and users' experiences.

ANDROID KEYBOARD

SwiftKey

Free from bit.ly/swiftkey416
Tested: Issue 416
SwiftKey is the king of Android keyboards, with an unmatched combination of features, usability and performance.

STICKY-NOTES TOOL

Stickies

Free from bit.ly/stickies415
Tested: Issue 415
Stickies is simple to use, lets you display almost anything in its notes and has lots of useful options.

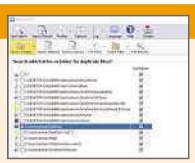
ANDROID CAMERA APP

Open Camera

Free from bit.ly/open414
Tested: Issue 414
Open Camera is by far the best replacement for your phone's camera app, and offers an unrivalled selection of tools.

DUPLICATE SCANNER

AllDup



Free from bit.ly/alldup413
Tested: Issue 413
AllDup frees up space on your hard drive by deleting duplicate files. Unlike similar tools, it's completely free.

READ-IT-LATER TOOL

Pocket

From free from getpocket.com
Tested: Issue 412
Pocket's free version is perfectly adequate for most users, especially its excellent, tag-based organising tools.

ENCRYPTION TOOL

VeraCrypt

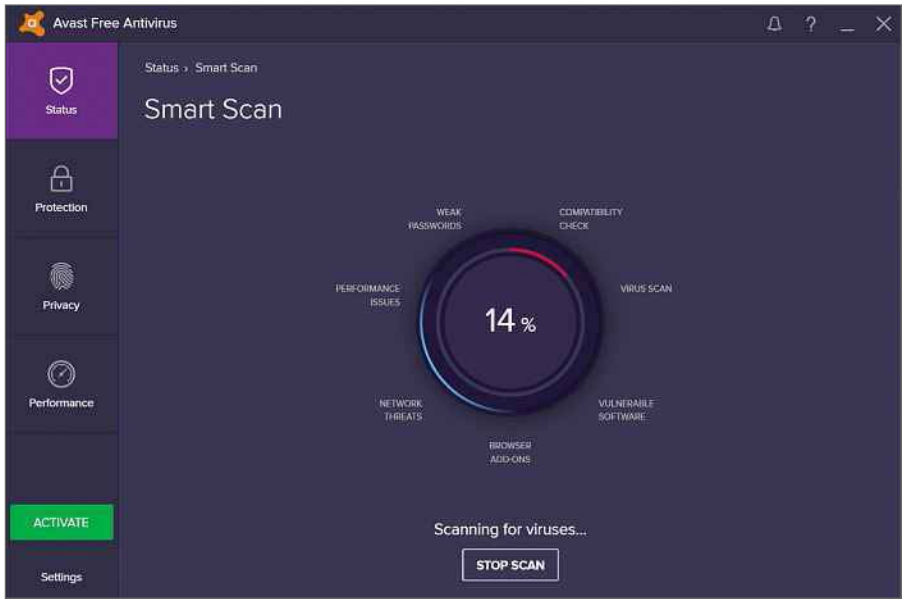
Free from bit.ly/veracrypt411
Tested: Issue 411
VeraCrypt's powerful encryption and container-style protection make working with encrypted files very easy.

Best Free Software

ANTIVIRUS SOFTWARE

Avast Free Antivirus 2017

www.avast.com
Min requirements:
Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 6.3MB



Two issues ago, in this very section, we featured the first new version of AVG Free since the company was taken over by Avast last September. Now Avast has released the first major update of its own antivirus software since the acquisition, and it's already easy to see the benefits that owning AVG will deliver to users.

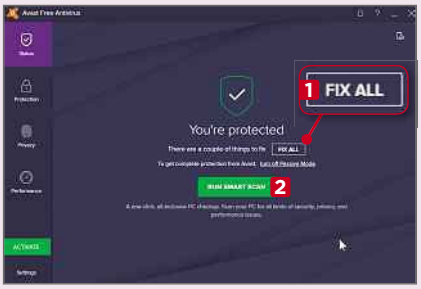
The most significant change is that the software now includes combined threat detection from both antivirus products, for increased protection. CyberCapture, Avast's cloud-based smart file scanner has been improved, reducing the amount of time it takes to detect and quarantine threats. Avast says CyberCapture analyses around 10,000 new files each day, and determines the safety of over half of those in under five minutes.

There's also a new Behaviour Shield that continuously monitors suspicious activity on your PC and protects you against it, while the Game Mode now automatically detects and prioritises game play for better, smoother performance.

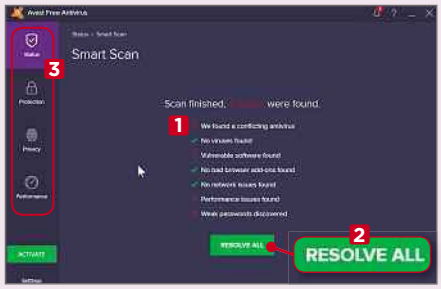
Avast's password-management feature has been redesigned and the Home Network Security feature, introduced in 2014, has been enhanced and given the snappier new name Wi-Fi Inspector. This automatically scans your home network for vulnerable devices and provides advice on what you should do to make them more secure. As with the new AVG Free, Avast's software can now be installed in Passive Mode, which allows it to run alongside your existing security software.

Finally, as is nearly always the case with any major new iteration of an antivirus program, Avast Free's interface has been given a stylish makeover that looks right at home on Windows 10.

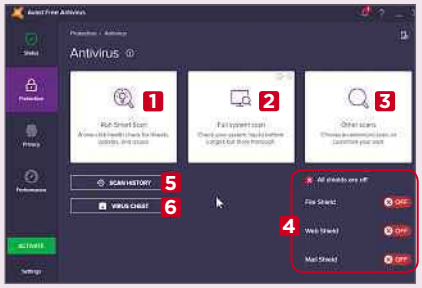
MINI WORKSHOP | Keep your PC safe with Avast Free Antivirus 2017



1 Avast checks your system and reports if there's anything obvious to repair, giving you the option to Fix All. **1** Click Smart Scan **2** to check your PC for problems such as malware, vulnerable software, network threats, performance issues, bad browser add-ons and weak passwords. You can stop the scan at any time.

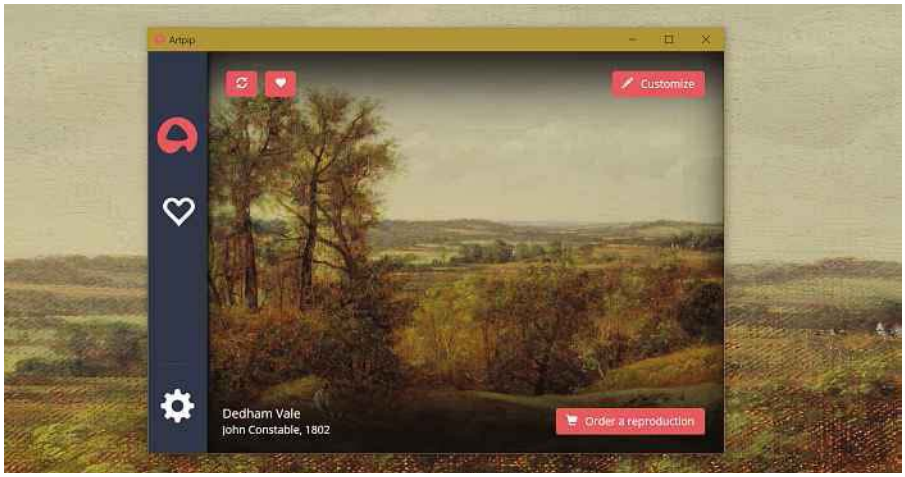


2 Avast lists any problems it finds **1** and lets you resolve them all by clicking a button. **2** The left-hand bar contains tabs to access various tools. **3** Click Status to go to the overview screen; Protection for all the security modules; Privacy for the Passwords Manager and VPN; and Performance to access Cleanup and Game Mode.



3 To check for malware, go to Protection and click Antivirus. You can run a Smart Scan, **1** a Full System scan **2** or Other scans, **3** such as Quick, Folder, USB/DVD, Boot-time or Custom. You can also manage virus shields, **4** view your Scan History **5** and explore the Virus Chest (quarantine area). **6**

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



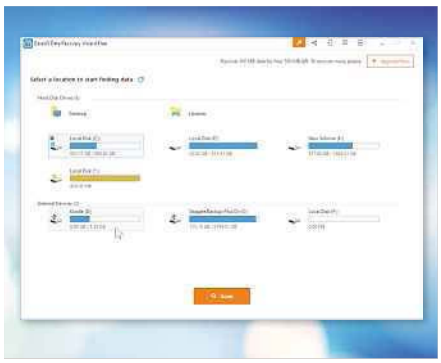
WALLPAPER CHANGER

Artpip

www.artpip.com

Min requirements: Windows 7/8+/10 (64-bit only), or Mac OS **File size:** 62.7MB

Artpip turns your Desktop into a virtual art gallery. Every hour, it downloads a new curated piece of artwork and sets it as your Windows wallpaper. These aren't low-res images, either – they are in Ultra HD 4K resolution, so if you have a large screen, you'll really appreciate the detail. You can customise the type of art you want to see and the frequency with which it changes; 'favourite' artwork you really like; and even buy a reproduction of the piece through the Artpip website.



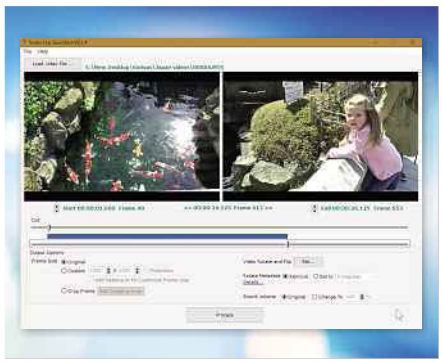
DATA-RECOVERY TOOL

EaseUS Data Recovery Wizard Free 11

bit.ly/easeus418

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 15.5MB

EaseUS Data Recovery Wizard Free restores data lost as a result of accidental deletion, hardware failure or formatting. Launch the program, choose what you're looking for and where, scan your device, then preview and recover the files it finds. The latest version has a new interface and improves the scanning process. The free version can recover a maximum of 2GB.



VIDEO EDITOR

Video Clip QuickTool

www.a4video.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 6.4MB

If you want to make quick changes to a video – rotate it, for example, or trim it of unwanted content – then using a full-blown video editor is the equivalent of using a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

Video Clip QuickTool lets you easily perform simple editing tasks. Drag and drop a video on to the interface, then use the slider to set the start and end points. If you want to rotate or flip the video, just select the relevant thumbnail.

New Windows Apps

Fallout Shelter

bit.ly/fallout418

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 1.41GB

The mobile spin-off game based on Bethesda's popular Fallout series finally comes to Windows 10. Build a vault to keep your dwellers happy and safe from threats. Be aware that it's a huge download, though.

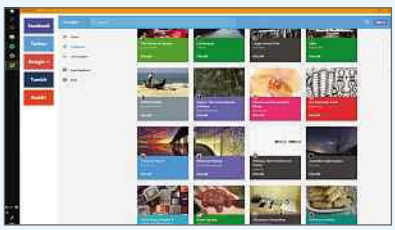
Social Client

bit.ly/socialc418

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 15.7MB

Social Client pulls all your favourite social networks together in one app. It currently supports Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, Tumblr and Reddit, with additional services due to be added in the future.



Complete Anatomy

bit.ly/anatomy418

Min requirements: Windows 10

File size: 1GB

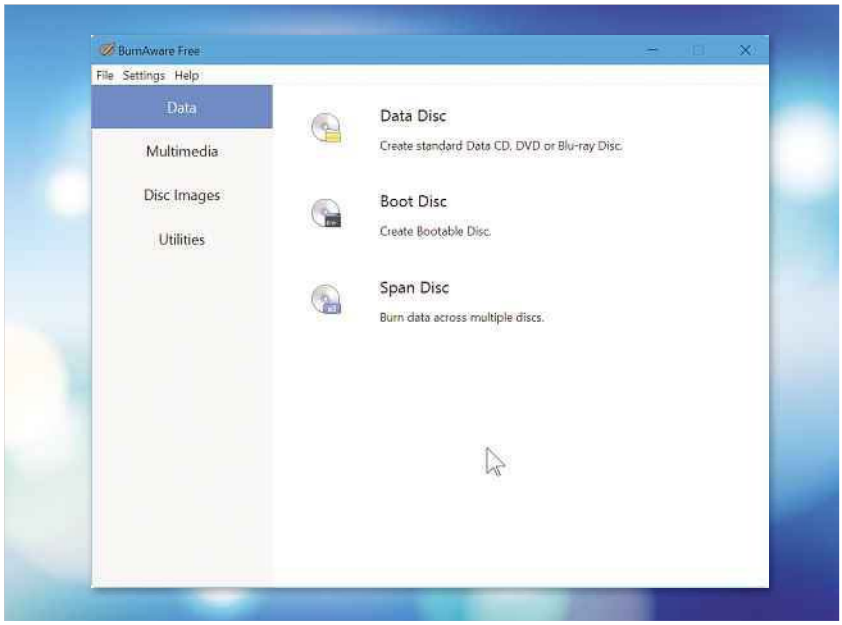
Another large app, Complete Anatomy lets you interact with the human body. You can explore the skeletal system and connective tissue, zoom in and out, and view information.

DISC-AUTHORING SOFTWARE

BurnAware Free 10

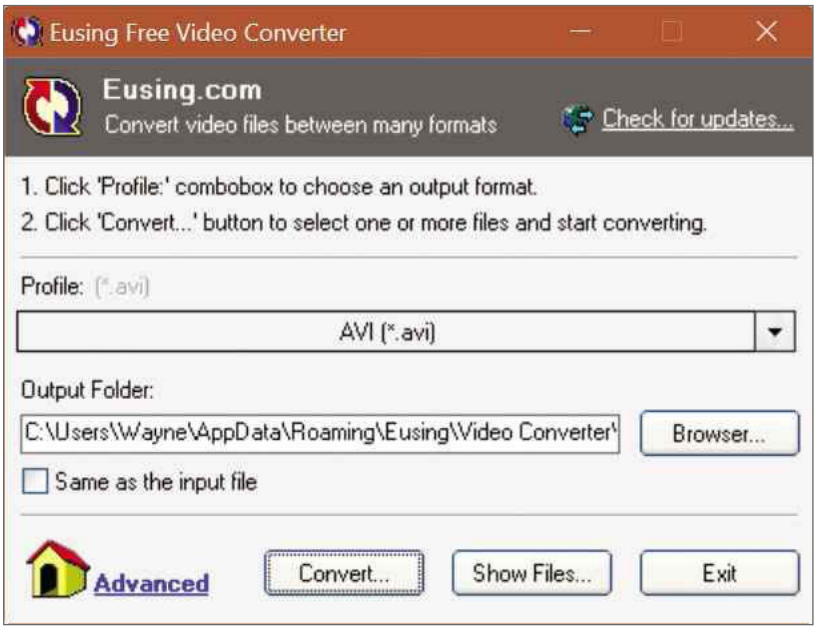
www.burnaware.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 6.6MB



BurnAware Free is one of the better free disc-authoring tools, and can write to all types of optical media, including Blu-rays. It can create bootable CDs and DVDs, split content across multiple discs, create video DVDs, burn or create ISO files and erase rewriteable discs so you can use them again. The latest version gains a new user interface – the first major update in quite some time – and adds much-needed support for high-DPI monitors and settings. Also, BurnAware Free now works with screen readers and adds command-line support to the 'Copy to Image' tool.

Be sure to decline the bundled junk during installation.



VIDEO CONVERTER

Eusing Free Video Converter 2

bit.ly/eusing418

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 4.1MB

If you're looking for a simple way to convert a video file from one format to another – so you can watch downloaded HD videos on your iPhone, for example – Eusing Free Video Converter is worth a look. All you need to do is click the Profile box in the centre of the main screen and choose a format to save the file in. This can be a general video (or audio) format such as AVI or MOV, or a type of device such as Apple iPhone or Google Android.

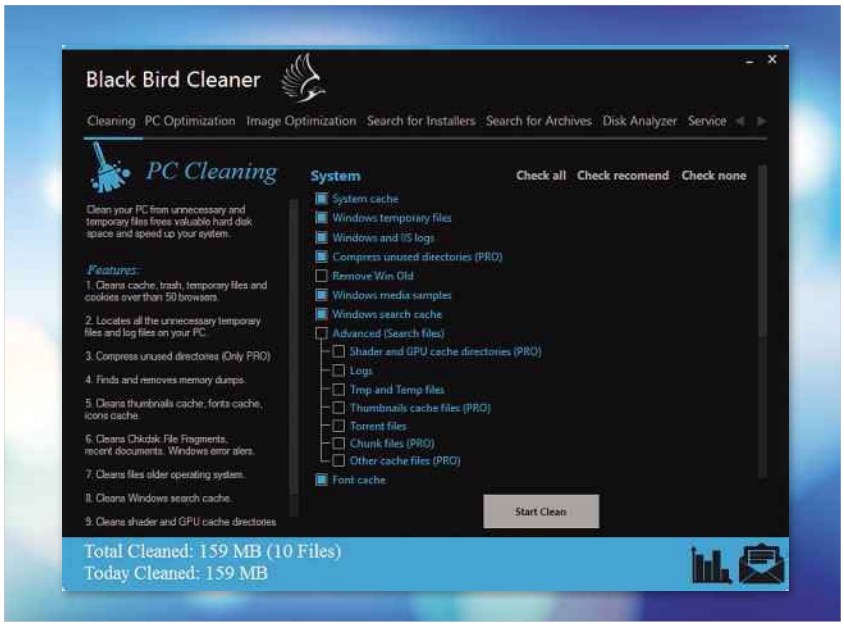
Choose a folder to output the file to, then click Convert to select your file. It's very easy to use and free of the bundled rubbish that comes with many video converters (yes, we're talking about you, Freemake Video Converter).

SYSTEM CLEANER

Black Bird Cleaner

blackbirdcleaning.com

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10 **File size:** 843KB



Black Bird Cleaner is a new, lightweight system cleaner that removes junk files and frees up space on your hard drive. You can choose which areas to target, and select all the cleaning options or just the recommended ones. In addition, there are sections for PC optimisation, image optimisation (which reduces the file size), a disk analyser, services manager and system information screen. The program can also find old installers and ZIP files for you to delete.

Note that some of the features, such as the options to compress unused directories and delete cached thumbnail files, are only available in the paid-for Pro edition.

GAME

Don't Do That!

bit.ly/dontdo418

Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 44.6MB

This is a fun game in which you control a wizard collecting ingredients for a magic potion. Point and click to navigate the labyrinthine library and drop the found food items into the cauldron. Out to stop you are a clowder (apparently) of cats, whose miaowing grows more urgent as the game progresses. You can use spells to defeat them.

✗ Don't install...

Fast Duplicate File Finder

www.mindgems.com
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 2.6MB

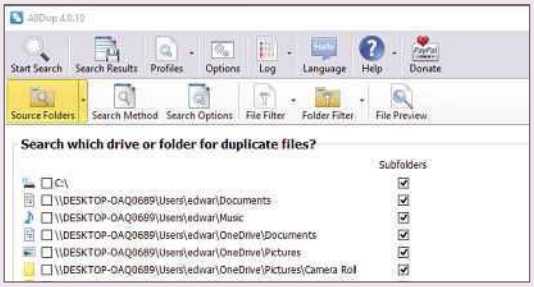
Clearing out duplicate files keeps your hard drive tidy, but this is far from the best tool for the job. While it lives up to its name by finding duplicates for you, it only removes them if you pay $39.95 (£32.15) to upgrade to the Professional edition. Of course, you could delete each file manually using the program's information but, frankly, life's too short.

...Install this instead ✓

AllDup

bit.ly/alldup418
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 6.3MB

AllDup is one of those rare programs that we can't recommend enough. Unlike similar duplicate finders, it's completely free to use and lets you quickly find multiple copies of images, videos, documents and music files on your PC, and remove them with a single click. One thing we particularly like is that it also lets you preview duplicates without opening any other software, making it easy to identify genuine duplicates and choose an appropriate action. You can permanently delete any duplicates it finds or move them to the Recycle Bin, and scan folders by right-clicking them.



UPDATED | New tweaks and fixes for your favourite free programs

SYSTEM CLEANER

CCleaner 5.27

www.piriform.com/ccleaner
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+
File size: 8.8MB

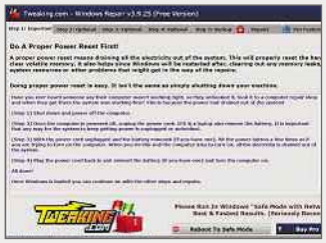
Yes, it's CCleaner update time again. This latest version improves cleaning in Firefox, Chrome, and Opera Beta, improves Windows 10 support and tweaks sorting in the Uninstall feature. It now includes an option to clean Foxit Reader 8.0.

PDF TOOLKIT

PDF Shaper 7.1

www.pdfshaper.com
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 8MB

PDF Shaper is a collection of useful PDF tools. The latest version adds the ability to merge protected and unprotected PDFs, and introduces support for form filling and saving. You can now export images in separate PDF files. Be sure to decline the bundled junk during installation.

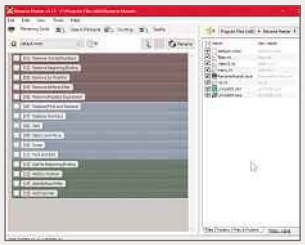


SYSTEM TOOL

Windows Repair 3.9.25

bit.ly/winrepair418
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 31.3MB

The excellent Windows Repair helps you fix all manner of annoying problems with a misbehaving PC. This updated version fixes problems with the Repair Environment Variables tool and overcomes a reported problem with removing duplicate items from a list.



SYSTEM TOOL

Rename Master 3.13

www.joejoesoft.com
Min requirements: Windows XP/Vista/7/8+/10
File size: 1.9MB

This handy free program lets you easily rename large groups of files in one go, and change the tags in MP3 files and JPEG images. The latest version adds a Keep Expanded option to the right-click context menu, and saves this setting. Various bugs have been fixed, too. ■

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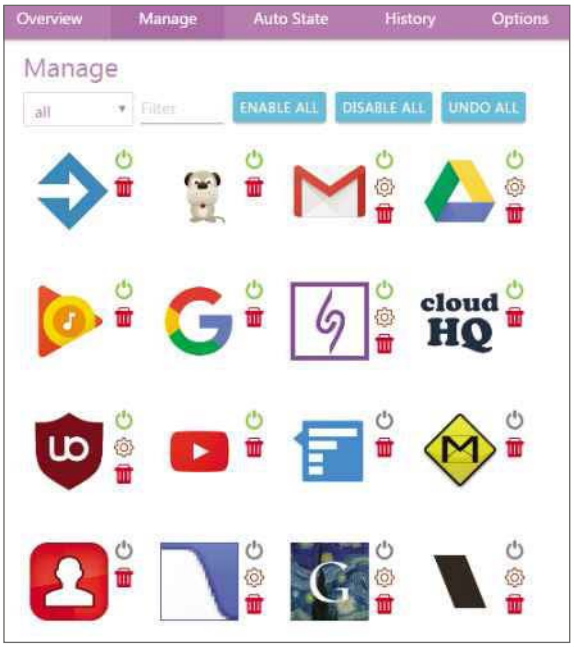
Best New Browser Tools

CHROME

Manage your Chrome extensions more easily



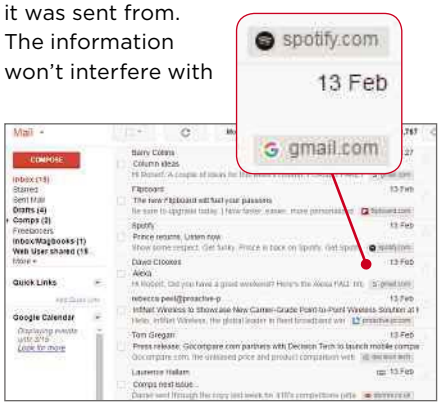
Chrome's extensions manager is pretty basic, consisting of little more than a list of add-ons that you can enable, disable or remove. For a superior alternative, meet NooBoss (bit.ly/noob418), which is decidedly different to the old boss and makes managing dozens of extensions a lot easier. It displays all your installed add-ons in a pop-up panel, either as a list or as icons.

NooBoss lets you quickly filter entries by typing a letter or two, and shows you at a glance which extensions are active. You can opt to receive Desktop notifications when they're updated, and enable or disable them all with a single click. Best of all, NooBoss lets you create rules so that specific add-ons become active only when you visit particular websites – for example, you could set your ad blocker to kick in on a particularly ad-stuffed site – which stops Chrome using too much memory.

Note that NooBoss automatically adds you to its community when you install the extension, but you can easily leave by deselecting the relevant option.

See at a glance where emails come from

It's obviously important to know who sent you an email, but it can also be useful to see which company or website the message came from. Perhaps, for example, you can't remember the name of the customer-support person who contacted you, or you suspect that a security warning may actually be a phishing scam. A new extension called Gmail Sender Icons (bit.ly/gmail418) makes life easier by adding information about the sender and an accompanying favicon (usually the company logo) to every email you receive. Not only does this make your inbox and Gmail search results look more colourful, it means you no longer have to open a message to find out which domain it was sent from. The information won't interfere with any other Gmail labels you use, and it's extracted locally in your browser, so no data is shared elsewhere.



Read comments while watching YouTube videos

When you're watching a video on YouTube, do you ever find yourself scrolling down to read the user comments and getting distracted from your viewing? If so, you'll appreciate a new add-on called Comment Mode (bit.ly/comment418), which moves the comments section to the top of the page and the video player to the right, so you can watch and read at the same time. Just click the speech-bubble icon on the video bar to activate comment mode or turn it off again. Currently, Comment Mode doesn't work when you watch videos full-screen, and it's a shame that comments can only be displayed to the left of the player, but it's a handy way to gauge people's views on what you're viewing.

Scale web pages for perfect printing

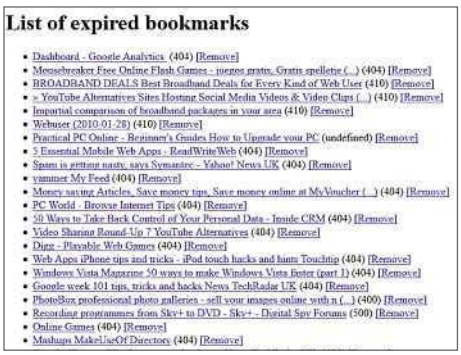
The latest version of Chrome (56) adds a useful new Print Scaling feature that should help reduce paper wastage when you're printing web pages and PDFs. By default, the feature rescales pages to 100% of the selected paper size so nothing will spill over onto extra sheets, but you can adjust the scale manually by clicking the 'More settings' link in the Print panel. Use the arrow buttons to increase or decrease the size of the printed content. This is a welcome addition to Chrome – especially as similar features have long been available in other browsers – but we still miss the 'Simplify page' option, which the developers removed in version 53 of the browser.

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

FIREFOX

Find and remove expired bookmarks

Clicking an old bookmark only to be told that "the page does not exist" is as disheartening as revisiting a favourite pub and finding that it's been knocked down. But who knows how many dead links are lurking in your Bookmarks folder, waiting to disappoint you? Find out by installing 404 Bookmarks (bit.ly/book418), a new Firefox add-on that scans your bookmarks collection for links to expired pages and lets you remove each one with a single click (although not all in one go). It isn't the prettiest of tools and, annoyingly, it rescans your entire collection of bookmarks every time you click its toolbar, but we were glad to be rid of such now-useless entries as '50 ways to make Vista faster' and 'Travel directions from Multimap'.



Get reminders to take screen breaks

It's amazing how long you can stare at your computer screen without blinking – and without even realising you haven't blinked. This can lead to dry, tired eyes and long-term vision problems, which is why Blink Reminder (bit.ly/blink418) is such a great idea. As you can probably guess from its name, this add-on reminds you to blink and look away from your monitor at regular intervals – every 20 minutes by default, although you can change the frequency in its settings. Reminders appear as Desktop notifications that are easy to close, and the add-on also nudges you take a 10-minute break once an hour, which sounds like a sensible idea to us!

Keep using plugins in Firefox 52

The latest version of Firefox is the first to drop support for plugins that use the Netscape Plugin Application Programming Interface (NPAPI) – with the exception of Adobe Flash, which is (unfortunately) still widely used across the web. To see for yourself, open the Add-ons Manager and click Plugins, and you'll notice that the list is now bare. If a favourite site still relies on a plugin – which indicates that it's pretty old – you can continue to use the likes of Java, QuickTime and Silverlight by downloading the Extended Support Release (bit.ly/extended418) edition of Firefox. This is aimed at businesses and schools rather than individuals "who always want the latest features, performance enhancements and technologies". The Extended Support Release will continue to support plugins, although some newer Firefox extensions (note the distinction) may not work. Also bear in mind that the reason Mozilla abandoned plugins in the first place is because they pose serious security and stability problems, so switch to ESR at your own risk.

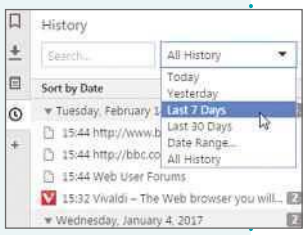
OTHER BROWSERS

Switch off JavaScript with one click

As we explained in our feature 'What your browser leaks about you', in Issue 416 (bit.ly/webuser416), JavaScript is essential to many websites, but it also poses a threat to your privacy and security. We recommended two tools for turning JavaScript on and off in Chrome and Firefox, and now there's one for Opera, too, in the form of JavaScript On/Off (bit.ly/js418). Click the toolbar button once to disable JavaScript and again to enable it. You can also add specific sites to a whitelist so that JavaScript is always allowed on them.

View your history in a side panel

All browsers keep a record of the sites you visit, but accessing your history (which you do by pressing Ctrl+H in most browsers) usually involves leaving the page you're viewing and opening a new tab. Vivaldi's latest innovation is to display your browsing history in a side panel that doesn't take you away from what you're doing. You can filter the panel's contents to show only entries from today, the past seven days or the past 30 days; search for a specific page; and see how many pages you visited on a particular day. To open the panel, click the clock icon on the left of the browser.



Best Free Apps

App of the Fortnight

NEWS & MAGAZINES

Flipboard 4

bit.ly/flipdroid418
bit.ly/flipios418
(varies with device)
9

UPDATED

Flipboard, which lets you read articles from millions of news sources for free, was named one of our 50 favourite apps in Issue 403's cover feature (bit.ly/webuser403). It's now gone back to the drawing board and relaunched with a new Smart Magazines tool that makes its content much easier to navigate.

Smart Magazines is the latest example of a trend for personalised news, following the likes of Google Play Newsstand (bit.ly/newsstand411) and the BBC News app (bit.ly/bbcnews418). Flipboard has always let you create customised magazines by combining favourite articles, but Smart Magazines now does the customising for you. It gets to know your tastes the more you use it, and employs real-life editors working alongside algorithms to show you more content that's of interest to you and less that isn't.

Some say this 'echo chamber' trend is unhealthy but with Flipboard, it's a practical necessity because it had grown too large to be manageable. In six years, it has amassed 30 million magazines in 34,000 topics, with new articles added almost constantly. Few of us have the time or inclination to wade through it manually.

This glut of content doesn't slow Flipboard down. Pages and search results load instantly and the 'flip' method of swiping up through pages works better than ever. Text and photos are rendered clearly, and video and audio support is seamless. Even in Airplane Mode, we were able to flip through page after page of headlines, though articles won't load unless you're online.

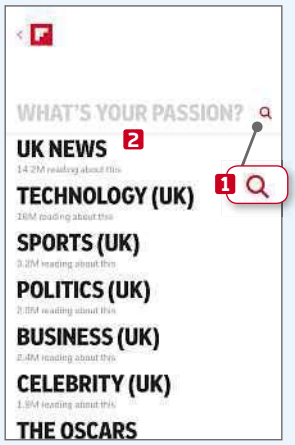
If you're not enjoying using the app, you can set up and use Flipboard in your browser (flipboard.com).

Our rating ★★★★★

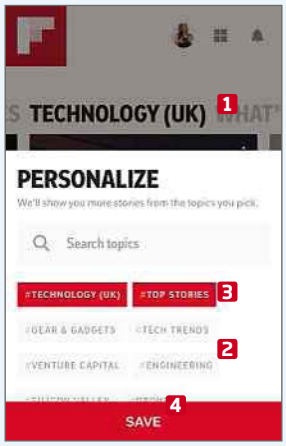
MINI WORKSHOP

Create your first Smart Magazine using Flipboard 4

1 Install and launch Flipboard. Tap 'Sign up' to create a Flipboard account, or 'Log in' to sign in using an existing account (such as Google, Facebook or Twitter). Tap Continue, then Next to skip the intro messages. Under 'New! Smart magazines', tap Get Started to see what Flipboard calls the Passion Picker screen, which displays a search box 1 and 'What's Your Passion?' categories. 2



2 The default list of 'passions' will reflect your location (such as UK News) and current events (such as The Oscars). Tap one to turn it into a Smart Magazine; we tapped 'Technology (UK)'. This takes you to its 'cover' screen 1 overlaid with related topics. 2 Swipe up to see more. Tap topics to add them to that magazine. The topics in red are added already. 3 Tap Save. 4



3 Tap the four squares to see your profile, which includes your automatically created Flipboard handle. 1 To access your new Smart Magazine, tap '1 Magazine', 2 then tap the magazine 3 to read its latest content. Swipe up to 'flip' through pages. Tap back to return to your profile. To create another magazine, tap the F icon, 4 then swipe from the right until you reach the Passion Picker screen again.

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

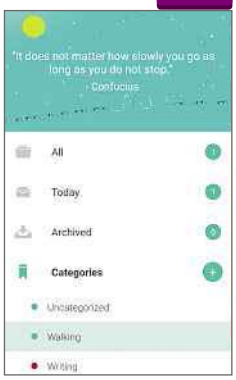
PRODUCTIVITY

NEW

HabitHub

thehabithub.com

4



"Don't break the chain" is the secret of productivity, according to US comedian Jerry Seinfeld, and HabitHub is the latest app to be inspired by this credo. Seinfeld's own low-fi approach is to cross each day's work off a wall calendar as you complete it, then never break the chain of crosses; HabitHub puts that calendar in your pocket. You can build multiple habit chains in different categories; get reminders and rewards; track your progress on graphs showing your best 'habit streaks'; and then back up your data to Dropbox. An iOS version is due soon.

Our rating ★★★★☆

PETS

NEW

PawSquad

bit.ly/pawdroid418

bit.ly/pawios418

4.1 8

You can book a home visit from a vet and even get a video consultation using this UK service, which has now launched an app after two years online (www.pawsquad.com). Consultations aren't free, of course – vets charge from £48 to visit your poorly pet, and the service currently only covers parts of London, Edinburgh, Essex and Staffordshire, hence our meagre star rating. But the app is free to download and use. It includes a booking service, text and video chat, registration for your pet and a prescription-reminder tool.

Our rating ★★★☆☆

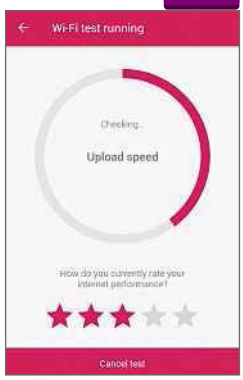
INTERNET

NEW

Ofcom Checker

bit.ly/ofcom418

4.4 9.1



Find out how fast your internet is and should be, using this free new tool from internet watchdog Ofcom. The 'Check availability' screen reveals available speeds and providers for your location; 'Run a test' measures your Wi-Fi and mobile internet in real time; and 'Test history' tracks your measurements on graphs. Some of the app's conclusions are a bit odd – it judged our Wi-Fi to be good for video and games but poor for web browsing, which makes no sense at all – but the raw measurements are useful, and it's certainly easy to use.

Our rating ★★★★☆

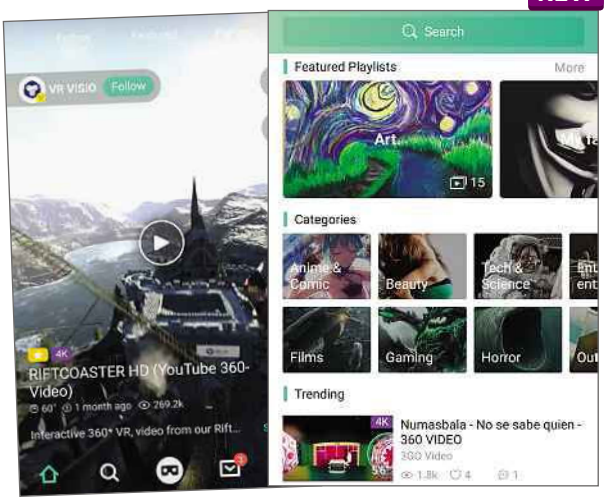
VR

NEW

VeeR VR

veer.tv

4.4 8



VeeR is like YouTube for hundreds of short 360-degree videos, all contributed by a community of 'creators'. You'll get the best experience by sticking your phone in a VR (virtual reality) headset such as Google Cardboard, then getting immersed in the rollercoaster rides, music concerts, mountain expeditions and so on, but you can watch without a headset, too. You don't even need an account but if you create one, you can build playlists, follow users and upload your own short films.

We were surprised by the range and quality of videos on offer. VeeR is not just a platform, it's a curated VR channel with great browsing tools and highly entertaining content. Categories include Anime, Nature and Horror as well as the more obvious VR genres of Outdoor and Gaming, and you can download videos for watching offline.

Our rating ★★★★★

GET THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO ANDROID

Our updated Android MagBook is packed with 148 pages of apps, workshops and advice to unlock the full potential of your tablet and phone.

Discover how to:

- Master new tools in Lollipop and Marshmallow
- Stop apps leaking your personal data
- Record anything on your phone and tablet
- Prevent updates from wrecking your device
- Remove hidden junk so it never comes back
- Switch from iOS without losing data

Order it now from Amazon at bit.ly/androidbook2016

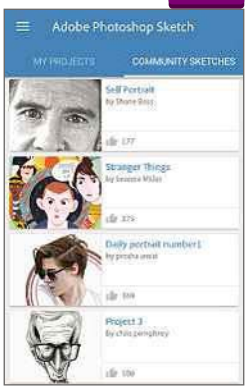
DRAWING

Adobe Photoshop Sketch

bit.ly/sketch418

4.4

NEW



Graphics powerhouse Adobe has finally launched an Android version of its drawing app, more than two years after iOS (bit.ly/sketchios418). The 58MB app turns your phone or tablet screen into a powerful sketchbook equipped with virtual pencils, pens, felt-tips, pastels, ink brushes and rubbers, along with Photoshop tools including layers and masks for turning your sketches into detailed masterpieces. There's full integration with other Adobe tools, including Photoshop and Illustrator, via your Adobe ID (which you need to sign in with), and a Community Sketches section where you can share your work and get inspiration from fellow artists.

Our rating ★★★★★

PRIVACY

Ooniprobe

bit.ly/ooni418

2.3 8

NEW

Is your ISP blocking certain websites? This new tool from privacy organisation Tor aims to find out. It lets you run tests to check for evidence of censorship, network tampering and surveillance, either by your provider or some shady interloper (government, hackers, the usual). One of the tests identifies activity that's affecting your internet speed, which is probably more relevant to most of us. Now for the bad news – your test results will be published, apparently in the interests of transparency, so you might want to exclude your IP address and other identifying data. For more privacy tools and tricks, see our cover feature on page 38.

Our rating ★★★★☆

5 NEW APPS WORTH PAYING FOR

PUZZLE

unWorded

www.bento-studio.com

Price: Android £3.39, iOS £3.99

2.3 6

Create objects by assembling letters, then piece together a mystery story about a writer. Garlanded with awards following its iOS launch in November, this beautifully designed game is now available on Android, too.

TV

Kodi Cast Toggle

bit.ly/kodicast418

Price: 99p

4

Use Kodi? Got a Chromecast? Then the next thing you'll want is this app, which is a simple switch for casting Kodi content from your Android device.

PRIVACY

Disable Incognito Mode

bit.ly/disable418

Price: 79p

5

This app lets you stop anyone using Incognito mode in Chrome on your device. Why? To ensure that nobody – a child, perhaps – uses it for things they shouldn't.

NEWS

Inquire by Tamper

bit.ly/inquire418

Price: 99p

8

Get a list of relevant Wikipedia articles that match your current location or today's trending topics, along with a hand-picked selection in categories such as Movies Filmed Nearby.

CALENDAR

Vantage Calendar

bit.ly/vantage418

Price: £3.99

9

Plan your days, weeks and months on a scrolling Star Wars-style timeline, using this new iOS app that replaces the traditional grid calendar with customisable graphics.

unWorded | Kodi Cast Toggle | Disable Incognito Mode | Inquire by Tamper | Vantage Calendar

Best New Mobile Games

SIMULATION NEW

Raft Survival Simulator

bit.ly/raftdroid418
bit.ly/raftios418
4.0.3 7

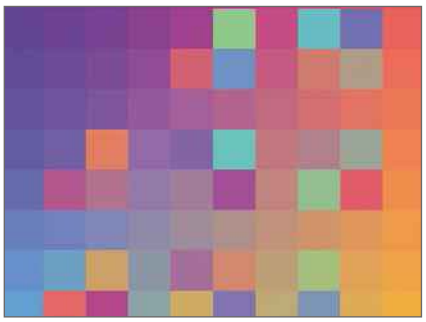
Would you sink or swim if your ship was wrecked at sea? Better still, could you build a raft and survive the ocean waves? That's the aim of this game, in which you construct a sophisticated and sturdy raft from passing flotsam; collect equipment and grow plants; fish for food and desalinate seawater; and fend off a hungry shark that wants you for breakfast. Raft Survival Simulator boasts excellent graphics and, although its controls are a bit fiddly and you have to put up with ads, it's great preparation if you ever find yourself stranded at sea.

Our rating ★★★★☆

PUZZLE NEW

I Love Hue

i-love-hue.com
4.0.3 6



If noisy, hectic games make you want to hurl your phone across the room, then calm your mind with I Love Hue – "a gentle journey into colour and perception" – in which you arrange mosaics of coloured tiles into solid spectrums by tapping and dragging them into place. When you move one tile, the surrounding blocks also move, and some are pinned into place. With its soothing synth soundtrack, I Love Hue is incredibly therapeutic and addictive, and the satisfaction you get from completing the increasingly tricky levels is immense.

Our rating ★★★★★

RACING NEW

Parker's Driving Challenge

bit.ly/parker418
4.1 7.1

If you like racing games and you love *Thunderbirds*, you'll be grasping your gear stick with glee at Parker's Driving Challenge. You take on missions set by Lady Penelope to find and recover items, and chase down the dastardly Hood, who is building a monstrous machine to funnel the sun's energy into his evil hands. Along the way, you get to drive a variety of souped-up vehicles, with Brains providing upgrades, some of which allow you to fly. There's plenty to enjoy in this challenging game, though the controls take some patience to master.

Our rating ★★★★☆

✗ Don't install...

Peak Hiker

bit.ly/peak418

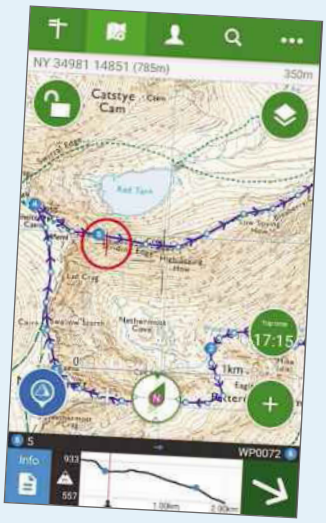
It's unusual to find an app on Google Play with a one-star rating, but such is the dismal score deservedly bestowed on this piece of rubbish. Ostensibly aimed at people who like hiking mountain peaks, it's supposed to use augmented reality to identify and measure terrain. However, its messy design and sluggish performance prevent it from providing any useful information, which makes the £1.02 charge a complete waste of money.

...Install this instead ✓

ViewRanger – Trails & Maps

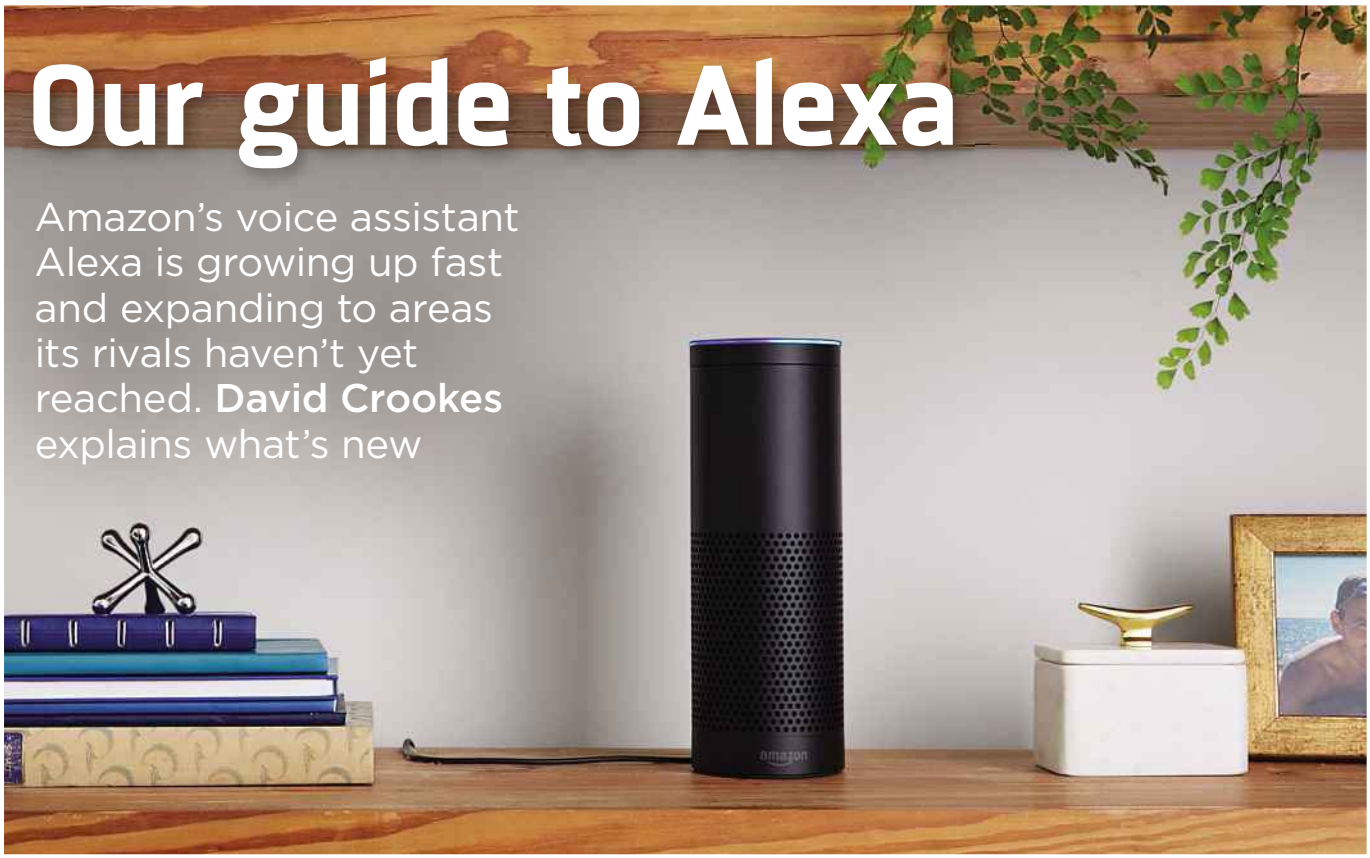
bit.ly/viewranger418
(varies with device) 8

Get out of your car and explore scenic rural splendour and historical city districts on foot or by bike using the brilliant ViewRanger app. This provides outdoor trails for countries all over the world, which you can browse by distance, difficulty level 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 stranded if you lose your mobile signal, and you can record and share your progress while finding nearby points of interest and places to stay. ViewRanger is free to use, but you need to pay to view its detailed Ordnance Survey and topographic maps. ■



FAQ

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



Our guide to Alexa

Amazon's voice assistant Alexa is growing up fast and expanding to areas its rivals haven't yet reached. **David Crookes** explains what's new

Haven't we already met?

Yes, it's quite likely. Alexa, Amazon's voice-activated virtual assistant, was released in November 2014 and is best known for living inside the Echo smart speaker, where she obeys commands to play music, place online orders, read recipes and perform other tasks. She's already proved a versatile rival to Apple's Siri, Microsoft's Cortana and Google Assistant, and now she appears to be on the path to digital domination.

Blimey. What's changed?

Alexa's reach has been growing as more and more developers build and publish skills for her. Skills are similar to apps, and they expand Alexa's capabilities by allowing her to perform lots of new tasks, whether it's ordering a pizza or calling for an Uber taxi (for a full list, see bit.ly/skills418). That's just half the story, though. Not content with being a central part of Amazon's own products, whether that's the Echo or Fire TV, Alexa is being built into a growing number of devices. By interacting with scores of third-party smart-home products, Alexa is taking automation to another level.

Alexa has broken out of Amazon's Echo speaker in a bid to conquer the world

Why is Alexa growing so fast?

In June 2015, Amazon made the important decision to open its voice-recognition technology to third-party developers and manufacturers. It did this by releasing two free products. The first was the Alexa Skills Kit (bit.ly/skillskit418), which allows professionals and hobbyists to create new skills and integrate Alexa into existing products. The second was Alexa Voice Service (AVS, bit.ly/voice418), which lets manufacturers embed Alexa in their devices so users don't need to buy an Echo to issue voice commands.

Which types of products have Alexa built in?

Anything and everything, it seems. One of the most illuminating items is the stylish C by GE Lamp (cbyge.com). This has AVS inside and works like an Echo, so you can issue all manner of commands, such as "Alexa, what's the news?" and "Alexa, wake me up at 8am". The difference is that it has a large circular lamp on top that you can turn on and off using your voice.

Just as impressive is LG's Smart InstaView Refrigerator (bit.ly/lgfridge418), which has a 29in touchscreen as well as Alexa built in.

What other devices does it work with?

Among the many devices with Alexa built in are the thermostats made by Nest (nest.com) and British Gas' Hive (www.hivehome.com). So, for example, you can say "Alexa, tell Hive to put the heating on at 25 degrees".

Ask Alexa to warm your home, then blame her when the heating bill arrives

In fact, Alexa is ideally suited to home automation because the technology has gained support from companies such as Belkin Wemo, Samsung SmartThings and LIFX.

Thanks to Alexa, you can ask your Huawei Mate how to pronounce its name

Does it work with portable gadgets?

Yes. Fitbit was the first wearable-technology company to work with Alexa, so users can ask how many calories they've burned, the number of steps taken and how much water they've consumed. Meanwhile, phone manufacturer Huawei has installed Alexa in its Mate 9 handset – making it the first mobile company to do so.

So, can Alexa follow me about?

Yes, and she can even take you for a ride. Ford, Volkswagen and Hyundai are building Alexa into their vehicles, while BMW's Connected phone app allows Alexa to check fuel levels and lock vehicles remotely. Then there's Logitech's ZeroTouch dock and app, which lets drivers plug in their Android phone to receive traffic alerts, listen to music and make calls without using their hands.

Alexa can keep you entertained while you're stuck in a tailback on the motorway

Are there any unusual Alexa devices?

Of course. There's an Alexa-enabled robot called Lynx by Ubtech, which can tell who it's talking to just by looking. Then there's Hubble Hugo, a robot that's reportedly able to detect emotions accurately. Odd skills abound, too. You can try the Sixties computer program Eliza to engage with a virtual psychotherapist, and read out your email address to Have I Been Pwned (haveibeenpwned.com) to see if your account has been compromised in a data breach. You can even ask Alexa to look up the rules of board games.

This Alexa-enabled robot can tell you its plans to destroy mankind

Doesn't this mean Amazon is gathering data about me?

Yes, and the company has admitted as much. Nikko Strom, one of the founding members of Amazon's Alexa and Echo team, said, "we get an insane amount of data coming in that we can work on." But before you consider ditching Alexa, it's worth knowing what kind of data the company is gathering. When you ask Alexa a question, your audio is encrypted and sent to the cloud for processing. These recordings are analysed, together with any information from third-party services, so that over time the results you receive become more accurate. The data Amazon retains includes the location of your Alexa device. In the spirit of transparency, however, you can go to Settings, History in the Alexa app to review everything you've said, and delete anything you don't like.

But isn't it always listening to my conversations?

Alexa is 'always on', but doesn't record and store everything you say. It's simply listening for the 'wake word', which by default is "Alexa". Only when it hears that word does it start to record.

The recording includes the fraction of a second before you say "Alexa" and stops as soon as your request is processed. On an Echo speaker, you can tell when Alexa is recording by the rotating blue light that runs around the top. You can stop Alexa listening at any time by pressing the microphone button on the top of your device.

Still, it's all about getting us to buy more from Amazon, isn't it?

Not according to Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos. Although Alexa can certainly be used to buy goods from Amazon, Bezos told Billboard: "Alexa is primarily about identifying tasks in the household that would be improved by voice". He says that music and home automation are its big selling points. One thing's for sure, though: it's only set to become more widespread, at least in the short term. Martin Garner, an analyst at CCS Insight, told the BBC that Amazon is pushing Alexa hard and "building out the ecosystem quickly". Considering Alexa is said to have cost the company $330m (around £265m) in 2016 – a figure that's forecast to rise to $600m (about £480m) this year – it can't afford not to make money back.

Jeff Bezos dreads the day Alexa starts flirting with boys and staying out late

ALEXA, WHAT'S THE NEWS?

Accidental orders

Alexa hit the headlines in January when a TV news anchor in San Diego activated viewers' devices while discussing the story of a girl who had inadvertently ordered a toy through her parents' Amazon Echo. He said, "I love the little girl, saying 'Alexa ordered me a dollhouse'," which activated lots of Echoes in and around the Californian city, each of which tried to order a dollhouse of its own.

How rude!

Manners don't cost anything, but when it comes to Alexa, there's no need to say please and thank you. This, however, is causing concern as some parents suggest she's teaching their kids to be rude (bit.ly/alexarude418). Still, it's not as bad as the moment, captured on video, when a child asked, "Alexa, play 'Digger, Digger'" and received the reply, "You want to hear a station for porn", followed by a string of rude words.

Alexa, whodunnit?

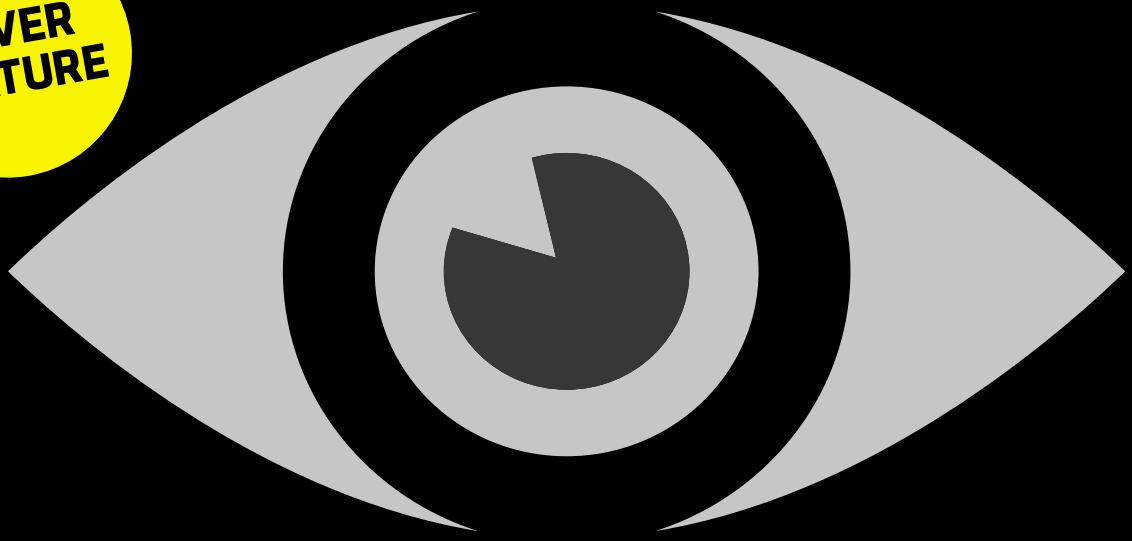
Last December, Amazon refused to hand over information recorded by an Echo speaker after police in Arkansas obtained a warrant for a device belonging to suspect James Bates. Officers believed it may have contained voice evidence that would prove Bates had strangled his friend in a hot tub. "Amazon objects to over-broad or otherwise inappropriate demands as a matter of course," the company said.

Your Complete Guide to...

STAYING ANONYMOUS

You're never alone on the web – there's always someone or something watching you. **Jane Hoskyn, Edward Munn** and **Robert Irvine** explain how to beat the snoopers and be completely invisible online

COVER FEATURE



Spammers, scammers and other snoopers have devious ways of tracking your every online move. Google knows more about what you've been up to than you do, and eavesdroppers have become adept at piecing together your so-called digital 'fingerprint' or 'footprint' from even your most mundane web activity – then using it to work out who you are, what you do and even where you live.

Fortunately, there are ways to dodge these spies, without sacrificing the pleasure and convenience of life online. We're not about to tell you to delete your Facebook account, stop using Google tools altogether or turn to the Dark Web – well, you can if you want, but these extreme measures aren't the only ways to guard your identity.

In our complete guide to staying anonymous online, you'll discover how to safeguard your details against even the most persistent privacy invaders, using settings, tweaks and free tools that let you go about your usual browsing business as easily and quickly as ever – but without being spied on. We also pick our nine essential browser add-ons for preserving your anonymity (see page 46) and reveal exactly who is watching you on the web – and how worried you should be.

SEE HOW MUCH INFO YOU'RE LEAKING

Find out how easily you can be identified

Off the top of your head, can you name your ISP (internet service provider), browser version and internet connection type? Your browser can. It also knows where you live and the configuration of your PC, such as the operating system you're using and your screen resolution.

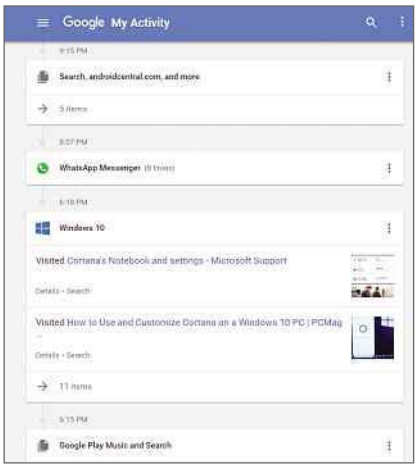
This information creates what's known as your online fingerprint (or footprint). It's available to every website you load in your browser, so it can tailor content to suit you, for example by displaying the correct language and currency. But if websites can see and use this data, so can advertisers, eavesdroppers, government agencies and hackers.

The free online tool MyBrowserInfo (mybrowserinfo.com) reveals how much fingerprint data you're broadcasting right now. First, it displays your IP (internet protocol) address, which gives away your location. Click 'See Detailed Location and Browser Information' to view your connection speed, Windows version, screen resolution, which cookies and plugins you've enabled, and much more. The point is that if MyBrowserInfo can see this stuff, so can anyone – easily.

Visit MyBrowserInfo.com to check which 'fingerprint' details you're leaking

YSMF shows where you're logged in and how easy you are to spot

You become even easier to identify and track if you stay logged into online accounts all the time. Your Social Media Fingerprint (bit.ly/social418) is an open-source web tool that reveals where you're signed in right now. When we tried it, it reminded us that we're still logged into a Blogger account we'd forgotten about years ago.



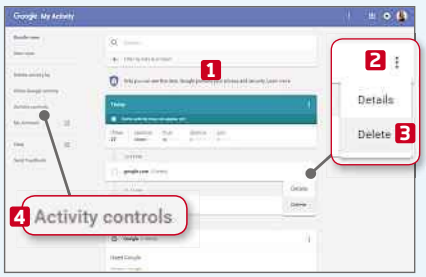
Google is watching you at all times, as your My Activity timeline reveals

Discover what Google knows about you

Google's new My Activity tool (myactivity.google.com) is based on a searchable timeline of your every move, as tracked by Google. If you use Chrome, Android and Windows 10, and sign into third-party services using your Google account, your timeline will cover nearly everything you do on your computer, phone and tablet. It's quite unsettling.

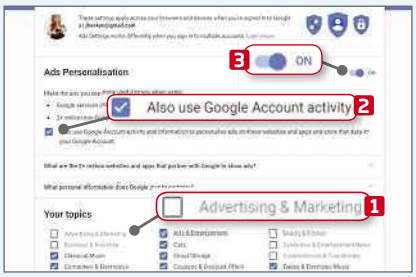
To its credit, Google has loaded My Activity with ways to limit the tracking – and to block advertisers from using the data it collects. Find out how in our Mini Workshop below.

MINI WORKSHOP | Block Google's trackers using My Activity



1 Go to myactivity.google.com in any browser. Sign into Google and click through the introductory screens (they won't appear again), then scroll through your timeline. 1 To remove any items from it, and also from Google's servers, click the three-dots icon, 2 then Delete. 3 Click OK in the box that opens, then click Delete. To configure your tracking settings, click 'Activity controls'. 4

2 By default, Google tracks all your 'Web & App Activity', which includes Chrome browsing, Android apps and even Cortana activity. To limit this tracking, untick 'Include Chrome browsing history and activity...', 1 then click Pause. To switch it off completely, click the toggle so it turns grey, 2 then click Pause. This doesn't delete previously collected data from your timeline or from Google's servers.



3 To manage the data Google shares with advertisers, scroll to the bottom of the 'Activity controls' page, then click Ads. You'll see a list of your interests, as determined by Google. Untick any to remove them 1 or untick 'Also use Google Account activity...' to remove them all. 2 To prevent Google from using your data to 'personalise' its services, click the toggle to Off. 3

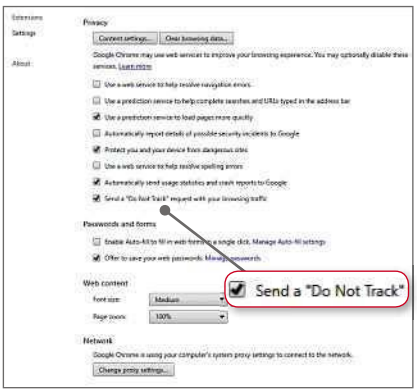
LOCK DOWN YOUR BROWSER

Enable Do Not Track

Your first line of defence against trackers is to enable Do Not Track, a kind of auto-response feature designed to fend off nosy parkers. To do this in Chrome, click the three-dots icon, then Settings, then 'Show advanced settings' and tick the option 'Send a "Do Not Track" request with your browsing traffic'. In Firefox, open the menu, then select Options (or type `about:preferences` in the address bar), then click Privacy. Click 'manage your Do Not Track settings' then tick 'Always apply Do Not Track'.

Do Not Track doesn't slow down your browsing or stop websites working – but that's because it's not particularly powerful. It's a request, not a rule. In fact, it might as well be called Do Not Track If That's OK Oh Go On Then.

A properly configured browser should be using other ways to protect your identity as well. To check if it's doing this, run the free online test Panopticlick (panopticlick.eff.org), created by the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF, www.eff.org). Panopticlick reveals whether your browser blocks tracking adverts; whether it blocks invisible trackers; and whether it takes steps to protect your fingerprint data. Brace yourself for a 'Mixed results' verdict at best. We got just one 'yes', and we owe that to our ad-blocking extension.



Do Not Track is your browser's first line of defence against snoopers

Panopticlick reveals whether your browser is keeping trackers at bay

Get rid of cookies and plugins

Cookies and plugins speed up your browsing and generally make the web work properly, but they're also used to track you as a matter of course. If privacy is your priority, get rid of them.

In Chrome, go to Privacy in Settings and click 'Content settings' (or type `chrome://settings/content` in the address bar). Set it to keep cookies 'until you quit your browser' and 'Block third-party cookies and site data'. Then click 'All cookies and site data' and go through the list of data-storing files downloaded to your computer by a website or advertiser. There may be hundreds. Hover over one, then click the cross to remove it, or click 'Remove all'.

Next, scroll down the Content Settings window and disable JavaScript and Flash. You can also disable 'Background sync' to prevent closed tabs sending and receiving data; prevent sites from tracking your location; block all pop-ups; and block access to your webcam and microphone.

In Firefox, go to Options then Privacy. Click 'Remember history' then select 'Use custom settings for history'. In the options that appear, click Always to open the drop-down menu, then select Never to block third-party cookies.

In Internet Explorer, you can manage cookies under the Privacy tab in Internet Options. In Edge, go to Settings then click 'Choose what to clear'.

Block some online trackers and click 'All cookies' to see how many follow you

WHY NOT TO USE AUTO-FILL

Just below the Do Not Track tick box in your Chrome settings you'll see a useful-sounding option, 'Enable Auto-fill to fill in web forms in a single click.' Don't tick it! It recently emerged that auto-fill tools in browsers including Chrome, Safari and Opera can easily be exploited by hackers to extract your phone number, address and bank card number.

Finnish developer Viljami Kuosmanen discovered that when you use auto-fill to enter basic info such as your email address on a phishing website, other sensitive profile data stored by your browser – such as your bank card – can be made to appear automatically in hidden text boxes. Easy pickings for a hacker. See for yourself in Kuosmanen's online demonstration (bit.ly/autofill418).

Firefox, Edge and Internet Explorer don't suffer this problem because they don't have built-in auto-fill, but Firefox is planning to add it soon. For your own safety and privacy, don't enable it. If you really can't be bothered to type your details manually, use a secure password manager-cum-digital wallet such as LastPass (lastpass.com) or Dashlane (www.dashlane.com).

Browse in incognito mode

All the big browsers have a private-browsing mode. In Chrome, it's incognito mode (press Ctrl+Shift+N to open an incognito window); in Firefox it's Private Mode (Ctrl+Shift+P) and in Edge it's InPrivate (also Ctrl+Shift+P).

Whatever you call it, this mode – which you can use in one window while you browse normally in another window – lets you search and visit websites without leaving a trace. No history is saved, no content is cached, and all cookies and temporary files are cleared when you close the window. Anyone using the same computer won't know what you've looked at or searched for.

Chrome's incognito mode hides where you've been, but it's not anonymous

Well, we say "without leaving a trace", but incognito browsing isn't anonymous. It doesn't hide your browsing from your ISP, the police or even the websites you visit. Snoopers and advertisers can still use trackers and other cookies; they just can't leave them behind.

USE A DISPOSABLE EMAIL ADDRESS

If you're not happy about being asked to 'Enter your email address,' for no good reason, you can get an anonymous, temporary address from Guerrilla Mail (www.guerrillamail.com). Go to the site and copy the address it currently displays. It'll display a new one every 10 seconds. Use the temporary address to confirm you're a real person as and when needed, and then dispose of it. There's a free Guerrilla Mail Android app, too (bit.ly/guerrilla418).

Set Firefox Private Mode to block all trackers

Firefox now enables basic Tracking Protection by default in Private Mode. This blocks advertising, analytics and social-sharing trackers included in the 'basic protection' list compiled by security firm Disconnect.me (disconnect.me) but it still doesn't block all trackers, because some are necessary for websites to work.

If you want to block all known trackers, go to Options in Firefox, then Privacy, then click Change Block List. Tick 'Disconnect.me strict protection', click Save Changes and then click OK to restart Firefox. This means you won't be tracked at all in Private Mode, but the trade-off is that some websites may not work properly. If this happens, you can temporarily disable Tracking Protection by clicking the shield icon on the address bar.

TIGHTEN YOUR FACEBOOK SETTINGS

Learn Facebook's privacy secrets

Facebook and anonymity go together like a horse and roller skates, but that's no reason to leave your privacy at the door – as the social network's new Privacy Basics page (www.facebook.com/about/basics) is keen to remind you. Privacy Basics is an online user manual of slideshows containing tips about your Facebook Settings (www.facebook.com/settings) along with useful links. For example, the Manage Your Privacy section contains a dozen slideshows including Search ('What do people who aren't my friend see when they search for me?') and 'Photos & Videos I'm In' ('How do I control whether Facebook recognises me in photos and videos?'). The Advertising section explains how to control Facebook's infernal targeted ads. Every slideshow ends with an invitation to 'Take the Privacy Checkup', which confirms just how anonymous your Facebook activity isn't. Click the Edit links to limit the audience and choose 'Only me' for all personal details – your Facebook friends don't need to know your phone number.

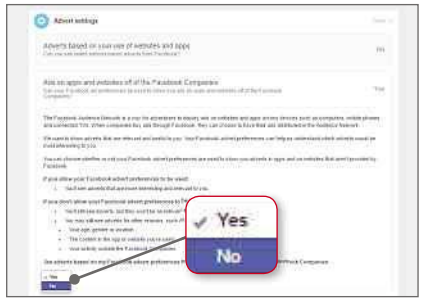
Facebook's new Privacy Basics guide helps you navigate its jungle of settings

Stop Facebook sharing your data with advertisers

Isn't it amazing how well Facebook's ads seem to know you? 'Amazing' as in 'creepy'. That's because Facebook hands over details about your interests, employment and even relationship status to its business partners.

To put a stop to this nonsense, go to Settings and click Adverts. Click a section ('Your interests', 'Advertisers you've interacted with', 'Your information' and 'Advert settings') to see what's being shared, then make your changes.

Some sections have on/off toggles (for example 'Relationship status' under 'Your information'), while others can be edited by clicking Yes or No and selecting options from a drop-down menu. Be sure to click 'Advert settings' then Yes next to 'Ads on apps and websites...', then click the Yes button at the bottom of the small print, then click No. It's every bit as convoluted as it sounds, but essential if you'd rather not be public property.



Change the default Yes to No in the advert settings to limit 'relevant' ads

STOP MICROSOFT SNOOPING ON YOU

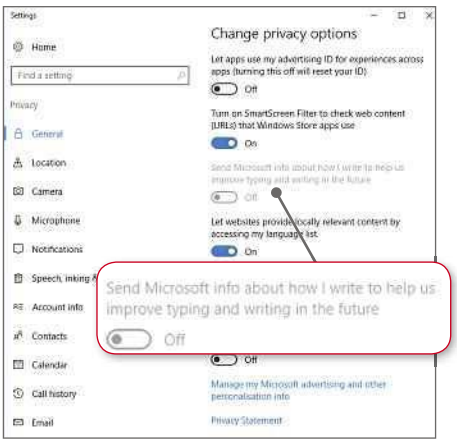
See (some of) what Microsoft knows about you

Unlike previous versions of Microsoft's operating system, Windows 10 is as much online as your browser. Microsoft's 'telemetry' technology constantly tracks your activity, showing "blatant disregard for user choice and privacy," to quote the Electronic Frontier Foundation (bit.ly/eff418).

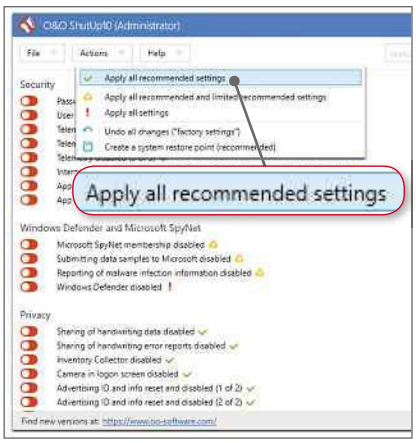
So Microsoft, like Google and Facebook, is playing privacy catch-up. It recently launched a web-based privacy dashboard (account.microsoft.com/privacy) that lets you see what it knows about you. Well, some of it. Officially, the dashboard includes Bing and Edge activity, and data gathered by GPS, Cortana Notebook and Microsoft Health. In practice, it doesn't reveal much at all ("We don't have any data associated with this Microsoft account at the moment" is its current catchphrase). Google's My Activity timeline reveals far more about our Windows 10 activity than Microsoft's privacy dashboard does – at the time of writing, at least. These may be teething troubles, so we'll stay tuned for improvements.

Tweak your Windows 10 privacy settings

Microsoft tracks you far more than its privacy dashboard suggests. To limit the snooping, configure your PC settings carefully. Type `privacy` into Start and click 'Privacy settings', then click the toggles to enable and disable the options, some of which you may not realise were switched on. For example 'Send Microsoft info about how I write' and 'Let websites provide locally relevant content' are enabled by default, so switch them off. To manage targeted ads, click 'Manage my Microsoft advertising and other personalisation info', then click the toggle on the web page that opens.



Many privacy-leaking options are enabled by default in Windows 10's settings



Take control over your Windows 10 privacy with O&O ShutUp10

Since the Windows 10 Anniversary Update, you can no longer remove Cortana using the native Windows settings. You can use it without signing in (click 'Maybe later' when asked), but if you want to remove it completely you'll need to use a third-party tool.

Block Microsoft's snooping using free tools

Between them, Microsoft's privacy dashboard and your Windows 10 'Privacy options' screen are frustratingly limiting. They make no mention of passwords, Wi-Fi connections, webcam data or biometrics, which are all vital chinks in your Windows 10 privacy armour.

The best tool for controlling these and umpteen more items that compromise your anonymity is O&O ShutUp10 (bit.ly/shutup418). It's free, portable and very easy to use. The program window is far more detailed and useful than your Windows 10 settings page and uses simple on/off toggles. To quickly set all toggles to O&O ShutUp10's recommended settings for maximum privacy without sacrificing convenience, click Actions then 'Apply all recommended settings'. To reapply Windows 10's default settings, click 'Undo all changes (factory settings)'. Some settings prompt O&O ShutUp10 to suggest you save a system restore point, in case you want to roll back your Windows 10 settings; click Yes in the pop-up to go ahead.

Microsoft is not a fan of third-party tools that give you control over your own privacy, or indeed over your own PC, so it often blocks programs that give you deep system access. One great telemetry-blocking tool, Win10 SpyStop, mysteriously disappeared from the internet within days of its launch last August, even though it worked very well. Was Microsoft involved in its demise? We'll leave you to decide.

WHY SCROOGLED SOLD OUT

"Keep calm while we steal your data" went the slogan for Scroogled, Microsoft's anti-Google privacy campaign (you could even buy the T-shirt: bit.ly/keepcalm418).

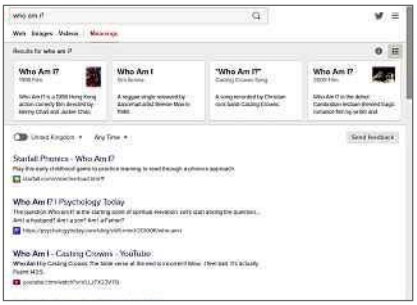
The campaign was launched after Google claimed the right to read your Gmail messages and then "provide you with personally relevant product features", which is still part of Google's Terms of Service (bit.ly/gterms418). But Scroogled has now been ditched (see what happens when you go to www.scroogled.com). And guess what? Microsoft now claims the right to read users' emails too.

Following an update in February 2017, Cortana automatically scans your private Outlook.com messages and then nags you to keep any promises you've made in them (bit.ly/nag418). The good news for us, at least for now, is that the new feature only applies to Cortana users in the US.

ENCRYPT EVERYTHING YOU DO

Switch to a private search site

If you'd rather not spend ages tweaking your Google settings to make your searches more private, use DuckDuckGo (duckduckgo.com) instead. Unlike many alternative search sites, it's not connected to Google in any way and isn't interested in tracking you at all. It doesn't save your history or log your IP address, and there's no such thing as a DuckDuckGo account. There are no ads, and your search results aren't skewed according to who or where the site thinks you are. So as well as being more private, the search results it delivers are more objective.



Search without being tracked or judged at DuckDuckGo

DuckDuckGo uses HTTPS by default and SSL for extra privacy and security. To translate the jargon, HTTPS (HyperText Transfer Protocol Secure) is a standard that adds security by encrypting all data to and from some websites; and SSL (Secure Socket Layer) means that whatever you type is hidden from anyone who might be monitoring traffic between your browser and the server. You can force websites to use HTTPS by installing HTTPS Everywhere (bit.ly/https418) – see page 46 for details.

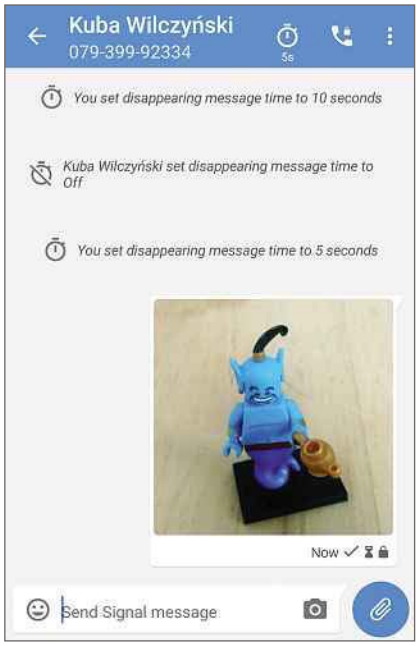
Send self-destructing encrypted texts

WhatsApp (www.whatsapp.com) now uses end-to-end encryption to ensure that your messages can't be read in transit, and it's significantly more private than SMS. But in the privacy stakes, it's trounced by Signal Private Messenger (Android bit.ly/sigdroid418, iOS bit.ly/sigios418). Like WhatsApp, Signal also uses end-to-end encryption, but it dispenses with privacy-invading paraphernalia such as accounts, tracking and cloud backups. It even lets you set all incoming and outgoing messages to self-destruct after a chosen number of seconds, minutes or hours. Signal now works in your browser, too – provided that browser is Chrome (bit.ly/sigchrome418).

Fake your location using a VPN

A VPN (virtual private network) such as CyberGhost (www.cyberghostvpn.com) is your private tunnel through the public internet. It spoofs your location to pretend you're browsing from another country and encrypts all your data. As well as making you anonymous and untrackable, it also unblocks content you'd normally only be able to access in other countries, such as US Netflix. CyberGhost will try to get you to sign up for its paid-for version (from £3.74 per month), but the basic version is free and works on Android and iOS as well as Windows.

Alternatively, you could install Opera (www.opera.com) as a second browser – or just switch to it completely. Opera is completely free and comes with its own VPN and ad-blocker built in. We also like Hotspot Shield's browser add-on VPN, which works with Firefox and Chrome – see page 47 for details.



Use Signal Private Messenger and no-one will ever see your texts again

Use Tor for complete anonymity

Tor (www.torproject.org) is the ultimate – and ultimately difficult – way to browse anonymously. This free open-source program is not just a whole new browser but a completely private network – effectively a separate operating system. It cloaks everything you do, offline as well as online.

Tor is legal to use, but there is a slightly dodgy whiff about it because it lets people access the unpoliced Dark Web and conduct criminal activities such as drug dealing and illegal pornography. But if you want total anonymity, you may decide that Tor is worth the effort. Turn to the next page to find out exactly who you're protecting your privacy from.

VPN tool CyberGhost lets you pretend you're browsing from another country entirely

Tor offers total privacy but it's difficult to use and has negative associations with the Dark Web

Who's Watching You Online?

To stay anonymous online, it's useful to know who you're hiding your activities from. Here, we reveal exactly who's spying on you and how worried you should be

ANALYTICS

Whenever you visit a website, it's more than likely you're being tracked by an analytics tool, which enables the site's owner to understand more about who you are and how you're using the site. An embedded piece of code is used to collect a range of data including your location, the browser you're using, the keywords you used to find the web page and the amount of time you spent viewing it. This information is collected primarily so that site owners can see which pages are most popular and continue to produce engaging content.

There's no need to worry, because all the data is collected anonymously, but if you're unhappy about being analysed in this way, you can block Google Analytics – the most popular analytics tool – by using the official browser add-on from Google (bit.ly/optout418).

Worry factor: 😨

SEARCH ENGINES

Google and Bing keep a record of every search you make so they can better understand your interests, which in turn lets them offer more useful search results and more relevant advertising. You might think two people making the same search would see the same results, but the search engines organise their results according to a number of factors including your location and the sites you've visited previously. To see this weighting, try making identical searches while logged into your Google account and while logged out, then compare the results.

To stop search engines tracking you and saving your searches, you can switch to DuckDuckGo (duckduckgo.com, see page 43) or add Disconnect Search (disconnect.me/search) to your browser so that your searches with Google and Bing are anonymised.

Worry factor: 😨😨

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Like search engines, social networks including Facebook and Twitter aim to build user profiles so they can offer tailored advertising and show you engaging content that keeps you coming back. Every time you react to a post – by clicking a 'Like' button for example – you're helping the social network understand what sort of posts you want to see. You can review and edit what Facebook thinks your interests are at www.facebook.com/ads/preferences.

The excellent browser add-on Privacy Badger (bit.ly/privacy418, see page 46) lets you protect your privacy by replacing the buttons on social networks with ones that do the same thing but don't track you.

Worry factor: 😨😨😨

ADVERTISERS

If you've ever visited a site and seen ads related to something you looked at elsewhere, then you know you're being successfully tracked by advertisers. Advertising firms place ads across thousands of sites and use cookies to track which websites you've visited and which ads you've seen. This allows them to tailor new ads for you, tempting you to buy their products and services.

Most major ad providers let you opt out of behaviour tracking and you can choose which advertisers you block cookies from by visiting bit.ly/adchoice418. To opt out of interest-based advertising from Google, visit bit.ly/gadsettings418. You can do the same for Microsoft at choice.microsoft.com and Yahoo at bit.ly/yahooad418. Using an ad blocker (see page 46) also lets you disable tracking to make you more anonymous to advertisers.

Worry factor: 😟😟

GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The government spies on individuals and companies to prevent crime and acts of terror, and new laws passed in last year's Investigatory Powers Bill mean that it has greater surveillance privileges than ever before. Dozens of government bodies including the Home Office and GCHQ now have the power to force communications companies (including ISPs and service providers such as Google) to keep records of every website and messaging service you access over a 12-month period. The same agencies can also hack phones, computers and servers, and bulk-collect and retain data. They don't even need a warrant, although there are controls on how they use the information.

The simplest way to go undercover and avoid such surveillance is to use encryption. Use a VPN to make sure your online communications are encrypted and follow our Workshop on page 54 to protect sensitive files on your hard drive.

Worry factor: 😟😟😟😟

ISPs

Your ISP can not only see which websites you visit but also read anything that you send over the web that's not encrypted. Ordinarily, they're only interested if you're abusing their service in some way, either for criminal activity or by simply putting too much strain on the network. If you are up to no good, they can share information with the government and the police, when requested. If you feel uncomfortable knowing that your ISP can see everything you do online, the easiest way to keep your activity secret is by using a VPN (provided you trust the VPN itself). We've recommended some of our favourite VPNs on page 43. Tor can also stop your ISP tracking your browser habits, but it has a steeper learning curve than the other services we've listed.

Worry factor: 😟😟😟

BT

Virgin media

sky

CYBERCRIMINALS

Cybercriminals write and spread malware for many reasons, but more often than not they're trying to make money, which can be achieved by spying on you and stealing your sensitive data. Keyloggers, for example, allow criminals to watch everything you type, and steal personal information such as your passwords and credit card details. These type of threats are the most worrying, but you can protect yourself by making sure you don't open suspicious looking emails and by avoiding software from unknown sources. You should use strong antivirus software such as Avast Free (www.avast.com – see page 26) and install SpyDetect Free (bit.ly/spydetect393) to identify any processes that might be recording your keystrokes. You should also enable 2-step verification for online services, where available.

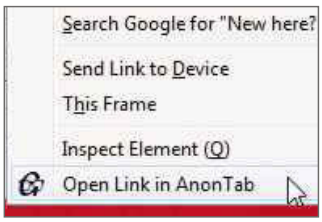
Worry factor: 😟😟😟😟😟

Best Add-Ons For Anonymity

Lots of browser add-ons claim to keep you anonymous online, but many are ineffective. Here, we pick the nine tools you need to guarantee your privacy

AnonTab

bit.ly/anon418



AnonTab lets you open a web page in a secure environment

Most browsers now have a private mode (see page 41), which stops details of the sites you visit and the things you search for being saved to your PC, but this doesn't make you anonymous online. A better way to shield what you're doing is to use AnonTab, which is a cross between the popular add-ons NoScript and HTTPS Everywhere (see below, right).

This useful tool lets you open a web page in a secure and private environment, masking your IP address, blocking scripts and encrypting all incoming and outgoing connections. Not only does this prevent your data from being leaked and your activities monitored, it also safeguards you against malware infection.

To use AnonTab, simply right-click a link and choose 'Open Link in AnonTab' to view the page securely in a new tab. You can also click its toolbar button and type a URL to open it in a safe environment.

Note that although AnonTab works with Chromium browsers, it isn't available from the Chrome Web Store.

Ghostery

www.ghostery.com

Ghostery tells you how a specific web tracker is affecting your browsing

While we were writing this feature, news came that this popular privacy tool had been acquired by a German company called Cliqz (bit.ly/cliqz418), which promises to take the add-on's anti-tracking technology to a "completely new level". In the meantime, it's still worth installing Ghostery, if you haven't already, because its latest version is the best yet.

As we explained in our workshop in Issue 409 (bit.ly/webuser409), Ghostery 7 colour-codes trackers into categories such as advertising, analytics, social media and 'essential', so you can decide precisely which types of spy to block. Further data tells you if a tracker is likely to slow your browser, stop a page loading properly or leak personal information on a supposedly secure site, and you can block and unblock all or individual pests with a single click.

If you'd like to see how Cliqz plans to make Ghostery even better, join the public beta at bit.ly/gbeta418.

Privacy Badger

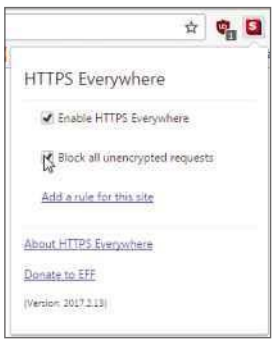
bit.ly/privacy418

You can now use Privacy Badger when you're browsing incognito

We've recommended Privacy Badger so often that you probably already use it to block hidden trackers and spying ads as you browse the web. Even so, it's worth us bigging up the Badger again because its developer, EFF, recently added several useful new features. For example, you can now prevent WebRTC technology from leaking your IP address when you make audio and video calls; transfer your anti-tracking preferences to another browser; and use the extension in incognito/private mode, so your data is protected both online and off. Unlike similar tools, Privacy Badger gives you total control over which trackers are blocked and allowed, with a handy colour-coded system that shows what's safe and what's not. An Edge version of the add-on is reportedly in the works.

HTTPS Everywhere

bit.ly/https418



HTTPS Everywhere ensures that websites always encrypt your data

Any website worth its salt should use HTTPS to encrypt its traffic and protect its users' data. Sadly, many don't bother and either default to their unsecure HTTP versions or use a combination of encrypted and unencrypted pages. You can ensure you always get the safest connection possible by installing this excellent tool from the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF, www.eff.org), which forces thousands of sites to use HTTPS, whether they like it or not. HTTPS Everywhere works automatically and is regularly updated with new 'rules' to keep you safe from online surveillance and account hijacking. You can create your own rules so that specific sites always use their encrypted versions, and block all unencrypted requests.

AdNauseum

adnauseam.io

Bad Ad Johnny

bit.ly/badad418

If you've heard of Adblock Plus (adblockplus.org), you'll probably be aware that it allows 'acceptable' ads on websites that pay to be whitelisted. This controversial policy, coupled with excessive memory usage, has made many users switch to alternative ad blockers, of which these two are our current favourites.

AdNauseum lets you foil advertisers without robbing sites of funds

AdNauseum strikes a compromise between blocking annoying adverts and depriving small websites (which can't afford to pay Adblock Plus) of the revenue they need to survive.

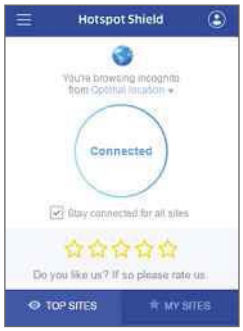
When it filters ads (it's based on uBlock Origin), it also clicks them in the background, so the sites still get paid by the advertising networks. To stop companies using those clicks to track you, AdNauseum "obfuscates" the data, rendering their targeting and surveillance futile.

PureVPN's Bad Ad Johnny extension takes a tougher approach by blocking all adverts on all websites, regardless of whether they're acceptable or not. It's very light on resources and its hard-line stance against ads and trackers is tempered by the options to disable it on specific sites and only target certain elements rather than everything on a page. Bad Ad Johnny will soon be available for Firefox, Opera and Safari.

Bad Ad Johnny blocks all online ads unless you purposely disable it

Hotspot Shield Free VPN Proxy

bit.ly/hsschrome418
bit.ly/hssfirefox418



Install Hotspot Shield's free browser add-on for reliable anonymity

There's something slightly suspicious about browser-extension VPNs – after all, why would companies with paid-for Desktop programs make things free and easy for you? However, Hotspot Shield's add-on for Chrome and Firefox offers everything you need from a VPN in terms of security and speed, but without the need to download any software.

You can pretend to be in nine different countries, including Canada, Germany and Spain; bookmark your favourite sites for easy access; and connect and disconnect with a single click. You need to pay to unlock the US and UK options, so it's not ideal for accessing restricted content, and you get nagged to upgrade to the Elite version – including a seven-day free trial. But if your main objectives are to hide who and where you are, and what you're doing, this extension performs brilliantly.

Fake Data

bit.ly/fake418

Fake Name Generator Panel

bit.ly/fpanel418

What's in a name? An alarming amount when you share you real moniker online, especially when combined with your real email address and phone number. Rather than signing up with websites using your genuine details, you can maintain your anonymity via Fake Data. This Chrome extension fills in registration forms with bogus but real-looking info, without you needing to type anything. Simply right-click a text box - be it a first or last name, email or postal address, phone number, company name or location - and choose the relevant option from Fake Data's side menu. By default, the extension is set to use US data, but you can change this to 'en_GB' in its Options.

Withhold your true details on websites by using Fake Data

For Firefox, it's worth installing Fake Name Generator Panel, which provides you with instant fake identities – including postcodes, email addresses, birthdays, jobs and card numbers – so you can safeguard your genuine details. ■

NEXT ISSUE on sale Wednesday 22 March 2017

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Best free music players

If you don't want to pay for Spotify, there are still plenty of excellent free programs you can use to rip and play CDs, and manage your MP3s. **Edward Munn** tests six of the best

MusicBee | getmusicbee.com | ★★★★★

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

WebUser GOLD AWARD

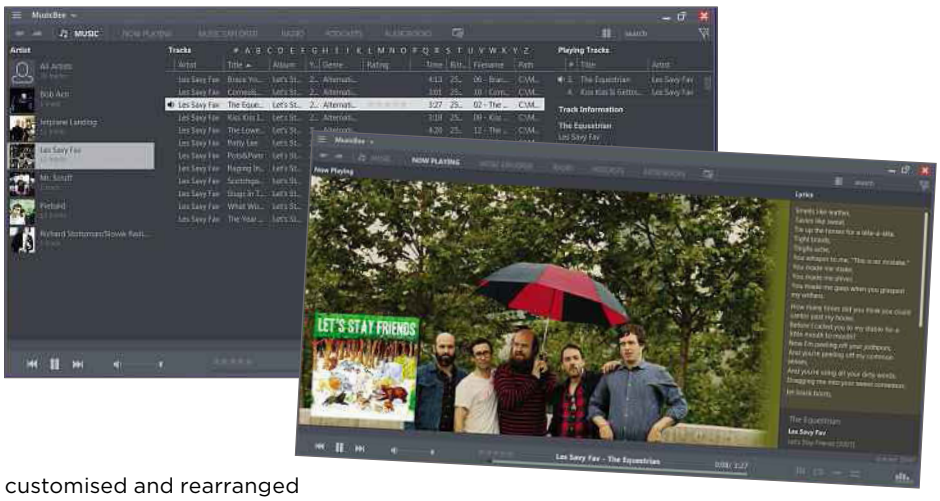
What we liked:

MusicBee won the Gold Award in our last round-up of music software back in Issue 349 (bit.ly/webuser349) and, two years on, it's still our favourite, thanks to its combination of excellent features, fast performance and usability.

When you first launch the program, it displays a simple wizard for adding all your existing music to your library. Alternatively, you can rip music directly from CD and the program's 'auto-tagging' tool automatically finds the album metadata and artwork.

MusicBee's default codec is FLAC (the fastest and most popular lossless audio format), which should appeal to those who want to listen to music at the highest quality. It also works with high-end sound cards and offers a built-in equaliser, volume normalisation and gapless playback for the very best listening experience.

As well as letting you create and manage your own playlists, MusicBee supports internet radio, podcasts and audiobooks, so you'll always find something to listen to. You can switch between these different modes using its simple tabbed interface, which can be customised and rearranged according to your tastes.



At times when you want a tool that doesn't take up your whole screen, MusicBee offers Mini and Compact players, both of which can be assigned hotkeys of your choice. There's also a good variety of skins to choose from.

We particularly like the way MusicBee displays images of the artists in its Now Playing area (along with biographies and song lyrics), and its Music Explorer, which lets you preview tracks from Microsoft Groove (formerly Xbox Music).

MusicBee also supports syncing to Android and Windows Phone.

How it can be improved:

We found very little to fault with MusicBee, but its tabbed interface could be a little more intuitive on first use. Also, if you want to rip CDs as MP3s, you need to install an add-on.

OUR VERDICT

MusicBee offers everything you could want from a music player. It's fast, easy to use and can be customised according to your tastes. Free software doesn't get much better than this.

MediaMonkey | www.mediamonkey.com | ★★★★☆

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

What we liked:

MediaMonkey boasts many of the same features that make MusicBee great, including excellent library-management tools and support for podcasts and internet radio. What separates it from its competitors is that you can use it to share your entire music library over your network (to DNLA and UPnP clients) without installing any additional plugins. Opting to install it as a 'service' also makes the media server accessible when you're not logged into your Windows account and MediaMonkey isn't running.

Other standout features include the option to sync your library to Android devices via Wi-Fi (although you'll need to pay £2.89 for MediaMonkey Pro to do this) and support for syncing to iOS devices, provided you already have iTunes installed. We also like its Folder Monitoring feature, which continuously scans specific folders so your music library is always up to date.

Like our Gold Award winner, you can choose from a number of different skins and there are also handy Mini and Micro player interfaces.

How it can be improved:

You need MediaMonkey Gold (a lifetime licence costs £52.97) to unlock certain features including automatic tagging and file organisation, and MP3 encoding. Elements of the program's interface are also a little cluttered and more fiddly than MusicBee.

OUR VERDICT

MediaMonkey withholds some of its best features for the paid-for version but it's still a very impressive music player, especially because it doubles as a media server.

AIMP | www.aimp.ru | ★★★★☆

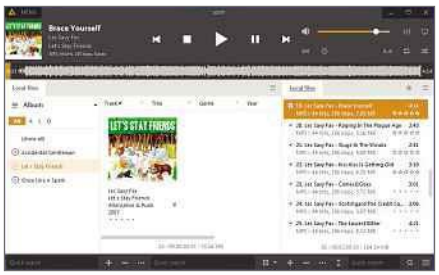
FEATURES ★★★☆☆ PERFORMANCE ★★★★☆ EASE OF USE ★★★★☆

What we liked:

If you're looking for a simple music manager without a load of menus and tools that you'll never use, AIMP is an excellent choice. You can quickly open files from its main menu or opt to add them permanently to your library by clicking the '+' symbol and choosing the relevant folders. Like MediaMonkey, you can also set it to monitor these folders for changes so that your library is always up to date.

The program's DSP Manager provides an equalizer, volume normalisation and mixing options to help you achieve a seamless listening experience. AIMP also comes with an Audio Converter that lets you rip tracks using a number of different codecs, as well as a Tag Editor for automatically changing your files' metadata

There's a range of plugins that let you add extra tools and you can also choose from a number of different skins to change how the player looks. We particularly like AIMP's Mini Player,



which sits above the taskbar when you minimise the program, and its handy alarm clock and sleep functions.

How it can be improved:

AIMP has a refreshingly simple interface but it could still be easier to use. The lack of tools for podcast and audiobook playback is also frustrating.

OUR VERDICT

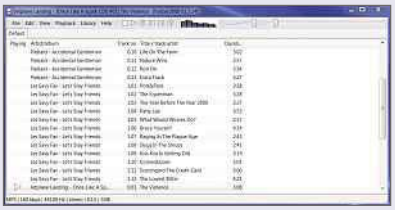
AIMP covers all the important bases, but we'd struggle to recommend it over our other award winners unless you're particularly drawn to its slimmed-down interface.

BEST OF THE REST

Foobar2000

www.foobar2000.org

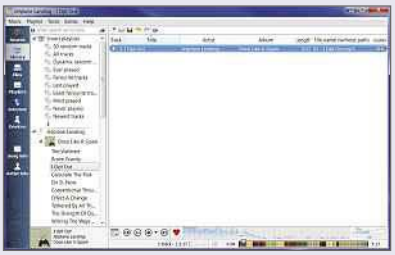
Foobar2000 is a fast music player that provides a vast range of customisation options, but most users will find its modular design too much hard work because you need to install add-ons to use even some basic tools. However, if you're prepared to persevere, you can transform Foobar2000 into the music player of your dreams.



Clementine

clementine-player.org

Clementine's simple interface makes it easy to use from the word go. Like our Gold and Silver award winners, it has an impressive range of tools, including strong library management and internet radio support. There's also an Android app you can use to remotely control the player and download songs to your phone. Unfortunately, we found the program too buggy and the design doesn't look anywhere near as attractive as our award winners.



iTunes

www.apple.com/uk/itunes

Apple's iTunes gets a lot of stick for being slow and bloated, and after testing it again, we have to agree with its critics. We love the Library section, which has a simple design and performs well, but its Radio and Store sections were so slow and buggy, even on a new laptop, that they were barely functional.

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2	TalkTalk For Everyone	TalkTalk: Broadband	£25.50 (£20.00 for 12 months)	12 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited	£240.00
3	EE	EE: Broadband	£28.50 (£21.00 for 18 months)	18 months	17Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited *	£252.00
4	Virgin media	Virgin: Broadband	£45.00 (£29.00 for 12 months)	12 months	50Mbps max speed	∞ unlimited *	£348.00

Terms & Conditions apply - see ISP sites for details
* Fair-usage or restriction policy applies.

Data supplied by www.broadbandgenie.co.uk. Correct as of 21 February 2017.

Ofcom

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

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4

5

6

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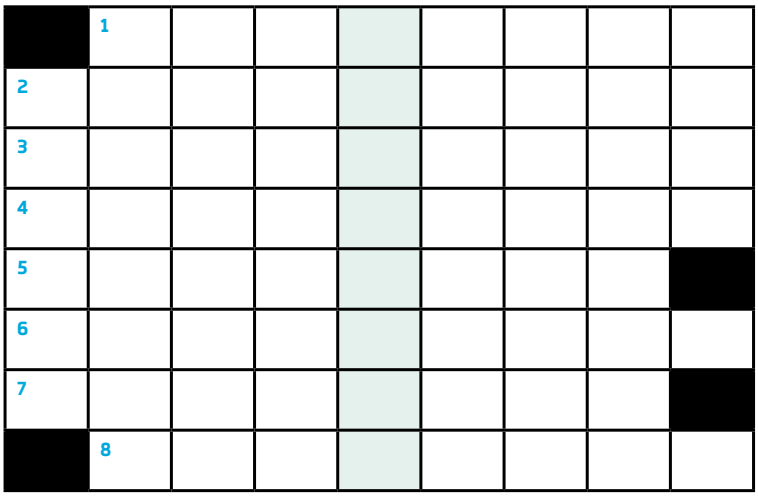
1. City and county in Ireland
2. Bryan Ferry's band (4,5)
3. Galaxy, constellation and princess from Greek mythology
4. British artist (1776-1837), painter of *The Hay Wain*
5. Manager of Manchester United
6. 1940 Disney movie featuring Jiminy Cricket
7. Fortified wine such as Martini, Cinzano and Noilly Prat
8. Aromatic spice derived from tree bark



COMPETITIONS

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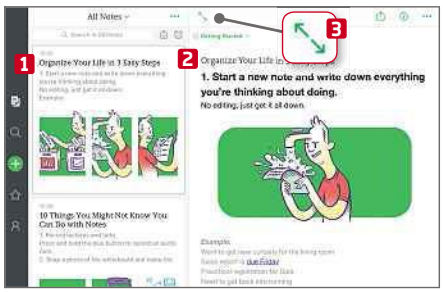
Evernote for iOS

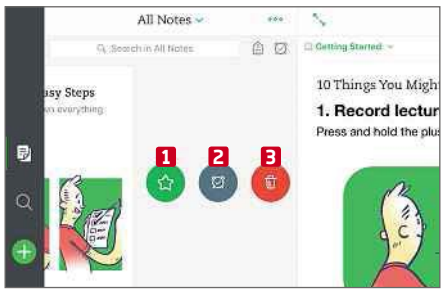
The popular note-taking app has been updated on iOS with a new design that focuses on speed and simplicity. Here's how to get started

Evernote: bit.ly/en418 | 10 mins | iOS 10

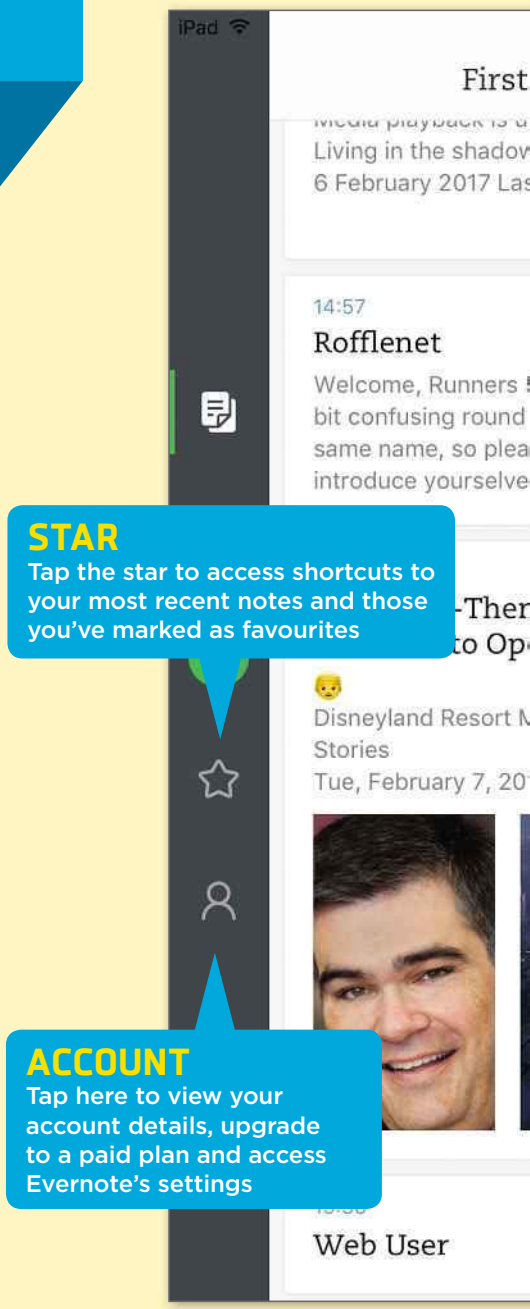
Evernote (evernote.com) has been through a lot of changes since its debut in 2008. The note-taking tool is available for use online and through software for Windows, Mac, Android, iOS, Windows Mobile, BlackBerry and other platforms. Now, the iOS version has been completely redesigned to make capturing ideas even easier and to reduce the amount of time you need to spend organising and searching for saved items. The new version is currently only available for iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch, but this is reported to be the first step in a major overhaul for Evernote and a sign of how the service will look across all versions and devices in the coming months.



1 When you first launch Evernote, it opens on the Notes screen with some general advice for getting started. You can scroll through these notes and zoom in to take a better look. Tap a note in the panel on the left **1** to open it in the right-hand pane. **2** To see it full screen, tap the arrows **3** or swipe left.

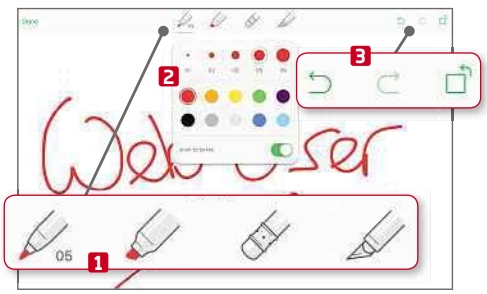


2 Swiping left on any of the notes reveals some options. Here, you can add a note to your favourites, **1** set a reminder **2** or send it to the bin. **3** When you've read all the Getting Started notes, you can delete each in turn, leaving you ready to start afresh with some notes of your own.

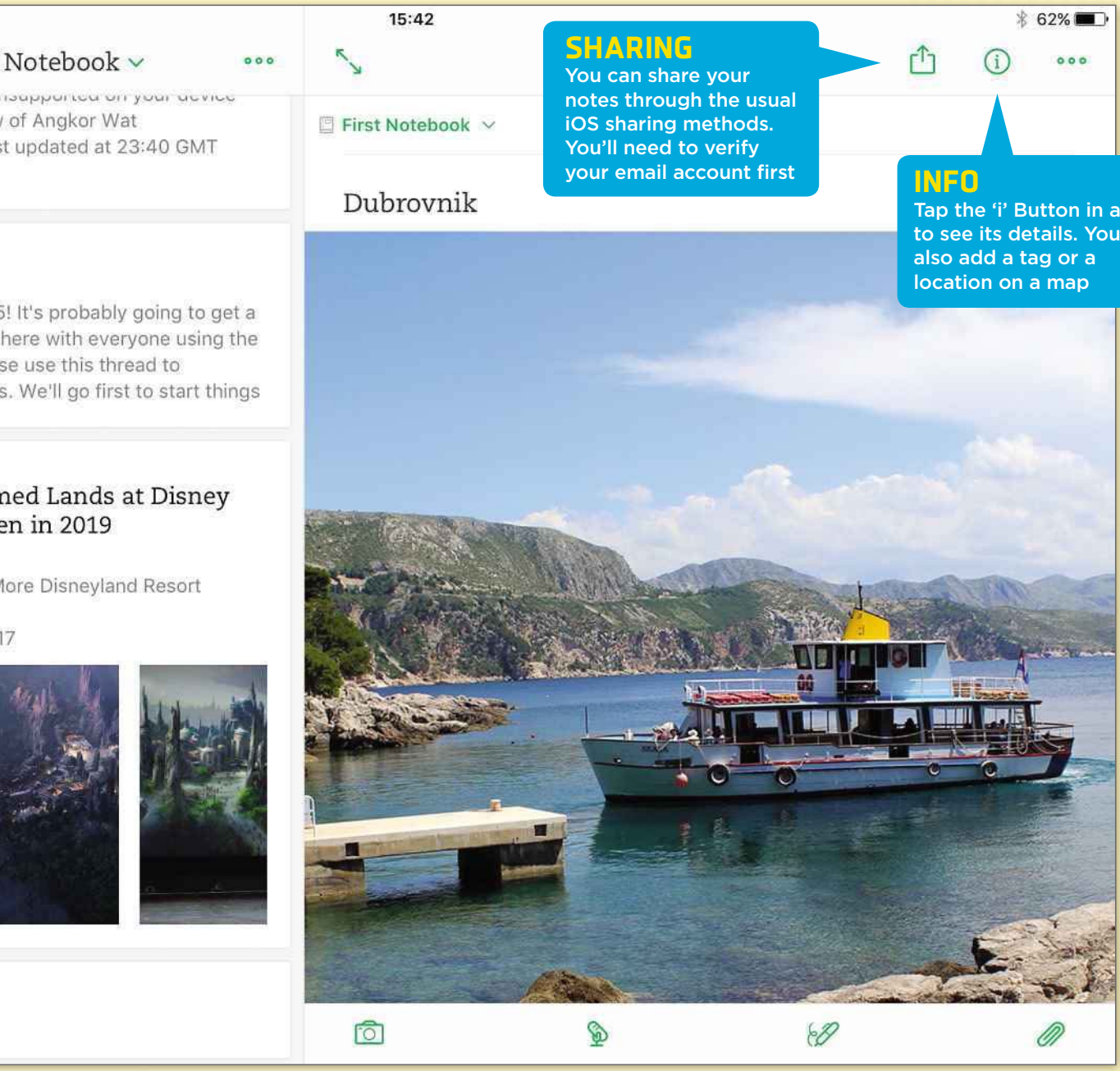


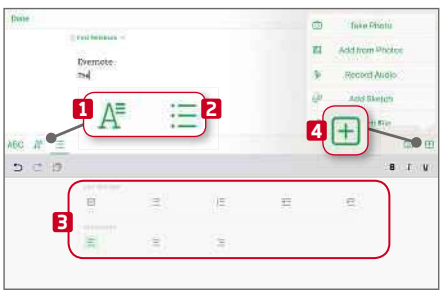
3 To create a new note, tap the green + button. This will rotate to become an X. **1** If you press and hold this button, Evernote reveals options to add audio, a photo or a reminder. **2** For now, we'll just create a basic note.

4 Give your new note a name **1** and start writing. **2** You can also copy and paste text into your note. Tap the icons on the bar above the keyboard to take a photo or add an existing image, **3** record a memo, **4** create a sketch or attach a file from iCloud or any connected device.

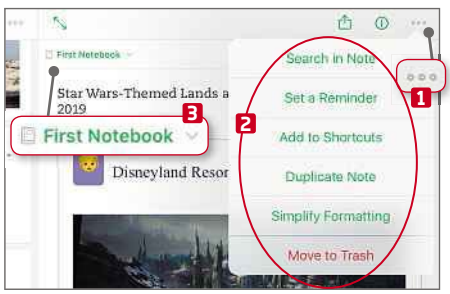


5 You can draw in the sketchpad using your finger or a stylus. Switch between a pen, highlighter, eraser and scalpel **1** to create your sketch. Tap one of the tools to bring up its options. **2** Tap the icons in the top-right corner to undo and redo your actions, and rotate the canvas in 90-degree steps. **3**





6 When you tap the Start Writing line, the bar changes to reveal formatting options. Tap the A icon **1** to change the size and colour of the text and add formatting. The List icon **2** lets you select from a range of list options and paragraph styles. **3** To add items to your notebook, tap the plus sign. **4**



7 Tap the three-dot icon in the top-right corner of a note. **1** From here, you can search within your note, set a reminder, add the note to shortcuts, create a duplicate, simplify the formatting or delete the note. **2** Tap the green notebook drop-down menu **3** to move a note or create a new notebook.

8 The All Notes menu **1** lets you switch between notebooks, **2** search for a notebook, access notes you've sent to the trash **3** and create a new notebook. **4** Tap the three-dot icon **5** for Note List Options, where you can change the size of notes, set what's displayed in previews and choose how notes are sorted.

Stop hackers and snoopers spying on your files

Hyper Crypt: bit.ly/hyper418 | 20 mins | Vista, 7, 8, 10

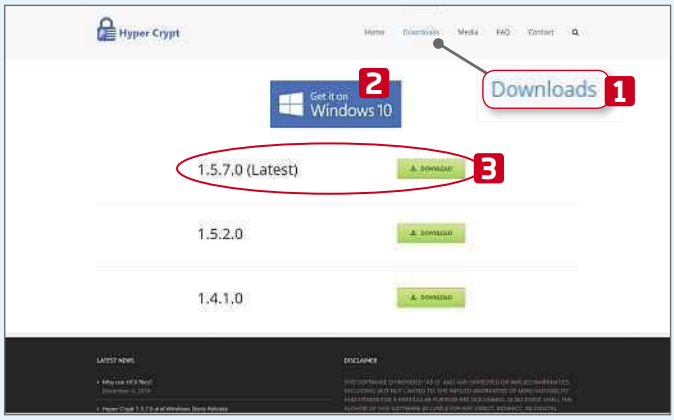
It's wise to hide private data, such as bank details and personal journals, but encrypting it is even safer because it makes the information virtually impossible to read, even if a determined snoop gains access. Encryption uses a 'key' – a string of random characters – to mathematically scramble data, which can only be unscrambled (decrypted) by the same key. Hyper Crypt is a great new tool designed to simplify the process.

Remember – once you've used the software to lock your files, you need the key to unlock them again, so make sure you're comfortable with the balance between your desire for privacy and the potential for rendering your files unreadable if you lose that key.

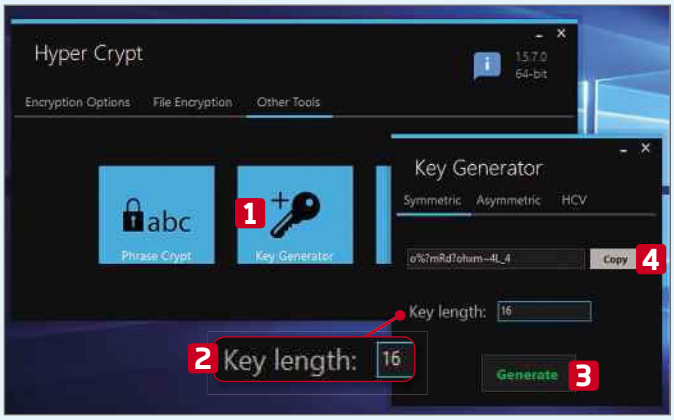
EXPERT TIP

Andy Shaw says

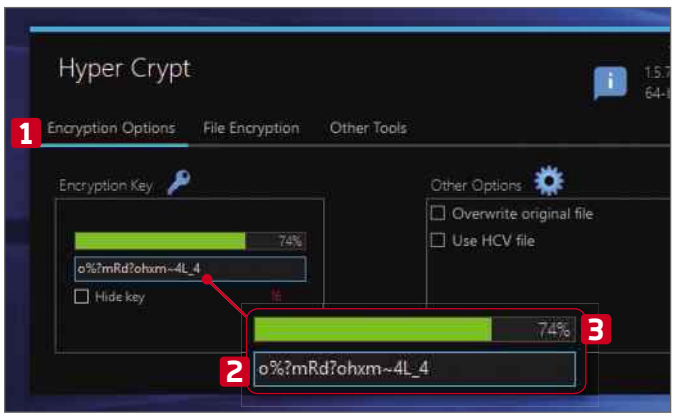
If you're encrypting something to send to someone, use asymmetric encryption to make a pair of keys: one public and one private. The recipient sends you a public key to encrypt the data, which can only be decrypted with their private key. Asymmetric keys are longer than the data they encrypt, so are best suited to short text items, such as passwords. You can set up Asymmetric Encryption from the Key Generator.



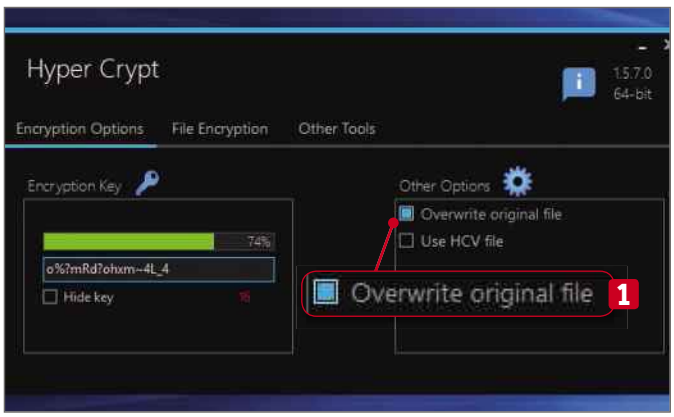
1 Go to bit.ly/hyper418 and click the Downloads link. 1 If you're running Windows 10, click the 'Get it on Windows 10' button 2 to download the app from the Store. If you're running an earlier version of Windows, download the ZIP file 3 and run the portable version by copying it from the ZIP.



2 Before you start encrypting, you need to create a key. Hyper Crypt can do this for you – click Other Tools, then Key Generator. 1 For a standard key, choose a 'Key length' by typing it into the box. 2 Eight characters is the minimum length but 16 is better. Click the Generate button, 3 then Copy. 4



3 Close the Key Generator and click Encryption Options. 1 Paste the key you created into the 'Enter key here' box. 2 The key's strength is shown as a percentage. 3 You can use any string of text as a key but randomly generated ones are more secure. Note that keys aren't saved when the software is closed, so make a note of any you want to use.

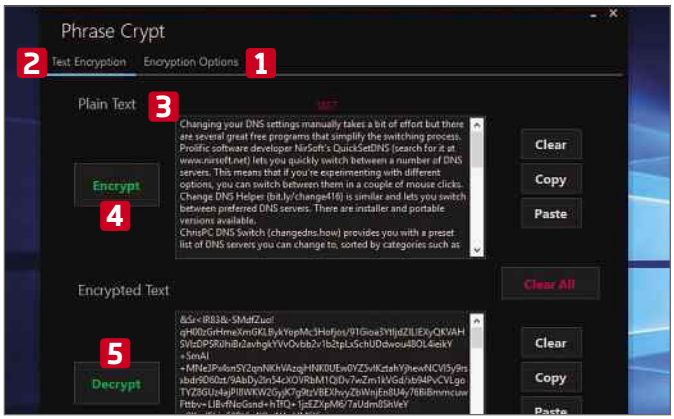


4 With its default settings, the software will create a new, encrypted version of the file. This is useful if you're going to send it to someone and want it secured while it's in transit. If you want to make sure the file is completely secure on your own PC, selecting the 'Overwrite original file' box 1 will replace the original with the encrypted version.

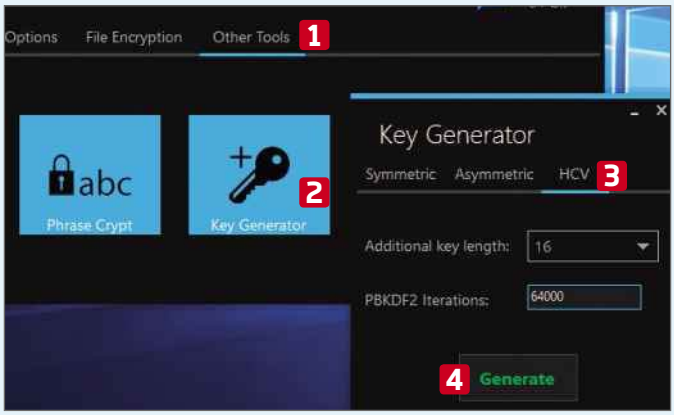
5 When you're ready to encrypt a file, click the File Encryption tab, 1 then click the Encrypt File button. 2 A standard Open window appears, in which you can browse for your file. Click Open and the software will encrypt it. When it's finished, the folder that held the original file will have a file with the same name but with '_Enc' appended.

6 To reverse the process, click the Decrypt File button 1 and select the file you want to decrypt from the folder. A second file will be created, this time with '_Dec' appended to its filename. 2 Instead of clicking the buttons and choosing files, you can also drag and drop files from Explorer to either of these buttons.

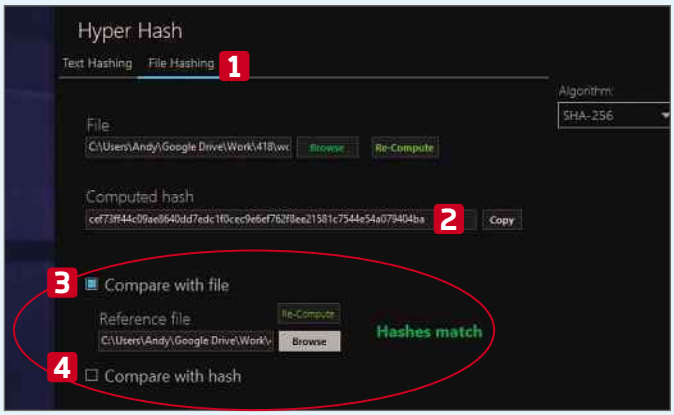
7 You can perform the same encryption and decryption with entire folders. Click the Encrypt Folder button 1 or drag a folder to the button to encrypt it. To reverse the process, do the same using the Decrypt Folder button. 2 This will encrypt and decrypt entire folders and their contents, including subfolders.



8 To encrypt a message or some text, click the Other Tools tab and select Phrase Crypt. Click Encryption Options 1 and enter a key as you would with File or Folder encryption. Go to Text Encryption, 2 paste the text you want to encrypt in the Plain Text box 3 and press Encrypt. 4 To reverse the process, paste into Encrypted Text and press Decrypt. 5



9 To double your security, create an HCV (Hyper Crypt Variable) file. Click Other Tools, 1 Key Generator, 2 then the HCV tab. 3 Click Generate 4 and choose where to save the .hcv file. To use it during encryption, click the 'Use HCV file' option in the Encryption Options tab. Both the HCV file and the key will be required to unlock the encryption.

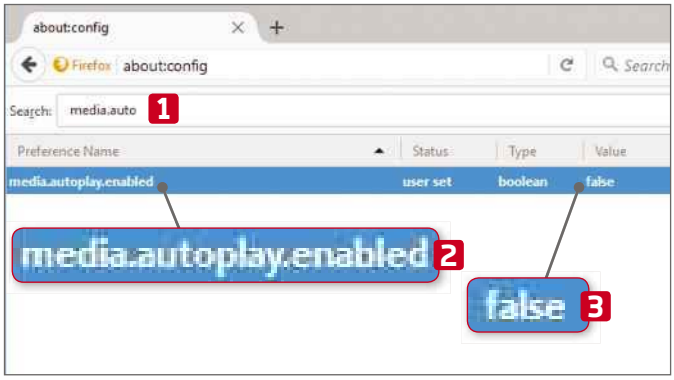


10 The Hyper Hash button, in Other Tools, lets you create a unique code from a particular file or piece of text. You can then use this code to verify whether a file has been tampered with. Under File Hashing, 1 choose a file and a hash will be computed. 2 Compare this with a file 3 or hash. 4 If they match, the file has not been changed.

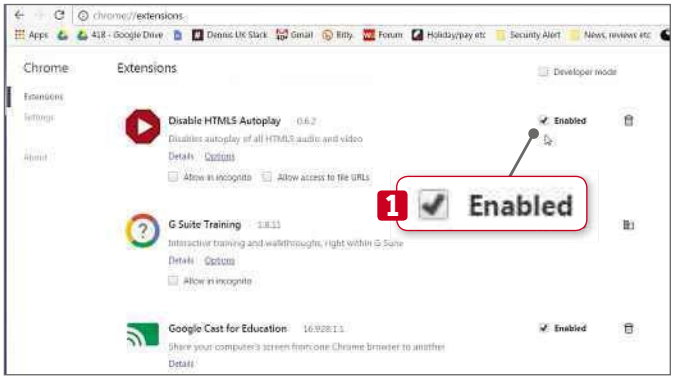
Block annoying videos and animated GIFs

Videos that suddenly start playing when you open a web page can be irritating, distracting and unexpectedly loud. In this Workshop, we show you how to stop videos and animated GIFs playing automatically by using add-ons and tweaking your browser's settings. We also help you ensure that you are protected against Flash-based videos, which may pose a threat to your PC's security.

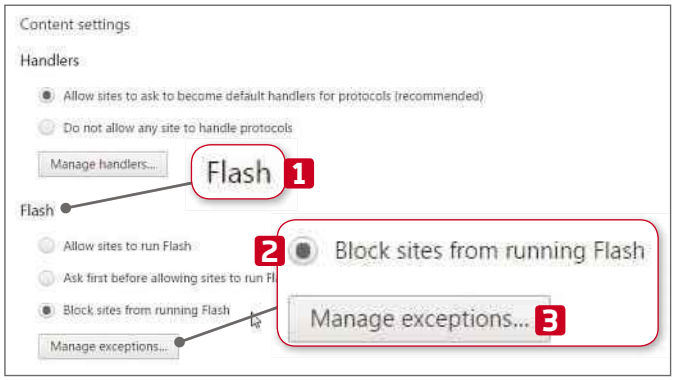
Disable HTML5 Autoplay: bit.ly/html418 | 5 mins |



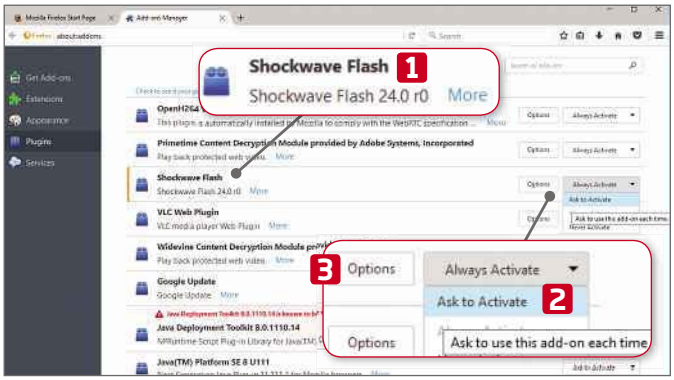
1 To stop HTML5 videos playing automatically in Firefox, type `about:config` into the address bar, press Enter, then click 'I accept the risk!'. Use the search box 1 to find 'media.autoplay.enabled', 2 then double-click it to set it as false. 3 HTML5 videos will no longer start automatically.



2 To do the same in Chrome, you need to install an add-on, such as Disable HTML5 Autoplay (bit.ly/html418). Once installed, the extension is enabled by default but you can disable it temporarily from chrome://extensions, should you need to. 1

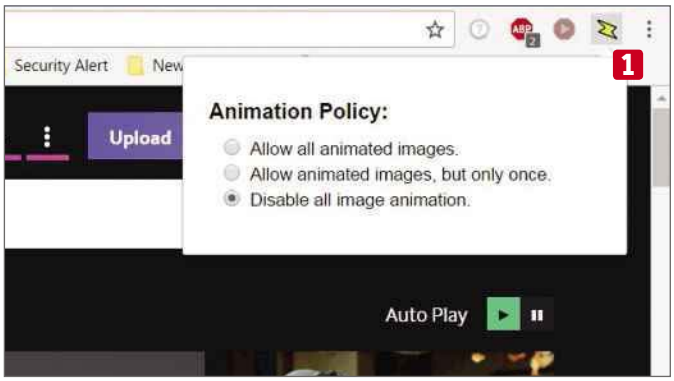


3 Chrome asks you for permission to use Flash, but you can improve your security by blocking it. In the advanced settings, under Privacy, click 'Content settings...'. Scroll down to Flash 1 and click 'Block sites from running Flash'. 2 Click 'Manage exceptions' 3 to allow Flash on specific sites.



4 To set Firefox to ask for permission before playing Flash content, click the menu button and choose Add-ons, then Plugins. Find Shockwave Flash 1 and choose 'Ask to Activate' 2 from its menu. Click Options 3 and make sure the box next to 'Enable Adobe Flash protected mode' is ticked.

5 To block annoying animated GIFs completely in Firefox, try the ESCapeFromThemGIFs add-on (bit.ly/esc418). 1 Once you've installed this handy extension, you can toggle it on and off (enabling or disabling all GIFs) simply by pressing the Esc key.

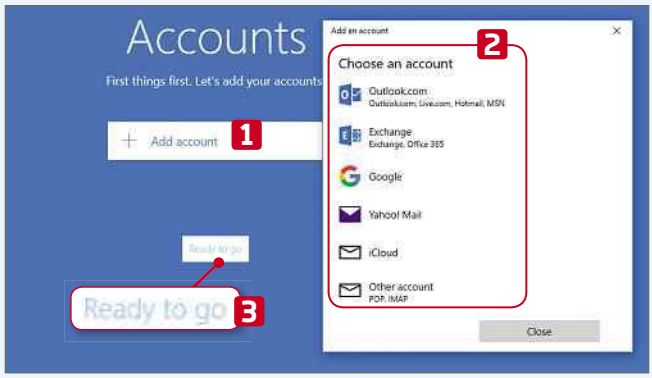


6 Google's Animation Policy addon for Chrome (bit.ly/animation418) lets you set animations to play just once or not at all. After installing it, click the lightning-bolt icon next to the address bar 1 and choose the option you want. You may need to refresh the page for this to take effect.

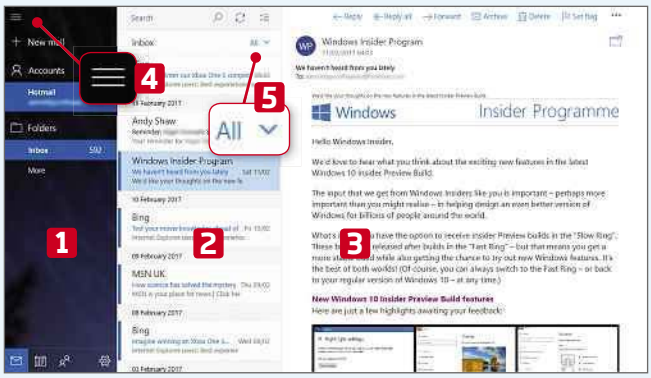
Manage webmail more easily

These days, many of us use webmail rather than software to manage our email. Email programs still have their advantages, though, especially if you have several accounts and do most of your emailing from a PC. Logging into a website to check email isn't to everyone's taste, and while Outlook Express may be long gone, Windows 10 has its own Mail app that's just as good.

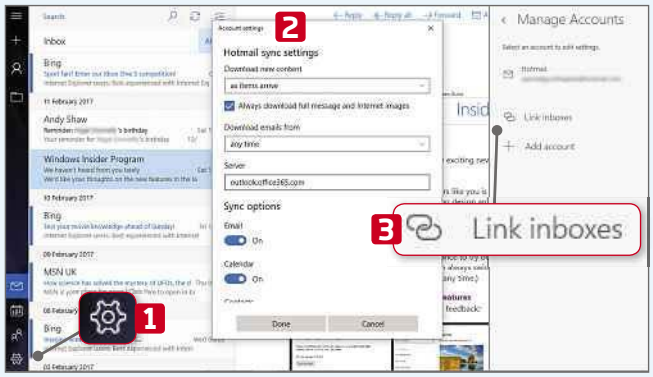
Mail: installed with Windows 10 | 10 mins | Windows 10



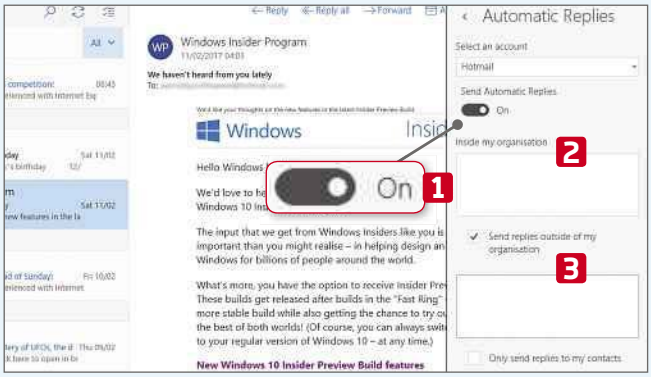
1 Click 'Add account' 1 and choose the account type from the list. 2 You'll need to provide your webmail username and password. If you're adding an Outlook.com account, Windows 10 may try to change your Windows login. Click 'Sign in to just this app instead', then click 'Ready to go'. 3



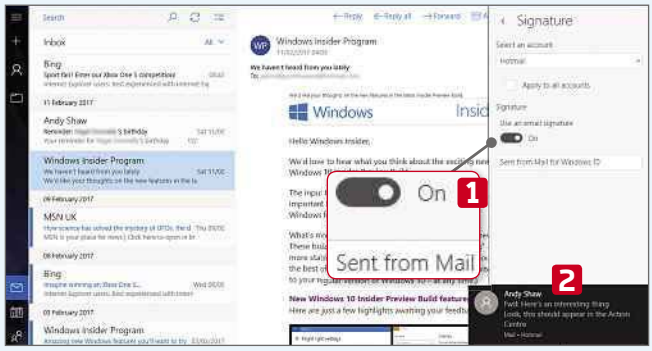
2 The main screen is split into three columns, with accounts and folders on the left, 1 a list of emails in the middle 2 and a preview window on the right. 3 To collapse the folder view to an icon bar, click the Collapse button. 4 Filter the list by clicking the arrow next to All. 5



3 Click the Settings cog 1 to access the menu. Manage Accounts opens the 'Account settings' box 2 where you can set how often the program checks for mail, how far back to go and whether to sync with the server. You can also link inboxes 3 to see all your messages in one place.



4 If you have a touchscreen, you can set up Quick Actions that let you swipe to delete a message or mark it as read. To set up an 'out of office' message, go to Automatic Replies. Flick the switch to On 1 and create your internal 2 and external 3 messages.



5 If you don't want all your emails to say 'Sent from Mail for Windows 10' at the bottom, go to Signature in Settings and either turn it off or change it. 1 Mail is integrated with Windows 10, which means you can receive notifications of new emails through the Action Center. 2

6 Use the Personalisation options to change the colours and background. Clicking the Calendar and Contacts icons 1 brings up separate apps for those tools. 2 These are tightly integrated, so the birthdays of your contacts appear in Calendar and reminders pop up in Mail.

Weekend Project

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

How to...

Rescue your videos from old, obsolete file formats

Wayne Williams digs out his VHS and camcorder footage and shows you how to digitise your old home movies while you still can

Technology moves at such a pace these days that media stored in a once common format may now be difficult to access. A lot of people have treasured memories stored on VHS (or old camcorder tapes) with no way of watching them, and some newer PCs don't come with optical drives, which makes viewing or copying videos on CDs and DVDs much harder. Not so long ago, digital video would have been stored in formats such as AVI or WMV, but they have been superseded by better, more modern formats, such as MP4 and MKV.

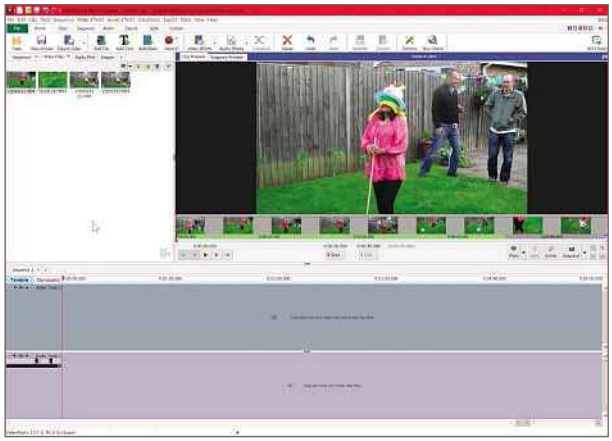
While you can pay someone to recover old video for you – transferring analogue video on tape to digital files, for example – it's easy enough to perform the task yourself, and you'll have the added benefit of being able to tweak and improve the quality of the finished result.

Copying from VHS

If you have a video recorder to play your tapes on, then digitising the contents is actually very straightforward. If you don't, find out if a friend or family member has a VHS recorder you can use. Otherwise, you should be able to pick one up on eBay for between £10 and £20 (check the listing carefully to make sure the device is in good working order before buying it).

Electrovid (www.electrovid.co.uk) also offers a selection of refurbished VHS players and recorders.

A DVD recorder lets you easily record VHS content directly to DVD



VideoPad lets you capture and edit old video footage

If you are willing to spend a little more money, you could buy a standalone DVD recorder, which will have a line-in connection; or a combination DVD recorder and VHS, which lets you record the contents of a tape directly to a disc.

If you opt for a regular VHS player, you'll need a hardware-capture device to digitise the analogue video ready for viewing, editing and converting on your PC or Mac. There are lots of different capture devices to choose from, but the most common ones are dongles which have composite RCA and S-Video cables at one end and a USB plug at the other – expect to pay somewhere between £10 and £30.

The quality of your results will depend on a host of factors. VHS has a low resolution, equivalent to 335 x 576 pixels, and the quality of the original recording, the capture hardware, and the capture software will all play a big part in how the digitised video looks. The more times a tape has been played, the worse the quality will get over time. Also, always work from an original copy because each successive version (copies of copies) will be poorer than the previous one due to "generational decay."

The capture process will differ depending on the software that you receive with the device, but it usually involves starting the video playing, then clicking the record button when the scene you want appears in the preview window.

You don't have to stick with the supplied software because there are free programs that should work just as well, if not better, with your device. We recommend VideoPad Video Editor (bit.ly/vpve418).

Another interesting option is the DigitNow Video Grabber Box, which does away with the need for a PC. You connect your VHS player or camcorder directly to the device, then start a tape playing. The video will be shown on the device's built-in LCD screen and you can start recording any time. The digitised footage is saved directly to the supplied 4GB memory card (you can switch to a larger card if you prefer). At £89.99 on Amazon (bit.ly/digit418), it is a lot more expensive than other capture solutions, but it's a good choice if your priorities are simplicity and portability.

Copying from a camcorder

The process of digitising video from a camcorder that uses tapes (such as Hi-8) is much the same as for VHS. You will need a camcorder that plays the tapes, a hardware capture

You can digitise analogue video using a USB video-capture device

MINI WORKSHOP
Transfer video to a PC using a DVD recorder

1 **The Recorder should have a 'Line in' or 'Decoder' port, which will probably be a SCART socket. 1 If possible, use the cables and connectors that came with your camera 2 because we found our camcorder didn't get on with generic cables. Connect the AV port on the camera to the DVD recoder.**

2 **Turn on the TV, DVD and camcorder, then set the TV to the DVD's input so you can see it on the screen. Start the camcorder playing and select the correct source on the DVD (ours was 'Line 1') to see what you're recording. 1 When your camcorder footage is at the right point, start recording on your DVD, then set the camcorder playing.**

3 **Once you've finished recording, finalise the disc by choosing the option from the DVD player's menu. 1 This will ensure that it can be played in any player. You can then transfer this to your PC using HandBrake. Click the Source button and choose your DVD drive, then set the software up by following our Mini Workshop on page 61.**

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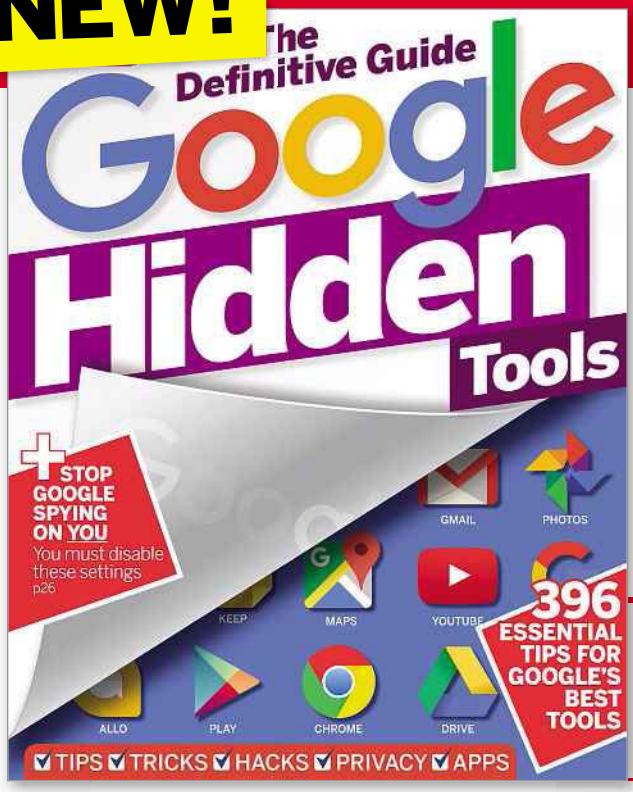

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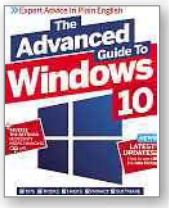

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The DigitNow Video Grabber Box captures videos without the need for a PC

device, and the relevant cables.

If you have a DV camcorder, this will connect directly to your PC via USB or IEEE 1394 FireWire. If your computer doesn't have a FireWire port – and, if it's new, there's a good chance it won't – you can pick up a card (and cable, if required) on Amazon for around £20.

Copying from CD and DVD

There's been some concern about optical media regarding 'disc rot' – the physical degradation of CDs and, to a lesser degree, DVDs, which can prevent them from being read – but this is often overstated and shouldn't worry you. Provided the discs are of a decent quality and have been handled with care, they should play for many, many years. However, it doesn't hurt to make a backup copy of the video on your discs for safety purposes. You can write the video to a new disc, store it on a hard drive or upload it to the cloud or YouTube.

If your PC or Mac has a CD/DVD drive, you can copy the files from the disc to your hard drive. If it's a video DVD, then you can use free software such as HandBrake (handbrake.fr) to rip the contents.

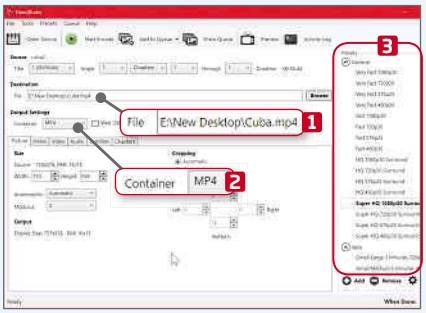
Choosing a new video format

You're probably familiar with video formats such as AVI and MKV, but you may not appreciate that these are simply 'containers'. The key thing to know is that the video itself is compressed using 'codecs'. There are a lot of codecs to choose from, but we would recommend either H.264 (which offers great quality) or MPEG-4 (for faster compression).

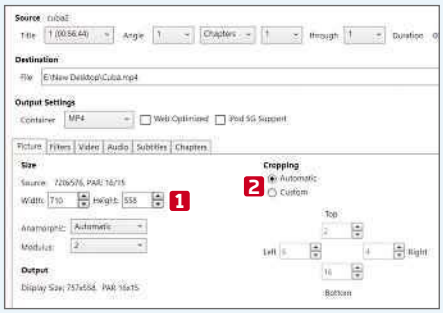
Similarly, there are many containers to choose from. Ideally, you should go for Matroska (with the MKV extension) or MP4. While MKV is an excellent format that supports most codecs and offers a lot of features, it's not as popular as MP4, so not every media player will be able to handle it. ■

You may need a FireWire card to transfer videos stored on DV tapes

MINI WORKSHOP | Convert old videos into a digital format using HandBrake



1 Open HandBrake, then drag and drop a video to the program window. Choose a save destination for the converted file. 1 By default, you can choose between MP4 and MKV as the video container. 2 There's also a long list of video presets available to browse. 3



2 The preset video profiles include general, web-optimised and device-specific (Fire TV, Android, Chromecast and so on). There are also options for Matroska (MKV) and legacy devices. Make any required changes to the picture including adjusting the width and height, 1 and cropping. 2 In most cases, it's wisest to leave things as they are.

3 The row of tabs 1 lets you perform various actions. You can add filters such as Denoise and Rotate; choose a different codec and framerate under Video; change the Audio settings; add subtitles and insert chapters. Click Preview 2 to see what the video will look like and Start Encode 3 to begin the conversion process.

NEXT ISSUE **How To...** Protect your PC by running programs in a sandbox

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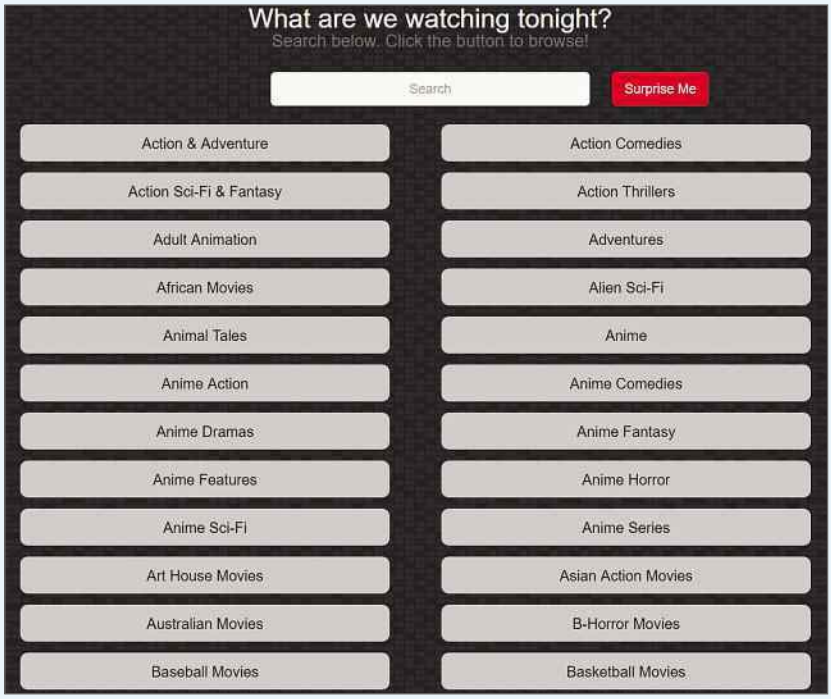
Web User Masterclass

Get more from streaming-TV services **Netflix** and **Amazon Prime Video** with our expert hacks and secret tips

Access hidden Netflix categories

Netflix offers thousands of movies and TV programmes to watch, which it organises into categories or genres. When you click the Browse link on the homepage, it displays around 20 categories. There are actually many more – hundreds, in fact – but you can't see them. Luckily, there are several websites that provide links to them.

Visit bit.ly/genre418 and you'll see a list containing dozens of categories. Click the link at the top to view the extended list, which contains many more. Not every link works because Netflix sometimes deletes categories, but many still function and contain fascinating movies you might otherwise miss. You'll find an alternative source of Netflix categories at netflixcodes.me. These category links are a great way to discover different films and TV series.



This is just the first part of a long list of hidden Netflix categories

Discover what to watch

When you browse Netflix, you see only a small proportion of what's available. Use netflixroulette.net to search for directors, actors and keywords, and filter the results by rating. Then click the Spin button to receive a random suggestion based on your choices. Netflix removes old content from time to time, so not every link works.

Free Amazon Prime Video

An Amazon Prime subscription gives you access to a host of services, one of which is Prime Video. If you experience a problem with one of the services, you may be able to get a free month added to your subscription, up to 12 times a year.

As a Prime member, you can use Amazon Guaranteed Accelerated Delivery when buying products. If your goods fail to arrive by the given date and time, go to bit.ly/fine418 and see if you qualify for an extra free month, which includes Prime Video.

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.

Get movie suggestions from the Netflix Roulette website

Get Amazon Prime half price

You can share an account with your partner or flatmate, and pay half each for your Prime subscription. Go to bit.ly/half418 to create a Household account. You can add two adults and four children to the account, and both adults can access video streaming and other Prime membership benefits.

Create Netflix profiles

When you browse Netflix, it displays TV shows and movies it thinks you'll like based on your interests and viewing history. But if your partner or kids also use Netflix, their viewing history will skew the results, so you may see recommendations for cartoons when you're only interested in crime thrillers.

Click your name in the top-right corner of the website, then click Manage Profiles, or tap the app's

Create a Netflix profile for each person in your home

menu button followed by your name. Use the Add button to add a new profile for each member of the household.

It's important that each person switches to their profile when they start the app or visit the website, so the items they view are added to their profile and not yours.

Avoid extra charges on Amazon

Some Amazon TV shows and movies aren't included in Prime Video and have to be bought. To avoid accidentally buying something instead of watching it as part of your subscription, go to Prime Video on the website, click Settings and turn on Purchase Restrictions. Create a PIN or enter the one you use for parental controls.

Set a PIN in Amazon Prime's settings to prevent accidental purchases

Stop Auto Play

When one episode of a TV series ends, the next one starts automatically. This can be irritating, unless you're planning to binge watch the whole series, because if you forget to press stop, the series plays to the end and flags all the episodes as watched, even if you just fell asleep or went to bed. Go to Settings in the Amazon app, press Auto Play and turn it off. On the Netflix website, go to My Account, 'Playback settings' and remove the tick.

Are you still there?

If you binge watch Netflix all day, you might see a message asking if you're still there or awake. A Chrome extension called Flix Assist (bit.ly/flix418) can stop this, but it doesn't work for everyone.

Create a watch list

When browsing for something to watch, you can save any interesting items you come across and continue browsing. To do this on Amazon, click the button below Watch Now. Use the Watch List button at the bottom of the screen in the app or go to Prime Video on the Amazon website and click Your Watchlist.

On Netflix, the MyList button under each movie does the same thing. Press it to save an item and continue browsing. Your MyList selections appear at the top of the home screen. On the website, click the Browse link and select MyList.

TAKE IT TO THE NEXT LEVEL

More advanced tips for when you're feeling brave

Clear your Netflix history

Netflix tracks the content you watch and saves it in your profile. If you've been indulging in too many guilty pleasures and are embarrassed by what's displayed in your profile, go to your account page on the website and click 'Viewing activity'. Click the cross next to any items you want to remove.

Alternatively, you can create a new profile and use that instead. You can't delete your own profile but you can delete any you've added, along with their data.

Set the video quality

Go to your Netflix account on the website and click 'Playback settings'. Here, you'll find Auto, Low, Medium and High settings. Auto sets the video quality and data rate automatically, but if you need to limit the amount of data used, choose the Low setting. If you have unlimited fibre broadband and a 4K TV, choose High. An hour of video at the High setting uses up to 7GB of data, but it's the best quality.

Amazon Prime Video's quality is set to Good by default, but its Better and Best settings offer improvements. Use the Good setting if you have a slow internet connection or limited data – when watching on a phone using mobile data, for example. Tap Settings, Streaming & Downloading, Streaming Quality. Choose Best if you have fast, unlimited broadband.

Use the quality setting that best suits your internet connection

Super Netflix

Chrome extension Super Netflix (bit.ly/super418) adds tools that let you access technical information and customise settings. Before you can use it, however, you must opt out of Netflix interface experiments. Go to your account page, click 'Test participation' and turn it off.

When video is streaming, a set of Super Netflix icons appears on the right. Right-click the video to view technical information including the frame rate, frames dropped, the bit rate and other data. The Fast-forward and Rewind buttons jump a little at a time, making it easier to skip forward and back. The TV icon cycles through different image modes, such as black and white, bright and darker, and more.

Click the gear icon and a window appears containing different audio and video bit rates. If your internet connection is poor, selecting lower bit rates will smooth out playback and prevent buffering.

Sign out remotely

You can access your Netflix account on more than one device, which means you may have enabled it on devices you no longer use or that belong to other people. Go to Your Account and click 'Sign out of all devices'. Now, anyone who tries to use your Netflix account will need to log in, which they won't be able to do without your username and password.

Watch movies offline

If you're going on holiday or somewhere that doesn't have Wi-Fi, you can download films and TV programmes to watch later on your phone or tablet. In Netflix, select a movie or TV show and look for the Download button under the image. Before you do that, however, open the menu, select App Settings and choose a suitable video quality for your downloads. Standard uses less storage space, which means you can download more titles.

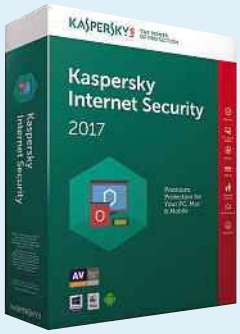
Amazon users have a button under Watch Now. First, go to Settings, Streaming & Downloading, Download Quality and select Best, Better or Good. Again, this will affect the viewing quality and how much storage space you need. Video at Good quality uses around 0.3GB an hour, while Best uses 0.9GB.

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

SECURITY

Upgrade free security tools



Paying for your security software often gets you more tools than free programs offer

Q Is the Post Office's free internet security software effective enough to protect my PC, or would you advise me to purchase something like Kaspersky or McAfee instead?

Jagtar Singh, via email

A The free security software provided with Post Office's broadband internet service (bit.ly/po418) appears to be supplied by Fujitsu Internet Security. Fujitsu doesn't make its own security software, so this is a rebadged version of another company's product. A quick search for the files online indicates that the security element is provided by Bitdefender (www.bitdefender.co.uk).

Bitdefender is one of the best-performing antivirus programs available, so it should offer good security, provided it's up to date. However, paid-for security software often has more features than free software and tends to include extra tools such as a password manager, file encryption, secure file erasing, identity protection, a firewall and so on.

Kaspersky Internet Security 2017 (bit.ly/kaspersky2017) is an excellent choice if you decide to buy software, but McAfee didn't perform as well in recent tests run by AV-Test (www.av-test.org) and AV-Comparatives (www.av-comparatives.org).

EMAIL

Email web pages

Q For years, I've used the 'Send Page by Email' tool in Internet Explorer 11 as a convenient way of creating a monthly newsletter for a village website, which I email to more than 200 people. With the web page open, selecting the option would bring up the message: "A Web site wants to open web content using this program on your computer".

Since the Anniversary Update, this is broken and I just see "Program: Microsoft Windows. Publisher: Microsoft Corporation. Effects Outlook Email in both Office 2007 and Office 2016."

I sometimes use the Edge browser but I still find Internet Explorer 11 fast and easy to use, as long as no add-ons or extra toolbars are present and only one search provider is active. As an added benefit, Internet Explorer 11 can display two or more web pages side by side.

I'm a full believer in moving forward with technology, but in this case I'm having to resort to an old Windows 7 PC.

David Eversden, via email

Use Edge's share tool to send a web page by email

A When we tried a few websites in Internet Explorer 11, the 'Send page by email' menu was disabled. This feature may no longer work, but Windows 10 provides a new way of doing a similar thing.

Microsoft Edge doesn't offer the option to send a web page by email, but you can share it instead. This works well and is easy to do. It uses the Mail app (which we have a workshop on – see page 57) so if you haven't done so already, set it up by adding your email account to it. Then go to a website in Edge and click the Share button in the toolbar. A panel opens on the right of the screen with sharing options. Select Mail, and an email is created with the page title, image and link. You can customise this by adding your own headings and text. Then fill in the To box and send the email.

It's not a good idea to send one email to 200 people, because your internet provider and other email servers may blacklist you as a spammer. Instead, use a legitimate email marketing tool. MailChimp (mailchimp.com) is one of many but it lets you email up to 2,000 people with a total of 12,000 emails a month for free. Once you get used to it, you'll find it quick and easy to use.

Edge can also display two or more pages side by side. Open two tabs, then click and drag one out and into its own window. Position and resize them.

MEDIA

Change Kodi's media player

Q I am trying to replace Kodi's default media player with my all-time favourite, VLC media player (www.videolan.org), which is the most reliable and versatile player I have ever used. It's incredibly advanced for a free program, and I find its picture sharpener and aspect ratio setting extremely useful when I'm watching a low-quality video file, because it lets me improve the size and crispness of the file being played.

I've looked for instructions for this online, but most how-to guides aren't detailed enough to help. I find your magazine very helpful in lots of other computer-related matters, so I wonder if you could take me through the process step by step.

Naroon, via email

A The Kodi Wiki (bit.ly/kodi418) provides an almost – but not quite – complete answer. It just needs a few changes to the code. Copy the example code in '1 Set up' and paste it into

Notepad. Set the player name in the third line to VLC.

The fourth line contains the path to the media player you want to use. Delete everything between <filename> and </filename>, then enter the path to VLC on your PC. The line will then look something like this:

```
<filename>C:\Program Files (x86)\VideoLAN\VLC\vlc.exe </filename>
```

Change the line that's third from the end to tell Kodi which file types VLC player should play. You can add more file types, but this should be sufficient:

```
<rule filetypes="mkv|mp4|avi" player="VLC"/>
```

Now you just have to save this file in the right place. Press Windows+R and type `%appdata%\kodi\userdata`. Explorer opens and displays a folder. Save the Notepad file to this folder with the name 'playercorefactory.xml'. Start Kodi and it will use VLC.

SECURITY

Protect your router from Wi-Fi hacks

Q I used to leave my Wi-Fi on all the time, but I read an article in the *Daily Mail* saying that Wi-Fi passwords can be hacked easily if someone sets up their PC as a hotspot with the same name. Now I switch mine off when I'm not using it, even though most of my friends and relatives keep theirs switched on.

How can I make my router safer so I can keep it switched on for my phone, laptop, iPad and TV streaming?

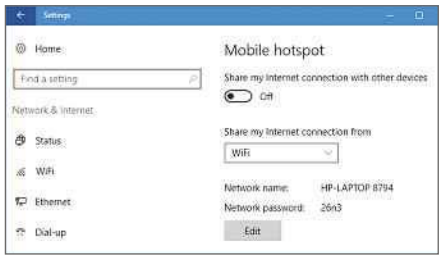
Peter Day, via email

A It's easy to set up a laptop or phone as a Wi-Fi hotspot. If someone were to do this in a public place such as a café, others might think it was the café's free Wi-Fi and connect to it, allowing that person to spy on their web use.

If you have an evil next-door neighbour, they could give their Wi-Fi network the same name as yours so that your devices connect to it by mistake, although this isn't particularly likely.

Another way to spy on your internet activities is to hack the router. If you suspect someone has done this, you should change the router's password, especially if you haven't done so before.

Press Windows+R, type `cmd` and press Enter. Type `ipconfig`, press Enter and look for the Default Gateway. Type the IP address (which should look something like 192.168.1.254), and the router's homepage will appear. Log in, find the router's password setting and



Any PC can be turned into a spoof Wi-Fi hotspot via Windows 10's Settings

change it. While you're there, make sure WPA/WPA2 encryption is enabled.

Anything can be hacked given enough time, computing power and expertise, but unless you live next door to a skilled hacker, taking these few simple precautions will mean you won't need to worry about leaving your home Wi-Fi on all the time.

ONLINE STORAGE

Using web space as storage

Q Many web-hosting options offer unlimited storage for a relatively low monthly fee. If I were to put up a basic one-page website, could I then use the unlimited storage to store my own files? It would be like having my own personal online drive.

J Evans, via email

A Yes, this is possible, but there are limitations. OneDrive, Google Drive, Dropbox and other dedicated online-storage services provide a folder on your PC's hard drive that acts like any other folder on your PC and automatically syncs with your online storage. They also provide easy-to-use web interfaces, mobile apps and so on.

Access to a website's online storage is often limited to a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) program, which is a tool for uploading and downloading files. These are clunky and inconvenient for files that need to be accessed frequently. Files stored on a website are publicly accessible, too, so you'd need to encrypt them before uploading them.

Many services described as unlimited aren't actually unlimited and have terms and conditions that prevent excessive use. They may even expressly forbid using the service as an online drive. It's an interesting idea, but it's not practical.

GENERAL PC

Can't disable apps in Windows 8.1

Q The Top Tip in Issue 414 (bit.ly/webuser414) on disabling unwanted applications doesn't state which version of Windows was used. I have Windows 8.1, and following the procedure outlined didn't lead to any list of apps. I tried the Search tab in case the list was hidden elsewhere, but to no avail.

J Zarach, via email

A Sorry, the tip you mention is for Windows 10 only. Although there are many similarities between Windows 8.1 and Windows 10, not everything that works on Windows 10 will also work on Windows 8.1.

GENERAL PC

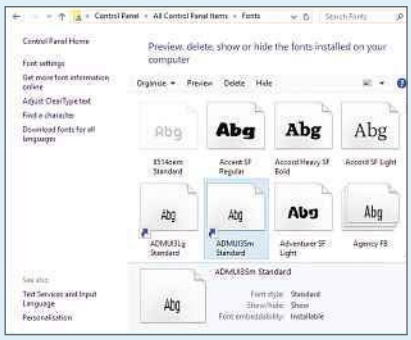
Clear out unnecessary fonts

Q I have 500 fonts on my PC. I use around 15 of them regularly but I have to scroll through them all to find those I want. Is it possible to store the fonts in two folders so Windows 10 loads only those I use regularly, but the others are still available if needed?

Jim Mellor, via email

A You can't have two lists of fonts, but there are other options. Open the Control Panel and click Fonts to see a list of fonts on your PC. Double-click a font to see some example text showing what it looks like.

When you find a font you don't want, click to select it and click the Hide link in the menu bar at the top.



Fonts can be hidden or deleted from the Control Panel

Most programs don't show hidden fonts, so this is a useful way to reduce the number on display. You can click to show them again if you need them.

You can also delete fonts from here, but you should only do this for fonts you know you'll never use and that aren't needed by Windows or other programs for menus, links and so on.

This fortnight, all Roland's friends' PCs seemed to conk out, so he's been on call, reformatting and restoring Windows

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

Mug winner

MUSIC

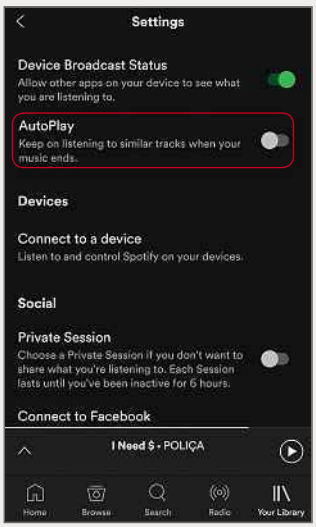
Stop Spotify playing automatically

Spotify recently added a new feature that automatically plays similar songs once your chosen album, playlist or collection has finished. While some users might like this, I find it frustrating because I can't necessarily tell when my original selection has ended, and it can consume excessive amounts of mobile data. Luckily, it can be turned off.

In Spotify's Android app, tap Your Library and select the Settings cog. Scroll down the page until you see an option called AutoPlay. Switch this off and tracks will no longer play when the music you've chosen ends. In the iOS app, you'll find the same option in the Playback sub-menu.

To disable it in the Desktop version of Spotify, click the down arrow in the top-right corner and select Settings. Scroll down to AutoPlay and turn it off.

Alex Hale, via email



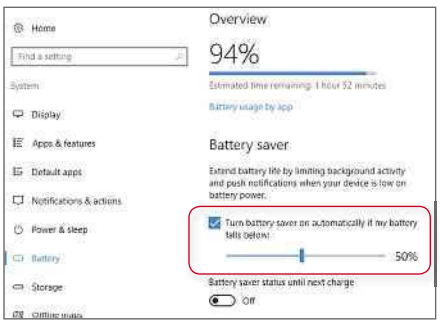
AutoPlay finds similar tracks when your playlist finishes

HARDWARE

Make your laptop battery last longer

Here's a quick tip for owners of Windows 10 laptops that will make their batteries last longer. Open the Settings app, click System and select Battery. If the Battery saver isn't enabled, tick the box. Battery Saver switches on automatically when the laptop's battery level drops to around 20%, but if you drag the slider to somewhere around 50%, it will kick in sooner and save even more power.

Paul Evans, via email



Enable battery saver and drag the slider to start saving battery power sooner

EMAIL

Receive news by email

If you haven't tried Google Alerts yet, go to www.google.com/alerts and check it out – I find it really useful. Enter a topic and you'll receive a list of relevant news stories by email every day. For example, you can enter your home town, a football team, your favourite music and so on.

When you type a word or phrase, a preview of a news story appears. If you like what you see, click Create Alert. The 'Show options' link is useful and the 'How often' option lets you choose between 'As it happens', 'At most once a day' and 'At most once a week'. It saves you having to browse multiple websites for interesting news stories, because they all appear as an email in your inbox.

Andrew Mullen, via email

OFFICE

Edit PDF files in Google

If you need to edit or extract text from a PDF file, Google Docs can help. Go to drive.google.com in a browser, then drag the PDF from an Explorer window and drop it to upload it. Right-click the PDF file on Google Drive, hover the mouse pointer over 'Open with' and click the Google Docs option. After a few seconds, you'll see a new Google Docs document that contains all the text.

Barry Doyle, via email

EMAIL

Remove spammers from your inbox

I've often heard that you shouldn't respond to junk emails or click anything in them because it tells the spammer you exist and that you're reading the emails, which encourages them to send more. In my experience this isn't completely true.

There are two types of spammer: responsible ones who put unsubscribe links in their emails and those who don't. These are the worst kind. If junk mail has an unsubscribe link, my advice is to click it, because it almost always works.

If you use Outlook.com for email, you'll see a link to unsubscribe at the top of the message just under the title. Outlook puts it there. I click both the unsubscribe link in the email and Outlook's link.

If there is no unsubscribe link, there's not much you can do except select the message and click Junk in Outlook.

Adam Poste, via email

BROWSERS

Save web-page shortcuts to your Desktop

We all have bookmarks for our favourite websites, but what if you want a Desktop shortcut instead? Making one in Chrome is very easy. Visit your chosen website, click the three dot icon in the top-right corner of the browser and choose 'More tools', then 'Add to desktop'. Once you've done that, you can right-click the shortcut on the Desktop and choose further options, such as 'Pin to taskbar'.

To add a shortcut from Firefox, simply drag and drop the icon on the left of the URL to the Desktop. Whichever browser

Chrome lets you save shortcuts to web pages on your Desktop

you use to make the shortcut, it will still open in your default browser.

FratPark, Web User Forums

MOBILE

Save your phone's battery with black wallpaper

Some mobile phone screens are made with light-emitting diodes (LEDs). When you pass a current through them, they glow in different colours to produce an image. The thing is, when no current is flowing, the LEDs are black. So if you set your home screen background to black, it reduces power consumption and your battery lasts longer.

You'll still have icons and widgets on the screen, but having 50% of the screen black will preserve battery power. Find a black wallpaper to download or take a photo with the lens covered and use that.

Evan Williams, via email

GENERAL PC

Disable Cortana in the latest Windows build

Windows 10 build 14393-693 is the best so far, in my opinion. The only problem I've had is working out how to disable and then re-enable Cortana. Even after trawling the Registry, I couldn't work out a hack to deactivate it.

I then discovered that How To Geek offers a simple one-click Registry hack to fix the problem at bit.ly/cortana418. Scroll down and click the link to 'download our disable Cortana registry hack'. This downloads a ZIP file that, once extracted, contains two files, Disable Cortana.reg and Enable Cortana.reg. Double-click the appropriate option when required and the job is done.

David Guest, via email

BROWSERS

Switch tabs quickly in Chrome

The other day I stumbled on a quick way to switch tabs in Google Chrome. Simply hold down Ctrl and press the number of the tab you want, and it opens instantly. This is really useful if you're using the keyboard and don't want to have to switch to the mouse.

Rebecca Byrne, via email

EMAIL

Send money with Gmail

I'm not sure if anyone has noticed, but Gmail now lets you send and receive money. When writing a new email, click the '£' symbol at the bottom of the window and a pop-up for Google Wallet appears. If your credit or debit card is registered with your Google account, you can choose the card you want to use from a drop-down menu and enter the amount to send, before reviewing the transaction and attaching it to the email. Alternatively, click the Request tab to ask the recipient for an amount of money. You can also add an optional memo.

Register a credit card with Google to send money through Gmail

I haven't yet tried the service but the help page says recipients only need an email address and must then set up a Google Money account. I'd be wary of transferring more than a few pounds, but if you need to repay your share of a food bill or similar, it looks like a useful alternative to a bank transfer. If you haven't registered any cards with Google, you're invited to add these when you first click the icon.

Ed Wright, via email

OFFICE

Change case in Google Docs

I recently switched to Google Docs after years of using Microsoft's Office suite, and one of the small things I missed was the option to change the case of text with the keyboard shortcut Shift+F3. Although there's no keyboard shortcut in Docs, you can install an extension called Change Case (bit.ly/case418) that lets you highlight a passage and convert it to any case including upper case, lower case and 'sentence case'. I find it especially useful when I haven't noticed that Caps Lock is enabled.

James Blackburn, via email

Use Change Case to convert your text to capitals

BLUNDER OF THE FORTNIGHT

SECURITY

Bypass lock screen using Wi-Fi hack

My other half recently fired up an old Nexus 7 tablet that had been gathering dust on the shelf, but it was so long since she'd used it that she'd forgotten her pass pattern and couldn't get past the lock screen. As Edward Munn mentioned in 'Undo your mobile mistakes', Issue 416, after several incorrect attempts, the tablet gives you the option to log in with a Google account. Sadly, we'd replaced our router since we'd last used the device, so the tablet wouldn't connect to the internet to let us log in.

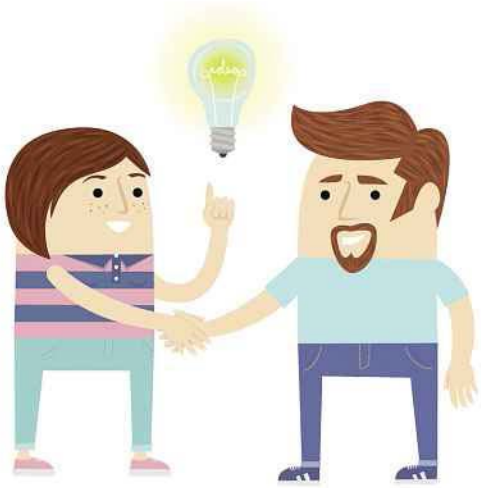
Once we'd resigned ourselves to wiping the device to regain access, I tried booting into Recovery Mode, but even this wouldn't work.

I was close to giving up when I suddenly thought it might be possible to use the 'Mobile hotspot' feature on my Samsung S6 to imitate our old router, thereby giving the tablet the internet connection it required. I used Keychain on my MacBook Pro to find the old router's name and security key, then tapped 'Configure Mobile hotspot' on my phone and entered the details. Within seconds of activating the hotspot, my phone showed one connected device, which was the Nexus 7! With the tablet's internet connection active, we could log into the Google Account and regain access. Having come so close to throwing the device away, it was hugely satisfying to give it another lease of life.

Keychain lets you reveal passwords for Wi-Fi networks you've used in the past

Ben Houghton, via email

Have you managed to fix a PC-related disaster?
If so, please send your story to webuser@dennis.co.uk



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

What's happened to my Task Manager?

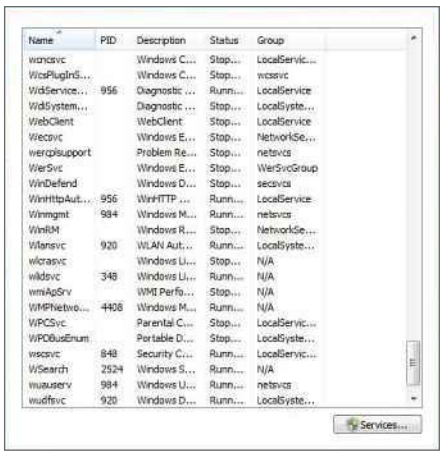
Q I opened Task Manager in Windows 7 and clicked Services, but it appeared with no menu bar, as illustrated in my picture (below). Can anyone tell me how I can get it to load normally?

Jon98, Web User Forums

A Your Task Manager is running in 'Tiny Footprint' mode. To restore Task Manager to its normal appearance, double-click the empty space above the entries displayed in your screenshot. Double-clicking in the same place when Task Manager looks normal changes it to Tiny Footprint mode, so perhaps you or another user did that accidentally.

In Windows 10, you can only enable this mode in the Performance tab. Pressing Esc closes Task Manager and it will load as normal when it's next opened.

Madeline and alanrwood, Web User Forums



Tiny Footprint mode removes the menu bar and page tabs from Task Manager

SECURITY

Why are my files encrypted?

Q All the images in my Pictures folder are encrypted. I don't know how this happened, but I have noticed a saved web page, OSIRIS.html, in the same folder. How do I resolve this? I have carried out an antivirus scan, which came back clear.

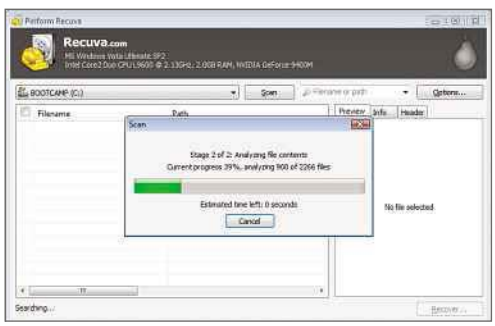
MicroKid, Web User Forums

A Having searched Google for OSIRIS .html, it looks as though you've fallen victim to the Locky Ransomware virus. Ransomware need not be a disaster, provided you have created a backup to an external drive that is not normally connected to your computer, or if you have backups of your important documents and photos. If you have made a backup, make sure you boot up with a system repair disk (see bit.ly/repair418 for more info), so you are outside Windows when you restore the image. Restoring a backup should not only restore your files but also remove the ransomware.

Unfortunately, if you don't have a backup, you may have lost the encrypted files forever, but you should follow the tips at bit.ly/osiris418 to remove the virus and attempt to recover the files with free file-recovery software such as Recuva (www.piriform.com/recuva).

Avoid opening emails from unknown sources because this is often how this type of malware is spread.

Cantrel and tornado, Web User Forums



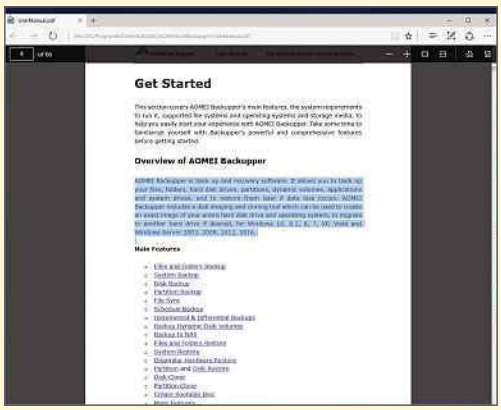
Recuva can sometimes restore files that have been encrypted by ransomware

BROWSERS

Why doesn't Edge's 'Find on page' work in some PDFs?

Q I am trying to search for a specific word in a PDF using the 'Find on Page' option in Microsoft Edge. However, although the word is quite clearly visible in the text, it displays 'No Results' every time I try it. Should I try using a different PDF viewer?

robinsong, Web User Forums



If you can highlight the text in a PDF, you should be able to search for words within the document

A If the PDF doesn't have searchable text, trying a different PDF viewer will make no difference. Often, documents are saved as images, which means that 'find on page' tools can't search their text. The easiest way to tell if your PDF has been saved in this way is to check if you can highlight the words with the cursor. If you can't, it's likely to be an image and therefore unsearchable.

This type of PDF can be opened and converted into searchable text using good OCR (optical character recognition) tools. These normally come packaged with premium software, such as Adobe Acrobat, but free online versions also exist, such as Online OCR (www.onlineocr.net).

lizzygraham, Web User Forums

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Star Email

Mug winner

The internet is a life-saver for me

About four weeks ago, I was taken very ill. I will not be crude, but suffice to say I had bad back pain and was very sick. I was taken into hospital and put in an unsuitable ward full of bedridden people, some of whom kept waking me up in the night. No sleep for a week.

Eventually, I was allowed to go home and, despite my weakness, I had to manage my own care. On the internet, I ordered special ready meals and groceries for two weeks, spending over £150 on food.

I then realised I did not have enough room in my freezer. On the Saturday morning, I called a well-known appliance store at 9am and ordered a chest freezer and a larder fridge for £432. My bank card did not work, even though it had the day before, so I tried my credit card, which did work. I called my bank, which said it had put a restriction on my card because of the amount spent. I said: "You are killing me because I need to rely on my card". The bank did take the restriction off, but I was very worried as I cannot get out or drive at the moment.

The ability to use the internet and order the things I need such as light pyjamas and a dressing gown made all the difference.

I am 71. I did not see a computer until I was 44. It is a life-saver for me now, and any old people who can take advantage of it should do. I am on the mend because being able to use the internet has taken a load off my mind and I can get everything I need online.

Martin Fletcher, Thorpe Hesley

Don't fall for BT Call Protect scam

After reading your news story in Issue 415, I signed up to BT's Call Protect nuisance-call blocker (www.bt.com/callprotect). This morning I received a call from an Asian lady who asked if I'd had any more nuisance calls, to which I said no. She claimed to be from BT and wanted to confirm my card details.

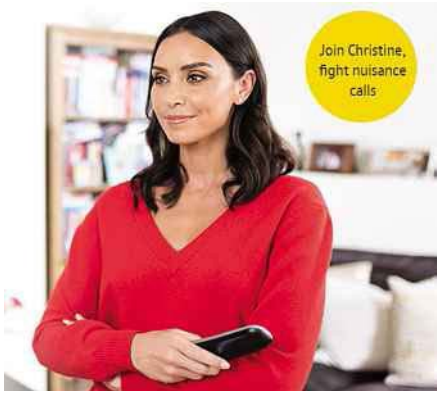
I used to work in a bank so I know not to give this information over the phone, but she said she already had my card details and just wanted to check that they were up to date. She said that my card number began with a '4' but when I asked her for the rest of the numbers, she changed the subject.

The woman said that there was a charge for BT Call Protect and asked for my details so that BT could debit my account. I told her that if there was a charge then I didn't want the service, to which she replied that in that case I would continue to get nuisance calls. I said that was fine and said goodbye.

I have since contacted BT, which said that the call wasn't from them. I asked them how someone found out so quickly that I had signed up to this service, and why Call Protect allowed this call to get though to me. Also, I dialled 1471 to find out where this call had come from – it was an 003030 number.

I do hope you pass on this information to your readers because I am sure that there are vulnerable people out there who will give their card details.

Mrs Joan Eaton, via email



Quiz Answers: Issue 417

1. Pinball Wizard
2. Waterloo Sunset
3. Please Mr Postman
4. Don't Cry for Me Argentina
5. Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree
6. Sweets For My Sweet

WINNER!
Kenny Kelly was the first to email us the correct answers and wins our *Definitive Guide to Google Hidden Tools*

WORD PUZZLE
Hardware

"A tenner says your kids or grandchildren have been duped on a Minecraft site"

Turn to page 74 to find out what's making Barry mad this issue

In praise of Opera Neon

Thank you for the article about Opera Neon in Issue 416 in your Best New Browser Tools section, and the workshop in issue 417. I'd already decided to try this browser, so your information has been very welcome and useful.

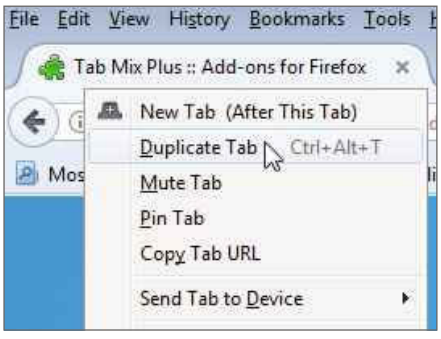
All the same, I don't think I'll be using Opera Neon much until I can use an ad blocker with it! Apart from that, I've found it very good - definitely something different! At least I've managed to add DuckDuckGo to Opera Neon as my default search engine.

Madeline, Web User Forums

Yes, you *can* duplicate tabs in Firefox!

I am very puzzled. Your Best New Browser Tools section in Issue 416 laments the "shameful situation" that Firefox has no means to duplicate tabs. I have been using Tab Mix Plus (bit.ly/tabmix418) for many years, which gives me this option. Simply right-click the tab and you'll see Duplicate Tab with the alternative keyboard shortcut Ctrl+Alt+T shown as well. I would have thought this add-on is essential for anyone serious about using tabs in Firefox. It gives you exceptional control over them.

Even without Tab Mix Plus, I believe your assertion is still wrong because Mozilla offers the following options to duplicate tabs: press Ctrl and click or middle-click the Reload button to open the current page in a new tab. Press Ctrl and click or middle-click items in the history of the Back and Forward buttons to open a page from that list in a new tab. You can duplicate a tab with its history by pressing Ctrl and dragging the tab to a new position on the tab bar.



Tony Allaway, London

Dismiss Walters at your peril

I completely concur with your correspondent in Issue 416 (bit.ly/webuser416) that not all Walters are "softies". A few notable examples for you: Sir Walter Raleigh, who introduced the potato to England; American newscaster Walter Cronkite, who informed the world of JFK's assassination; and footballer and soldier Walter Tull, who was the first black officer to lead a British troop in battle. Quite what this has to do with the web, I'm not sure, but we Walters will not be softly dismissed. Do so at your peril!

Walter Henshaw, via email

Retro gaming request

In Issue 416, I read an item on page 27 about a piece of software called Image to ZX Sec 2, which can be used to produce a ZX Spectrum-style slant on any image. It got me wondering whether something existed that could do the opposite?

Not long ago, I used an Atari ST emulator to play The Pawn – one of a series of adventure games produced by Magnetic Scrolls back in the Eighties. It was one of the first games available for those early 16-bit computers and the graphics accompanying the game were beautifully cutting-edge at the time. However, more than 30 years later, the images that once took my breath away now look very basic. Does anyone know of a free piece of software that can bring the wow factor back to early graphics?

David Neil Evans

Contactless cards lack security

Regarding your FAQ about smart glasses in Issue 416, I have one thing to say: the criminals will love them almost as much as contactless payment cards. The banks are always warning us to be on our guard against people who want to steal our money. So what do the banks do? They give us cards with absolutely no security.

Stan Elliott, Belfast

Wear gloves when drilling a hard drive

In your Weekend Project in Issue 417 about destroying an old hard drive, you make a point of stating "be sure to wear protective eyewear and gloves when attacking a drive". This is very sound advice, yet in the accompanying photos, the model is clearly not wearing gloves on his hands while operating a large drill and sledgehammer. I think this sends mixed messages about the necessity of employing proper safety measures when you attack computer equipment with

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potentially dangerous tools. I can only hope that the model's eyes (not visible in the picture) were adequately shielded by goggles, even though their hands were exposed to flying shards.

Brian Naylor, via email

Shot through the hard drive

It was good to read Wayne Williams' article in Issue 417 about wiping and disposing of old hard drives, which should help remind people about security. When I find my backup-cloning drives no longer have enough capacity, I shoot a hole through them with a 12-gauge shotgun before disposal. Here's one I destroyed earlier.

John Haas, via email

Why not to upgrade PHP

In Build a Better Site in Issue 417, your advice is to upgrade to PHP v7, but this could lead to problems for some users. One of the changes between PHP v5 and v7 (there was no v6) is that the way PHP connects to databases has been removed. MySQL directives must be replaced by MySQLi or PDO code in PHP programs. There's a lot of old code out there that still uses the MySQL code no longer supported in PHP 7. The replacement involves rather more than just finding any MySQL directives and replacing them with MySQLi or PDO.

There are good reasons (including security improvements) to rewrite the PHP programs to use MySQLi or PDO, but it can be expensive. A well-known hosting company I'd been using announced a monthly £5.30 surcharge for providing ongoing PHP5 support, just two months after PHP7 was released.

If you don't have a problem with MySQL code then you should certainly upgrade to PHP 7 because it introduces new functionality that some new programs may need.

Rob Hindle, via email

What you say...

SHOULD CAFÉS CHARGE CUSTOMERS TO CHARGE THEIR PHONES (bit.ly/cafe418)?

Cafés should just add a few pence to their coffee to subliminally charge, to not come across as penny pinching. They should be glad of the business.

Jason 'Boz' Bowyer

I read that if you fully charged your phone every day it would only cost 50p a year in electricity. That's less than a penny and customers would be buying a drink, so they have already covered the cost.

Paul Emsley

Electricity costs money but the amount each customer would use would be well under one penny. It would take around 200 phones plugged in for one hour to use about 14p, so to charge customers would be a rip off. Maybe add a penny to the cost of the beverage?

Gary Olsen

Cafés could always remove the facility to charge phones!

Bee Brown

NOKIA IS TO RELAUNCH THE 3310. WHAT WAS YOUR FAVOURITE NOKIA PHONE (bit.ly/nokia418)?

In the Nineties, I had two Nokia 3330s over several years. The battery life lasted for days and the phones were very durable. You could drop them on the floor and the screen wouldn't break, unlike the phones of today.

Brian Brown

It was the Nokia 3210 for me. It had everything – Snake, custom ringtones, changeable covers.

*Ray Burns @ray_burns_*

The ever-faithful Nokia 3310 was and is my favourite. I use it every day.

Paul Fald @bridge_53

The Nokia 3310 was my first mobile. I've still got it stashed somewhere and won't be selling it to any of those recycling rip-off scumbags.

Stephen Bingham

People still use older mobile phones and I've also noticed people buying cassette Walkmans on eBay.

David Griffiths

DO YOU APPROVE OF WIKIPEDIA BANNING THE *DAILY MAIL* (bit.ly/mail418)?

The *Daily Mail* unreliable? Well that's hardly news. It is good to hear that some other organisations are fighting for higher standards.

Graham Smith

Absolutely. The *Sun* and *Mail* are prime contributors to paranoia and hatred in this country. Now fish and chip shops can't wrap in newspaper, there is no real use for those papers.

Roy Cullen

Wikipedia's homepage says: "Imagine a world in which every single human being can freely share in the sum of all knowledge. That's our commitment". Are *Daily Mail* journalists now prevented from contributing to and supporting the knowledge pool?

Lance Parkington

"Banning" a newspaper, what next? Can you imagine suggesting that other sources of internet news are permitted when they quite clearly promote distorted or fake news, as we all know? All newspapers, no matter how unpalatable, are free to print what they like and should remain so.

Richard Bond

Wikipedia is full of fake news and fake science. None of the media can be relied on to tell the truth. This includes TV, radio, newspapers and what you read on the web.

Derek Briggs

Page 404

Barry Collins is sick of being harassed by conmen every time he goes online

Forget fake news – let's banish fake ads

"Well, take a look at what happened. Seriously. Four hundred and eighty two thousand, one hundred and eighteen pounds in the first month, and I'm simply blown away."

If you're anywhere near as volatile as me, the only thing that's "blown away" by that pack of lies is your computer monitor, when you put your fist through it every time this dreadful internet advert blares out of your speakers.

Despite all the fuss about "fake news" at the moment, it's fake ads that really need to be dealt with – like the one above, promoting the so-called Brit Method, a get-rich-quick share-trading scheme that's about as likely to make you wealthy as setting fire to your own wallet. Not least because, as the brilliant Dave Gorman pointed out on his television show recently, the 'traders' used for the various international versions of this advert all coincidentally reap the exact same amount in their first month's trading!

The Brit Method is just one of a series of fake ads that appears all over sites offering free software downloads. At the risk of a lengthy conversation with the *Web User* lawyers, it's an outright con, as are all those adverts with big flashing 'Download Here' buttons that try to wrong-foot you into believing they are the software you came to the site for in the first place. It's pathetic, pernicious and long past time it was put to a stop – not least because many of these ads specifically target children.

I edit a magazine based on the fantastically popular computer game Minecraft and therefore spend an unhealthy amount of my time searching for free Minecraft goodies for kids to download. These sites are plastered with adverts like the one above, as well as ads promoting gambling sites, and they are littered with big Download buttons that could easily fool a child into thinking they're downloading a Minecraft game, when in fact they're getting an insidious, impossible-to-remove piece of adware. If you find your browser flooded with strange pop-ups and toolbars, a tenner says your kids or grandchildren have been duped on a Minecraft site.

> "If your business model relies on conning your own customers, you need to rethink your business"

The sites offer the excuse that you're getting their downloads for free and they have to pay to maintain the site somehow, but that excuse doesn't butter my parsnips. If your business model relies on conning your own customers, you need to rethink your business.

And while there are so many of these adverts out there that any attempt by the authorities to quash individual ads would become the world's largest game of whack-a-mole (hit one and five others pop their heads above the surface), they should be targeting the dealers. None of the websites in question has an individual relationship with these fake-ad suppliers – they're all bought through widely used networks such as Adf.ly (which runs the Brit Method ads). I tried to contact Adf.ly to find out what it had to say for itself, but the firm's Contact Us page displays no telephone numbers, email addresses or contact forms, and simply invites you to log in with a Facebook account or register your details.

Well, thanks, but I'm not about to take up that kind offer. However, a watchdog such as the Advertising Standards Authority most definitely should. If only to save my monitor screen.

Illustration: Andrew Torrens

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

WebUser

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER
FOR MORE INFO SEE PAGE 62

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Thank you for reading this issue of *Web User* – we hope you found the tips and advice useful. The good news is that you don't have to wait too long for the next issue. If you subscribe to *Web User* by Monday 13 March (8pm)*, you'll receive it through your letterbox before it's available in the shops!

What's inside the next issue:

COVER FEATURE: BLOCK ALL ADS IN WINDOWS 10

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