The Complete Guide to
Windows 8

FOR YOUR LAPTOP, PC & TABLET

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Arsenal win back pride but Milan survive fright night
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■ **What's new in Windows 8**
Every feature explained

Exclusive: Windows 8 tablet review

■ **Easy Windows upgrades**
How to get Windows 8 today

■ **Secret extras in Windows 8**
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100 pages of tips and tricks from the Experts at PC ADVISOR

Welcome
to Windows 8

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I f you were there, you will remember the launch of Windows 95. Microsoft spent around $300 million promoting that release, spending a small fortune on the Rolling Stones' musical midlife crisis *Start Me Up*, and lighting the Empire State Building in Windows' colours.

But even if you can't recall the fanfare, long-term Windows users will be familiar with the startling shock of the new that greeted migrants from Windows 3.1 to 95. And it's fair to say that the transition from Windows 7 to 8 is as big a step, if not bigger. Be prepared for a surprise. Microsoft has designed Windows 8 from the ground up as an operating system that's equally at home on a desktop PC, laptop and tablet. It bears an uncanny resemblance to the interfaces of both Windows Phone 7 and Xbox 360. It is, in short, a platform that could be your constant companion from the morning commute to your evening's entertainment, via a few hours' work in the office or on the move.

Why has Microsoft done this? Quite simply, it can't afford not to. Although Steve Jobs may have been a little premature in declaring the traditional PC dead, it's no secret that an increasing amount of our computing these days takes place on the hoof. We all expect to be able to communicate, create and consume wherever we are. This has led to a plethora of new computing devices, from smartphones and tablets, to thin-and-light laptops. There's a computer for every situation, and the desktop is becoming the odd one out. With Google and Apple taking big bites out of the portable market, Microsoft needs Windows to become a viable mobile and tablet platform.

The good news for Microsoft is that it already owns desktop computing, and Windows 8 is designed so that your account on one device can be accessed from another. Imagine that: files and settings on your laptop at home replicated on your tablet as you travel to work, and accessed again from your office PC. The same information, presented in the same bespoke way on every device.

If you are already a Windows user, being able to extend your desktop experience to other screens is a compelling idea, you'll agree. So despite the fact that it's a steep learning curve, I'm excited about Windows 8. And I hope after reading *The Complete Guide to Windows 8* you will be, too.

I'd love to hear your thoughts about this magazine and Windows 8, so do feel free to drop me a line at matt_egan@idg.co.uk with any comments. ∎

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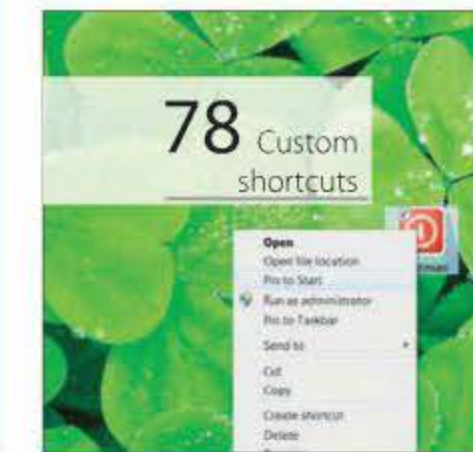
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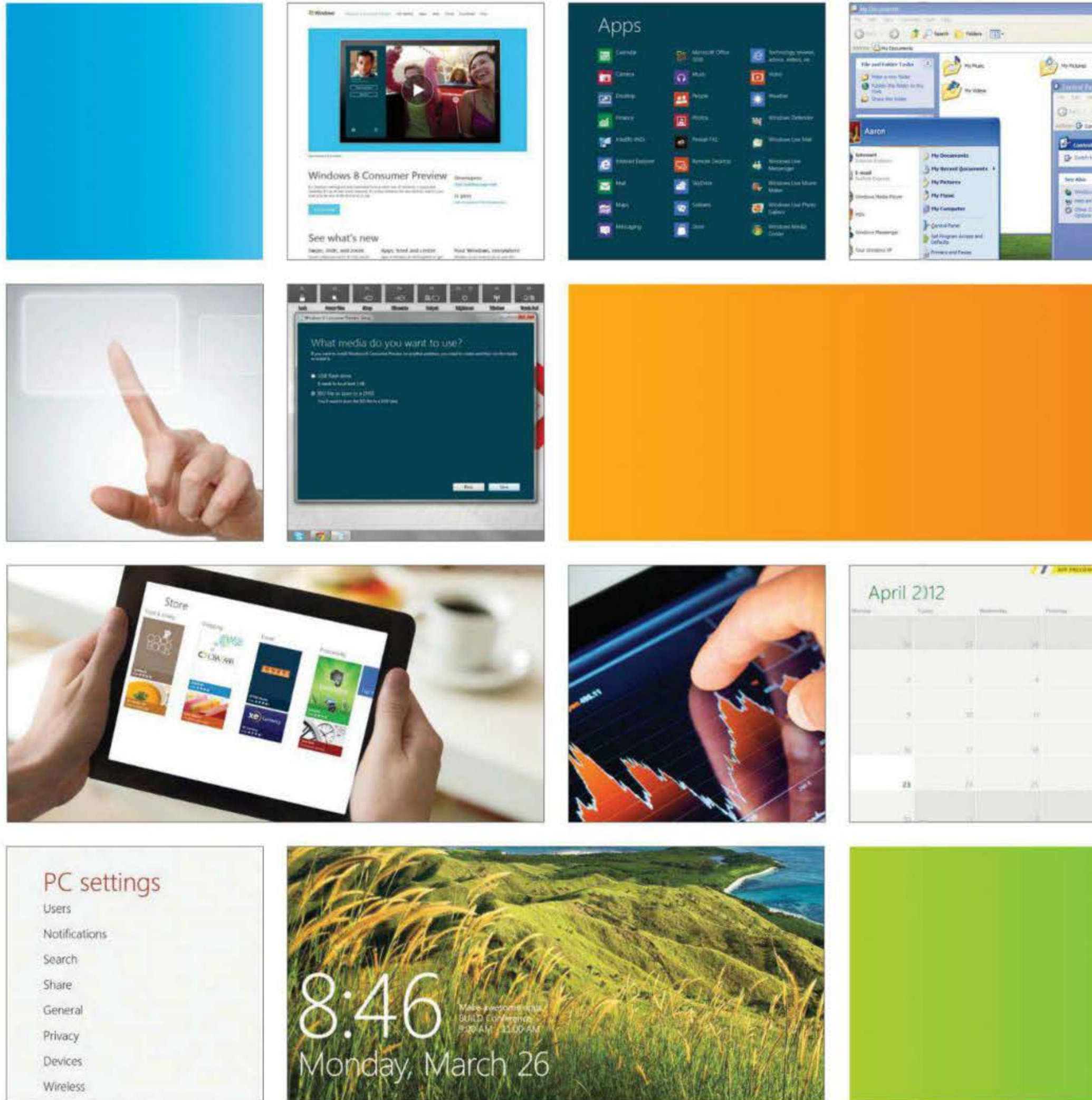
Introduction to Windows 8

It's the most significant upgrade to Microsoft's operating system since Windows 95. Here's what you need to know to get started with Windows 8

I f you're coming to Windows 8 with no experience or expectation, be prepared for a shock. Windows 8 is different. It looks different, it works in a different way, and it's aimed at a different set of devices than any previous iteration of Microsoft's PC operating system. In fact, it could be argued that the introduction of Windows 8 signals the death of the 'PC' as we know it. And that may be no bad thing.

By designing and building its new operating system in the way it has, Microsoft has acknowledged that the era of being tied to a single desktop computer is over. Windows 8 works just as well on a tablet or thin-and-light laptop as it does on a super-powered workstation. It does this by having a redesigned interface that's suited to both touch and mouse-and-keyboard input, and by keeping the system requirements low to improve performance and battery life on even portable computers. Indeed, combined with Intel's Ivy Bridge processors, Windows 8 PCs will be the most power efficient and portable Windows computers ever.

But not everyone likes change. For all those who rush to embrace the latest technology, there are plenty who see value in the mantra of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it'. The enduring popularity of XP bears testament to that. If that sounds like you: fear not. You're reading the right publication to help you get to grips with Windows 8, regardless of your technical experience.

In this section of *The Complete Guide to Windows 8* we explore the background behind Microsoft's decision to revamp Windows, looking at the history of Windows computing, examining the system requirements for Windows 8 and finding out which features are included with each version. We'll also tell you how to install or upgrade to the OS, examine the implications for business users, and take a look at running it on a tablet.

Your Windows 8 journey starts here.

> Microsoft has acknowledged that the era of being tied to a single desktop computer is over

History of Windows

Microsoft has a long and distinguished record of producing PC operating systems. We take a look at its previous offerings

With its dual interfaces, Windows 8 is unlike every other version that's preceded it. Microsoft has already produced several touchscreen desktop operating systems, but this looks like being the first one that's succeeded. Much of *The Complete Guide To Windows 8* looks at its touchscreen interactivity, but to acknowledge how far Microsoft has come, let's take a look at the operating system's early days.

Windows 3.1 is the starting point for many PC users. Launched in May 1990, it was the first Microsoft OS to reach a wide audience. It introduced us to the coloured wave logo, graphical user interface, dedicated sound and graphics cards, and the CD-ROM drive. Floppy disk drives (dating from the pre-Windows MS-DOS days) continued to be fitted in Windows 3.1, 95 and even 98 machines. Windows 3x was not geared up for high-resolution graphics, though, supporting only 256 colour displays. It was the first version to support more than 64K of memory and ran off a 640MB installation.

Pushing the right buttons

Windows 95 took Microsoft's desktop from highly successful to all-conquering. The Rolling Stones' *Start Me Up* was used for the US marketing campaign in tribute to the Start button, with its fly-out menu lists. A desktop search tool and a My Documents folder separating user content from the desktop, drives and network debuted, and Microsoft also added support for 32bit computing and x386 architecture. The first Windows version to have the web in mind – preview versions of 95 came with access to the soon-to-launch MSN, while Internet Explorer came installed as part of the first Windows 95 Service Pack. The second brought support for FAT32 and hard drives offering over 2GB capacities.

Windows 98 added more consumer-friendly features to the desktop under the Explorer umbrella. Multi-tasking in the sense of having several programs

Windows 95 took Microsoft's desktop from highly successful to all-conquering

and windows open at once was big news. USB 2.0 become a standard method of transferring data, working directly with such peripherals as printers, scanners and digital cameras, plus keyboards and mice. DVD drives were first introduced during Windows 98's lifetime, too. Disparate multimedia elements were repackaged in Windows Media Player with the second Service Pack in May 1999.

Windows Me, a home user OS, offered scant improvements (other than NTFS support for larger file structures) and was widely regarded

↑ After the success of Windows XP, expectations were high for Vista. It was, however, immediately slammed for its heavy hardware demands

to be less stable than both 95 and 98, so didn't garner widespread support. It did, however, come with Windows Movie Maker, so users could make something of their digital video footage or slide shows from their digital photos. The professional version was known as Windows 2000.

Around this time Microsoft started marketing separate Tablet Edition versions of Windows. Tablets came with the operating system pre-installed, along with support for digital note-taking via a sensitised screen and stylus. The device's size, weight and cost limited its appeal outside vertical markets such as hospitals, legal organisations and engineering field work, though.

Top of the pops

Windows XP will probably go down in history as the most popular desktop OS of all time, attaining a peak market share of 76.1 per cent for desktop operating systems. Launched in 2001, its name was derived from the word 'eXPerience'. Windows XP brought advances in the user interface that saw related tasks grouped together in a task bar, frequently-accessed items listed at the top of menus, and support for large visual thumbnails and filmstrip photo galleries – Windows 8 Photos app uses this very feature for its scrollable gallery.

Importantly, Windows XP was the first version of Windows that users could easily customise, with themes and backgrounds of their own. Installing updates and DIY upgrades was also easy to do under the enduringly popular XP.

Windows Vista, available from January 2006, was immediately derided for its heavy hardware demands and apparent incompatibility with existing peripherals and components. By the time drivers for many popular devices had been written, including families of graphics cards, the damage had been done and Vista declared a failure. When Microsoft started trailing Windows 7 in 2009, it insisted customers wanting to test-drive the new OS first upgrade to Vista.

Windows 7 saw Microsoft back on track with drivers and support for legacy programs all sorted out well ahead of its launch (unlike Vista, which suffered the iniquity of having a special Compatibility Mode feature allowing users to run older programs, specifically those that ran under the rabidly popular Windows XP). By the time Windows 7 arrived, many users were ready for an upgrade to both their operating system and PC, mainly moving to laptops that were now so powerful there was negligible performance difference from the standard desktop PC. Windows XP fans, meantime, were given netbooks as a sop.

Windows 7 has proved a dependable, stable OS that doesn't try to entice users with its fancy interface frills – another criticism levelled at Vista with its resource-sapping Aero 3D screens and desktop widgets.

Nonetheless, it's time for a new Windows that reflects our preference for portable computing, constant connectivity and customisation. The fact that it looks and feels the same across devices, loses the legendary Windows bloat and allows Microsoft and its loyal followers back in the cool camp are happy side effects. And who doesn't want to be part of the in-crowd? ∎

Windows XP will probably go down in history as the most popular desktop OS of all time

Start   Jim

8 reasons to upgrade

With Windows 8 on the way, **Chris Martin** gives eight
reasons why you should upgrade to Microsoft's new OS

Microsoft is only a few months away from launching Windows 8 and
you're probably wondering what to do. Here we've put together eight
reasons why you should upgrade. It's worth noting, though, that the
new operating system is a major redesign, so you'll want to consider carefully
before taking the plunge.

Touchscreen support
The most obvious change is that the Metro interface has been designed
with touch control in mind, making it an appealing upgrade for those with
an existing touchscreen device such as an all-in-one PC. If you don't have
such a machine, then you might want to get one specifically for Windows 8
even though it means a hardware purchase on top of the operating system.
Traditional keyboard and mouse input is still supported, though, so you don't
necessarily have to shell out for a new computer immediately.

Metro user interface
The Metro interface represents a radical redesign for the operating system.
It looks similar to Microsoft's Windows Phone 7 interface, and instead of the
normal desktop with icons there are live tiles. These will launch an application
like an icon, but also have the ability to show live information such as new
emails and up-to-date weather. Overall, the interface is easy and intuitive to use,
especially with a touchscreen. Different gestures, either with touch or a mouse,
will do clever things such as close applications, access menus, and more.

Apps
The operating system takes a more mobile approach when it comes to apps,
with the Windows Store. This is where you can browse, download and install
apps designed for the Metro interface. The selection on offer is currently limited,

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but it's expected that the number will
be significantly higher as time goes
by after Windows 8's full launch. A
lot of apps will display in full-screen,
with one example being Maps. This
uses Microsoft's Bing Maps service
to provide locational search and
directions on a global scale (see page
70). Windows 8 also comes preloaded
with a number of Metro apps including
People, Calendar, Photos, Music,
Messaging and Video.

↑ The Windows Store features apps that have been designed for the Metro
interface and touch control. Many, like Maps, will be displayed in full-screen

Cloud services
Windows 8 has a cloud focus to it,
which is a tempting feature. Microsoft stores all your settings in the cloud, so
whenever you log on to a Windows 8 machine you will have it looking and
working the way you like. Other elements of the cloud system include pulling
your email from Gmail and viewing all your photos from Facebook.

Lock screen and picture password
With this version of Windows you have the option to use a picture lock screen
similar to that of a smartphone. To login you'll need to make three gestures;
choosing from straight lines, circles and taps. The lock screen can also be
customised with your own photo, time, date and app notifications.

Device compatibility
Microsoft has designed Windows 8 to work on different devices – it's not just
for your PC. No matter whether the device is a 27in PC, a 15in laptop or a 10in
tablet, the new operating system should work flawlessly. Furthermore, the
Metro interface will scale to that device's screen size and resolution to provide a
uniform experience. If you want consistency across all your computing devices,
then Windows 8 is a great reason to upgrade.

Backwards compatibility
If you're worried about things being too different, then the good news is that
the operating system is backwards compatible with Windows 7. Microsoft has
included the 'Classic' desktop alongside the Metro interface. This takes you
to a traditional desktop where you can use all those applications that weren't
designed for the Metro interface. The only difference is there's no Start button.
You get the best of both worlds by upgrading, bringing you the new features of
Windows 8 without taking away the familiarity of the traditional desktop.

Task and file management
A couple of smaller but handy tweaks
have been made to the Task Manager
and the File Manager. The latter
consolidates multiple file operations
into one window, with the option to
pause or cancel each one individually.
There's also a real-time graph that
displays the transfer speed. The Task
Manager has also has been enhanced
and is split into Apps and Background
processes. A new tab called App
History includes a Metered network
section that shows which apps have
been using the most data. ■

*No matter
whether the
device is a
27in PC, a 15in
laptop or a
10in tablet, the
new operating
system should
work flawlessly*

8:46
Monday, March 26

↑ To ensure that your Windows 8 machine is secure, you can set a picture
lock screen. To login you'll need to make three gestures

Minimum specifications

Before you rush out and buy a copy of Windows 8, it's important you check that your computer is up to scratch

Most people who move to Windows 8 will do so when they buy a new PC or laptop. However, since the 'Vista Capable' debacle, Microsoft has worked hard to keep down the system requirements for successive operating systems, meaning older computers could upgrade. Windows 8 is no exception: here's what you need to run it.

The issue of minimum specifications for a new Windows operating system has been a hot topic ever since Vista enjoyed a less-then-auspicious start to life. Desperate to generate some excitement ahead of the appearance of its late-appearing OS, Microsoft created the label 'Vista Capable', and encouraged PC manufacturers to append it to XP systems that met the basic minimum specification for running Vista.

The trouble was that when Vista was finally launched, it required a great deal more than the basic system requirements suggested, in order to run well. As

with any new OS, Vista had issues with compatibility, and the occasional bug. But this was compounded by scores of disgruntled XP users 'upgrading' underpowered systems, and losing stability and speed in the process.

'Vista Capable' became the name of a huge class action lawsuit in the US, and a byword for how not to launch a new Windows OS. Once bitten, twice (and now a third time) shy, when Microsoft launched Windows 7, it made great play of the fact that it would run successfully on any system that was happy running Vista.

> 'Vista Capable' became the name of a huge class action lawsuit in the US, and a byword for how not to launch a new Windows OS

↑ Like Windows 7, Windows 8 requires only a 1GHz processor, but the better the processor, the more responsive your system will be
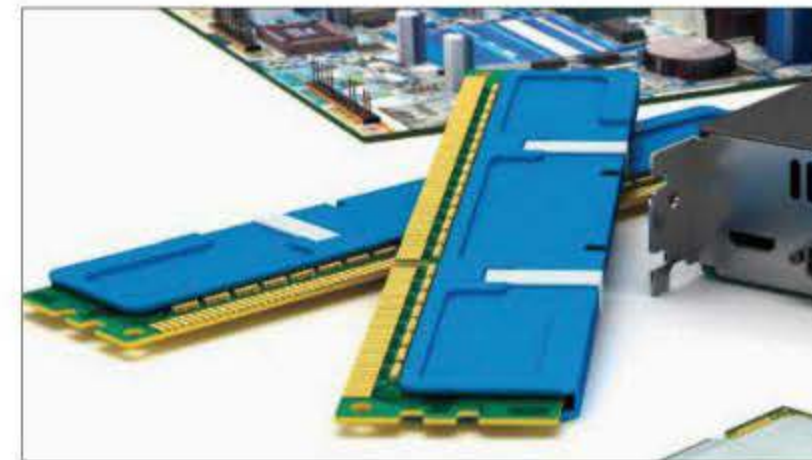
↑ Adding more RAM will enhance system performance, but remember that if you are running a 32bit OS you can't utilise more than 3GB of RAM

↑ The basic graphics requirements of Windows 8 are minimal – just a DirectX 9 card will do. But for serious gaming performance, be prepared to upgrade

This may not have done much to dispel the notion that Windows 7 was just the operating system that Vista should have been, but it did manage the expectations of new computer purchasers. Microsoft and partners such as Intel are now at least as focused on providing a stable, lightweight system that doesn't gobble power as they are on adding new features. So once again, as a new operating system is released, Microsoft has kept the minimum requirements the same. So if you have a PC or laptop that happily runs Vista or Windows 7, you will be okay with Windows 8.

Windows 8's specifications

In order to run Windows 8, your PC or laptop must have a 1GHz or faster processor. Obviously, as with all computers, a better processor will lead to an improved overall experience. In most cases Windows 8 laptops and PCs will run on AMD or – more likely – Intel processors, specifically Core i3, i5 and i7 processors. Intel's Ivy Bridge processors launched in April 2012, and they offer more efficient power consumption, and should therefore run well in thin and light systems. Microsoft is also set to release a version of Windows that can run on ARM's SOC (system on chip) processors. Windows RT is aimed at portable devices, and shouldn't be confused with the main desktop and laptop version of Windows 8.

The 32bit flavour of Windows 8 requires at least 1GB of RAM, and 2GB is required for a 64bit installation. If speed is important to you, don't skimp on RAM. Get as much as you can, but remember that a 32bit system can use only 3GB RAM. You'll need at least 16GB of hard disk space to run a 32bit installation or 20GB for a 64bit system. These are fantastically low figures, but should be taken with a pinch of salt. They suggest the bare minimum required, and once you start saving things you'll soon run out of space. An SSD rather a traditional spinning disk will help to keep your PC up to speed.

Windows 8 requires a Microsoft DirectX 9 or higher graphics system. If you're not a hard-core gamer, you may find that integrated graphics suffice, especially if you have an Ivy Bridge processor.

To use touch, you'll require a tablet or a monitor that supports multi-touch, and to access the Windows Store and download and run apps, you'll need an active internet connection and a screen resolution of at least 1024 x 768. To snap apps, a screen resolution of at least 1366 x 768 is required.

To install apps from the Windows Store, you'll need to sign up for a Microsoft account. ∎

System requirements

Processor 1GHz or faster
RAM 1GB (32bit) or 2GB (64bit)
Hard disk space 16GB (32bit) or 20GB (64bit)
Graphics card Microsoft DirectX 9 graphics device or higher

Additional requirements

To use touch A tablet or a monitor that supports multi-touch
To access the Windows Store and to download and run apps An active internet connection and a screen resolution of at least 1024 x 768 pixels
To snap apps A display with a resolution of at least 1366 x 768 pixels
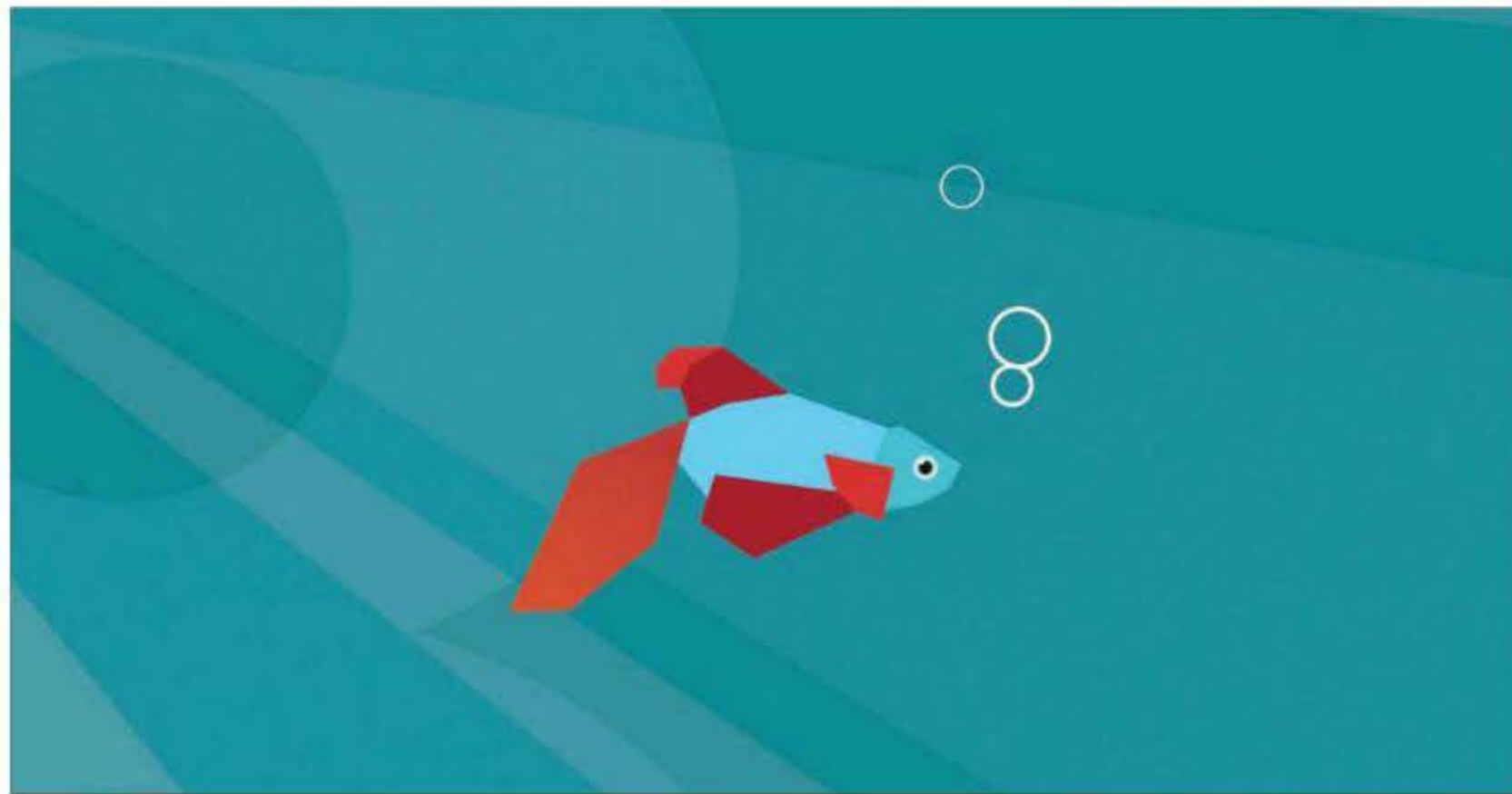
Getting started

Prior to the full launch of Windows 8, you can try it out for free. Here's how to get started with Microsoft's new OS

Microsoft has made many fundamental alterations to the user interface to drag Windows into the multi-touch touch and tablet world. At the time of writing, anyone unable to wait until the official release can download the Windows 8 Consumer Preview from microsoft.com. The result is a 5MB setup executable file that will run on a Windows 7, Vista or XP machine. It will download the rest of the installation files and start the install process. When the new operating system fully launches, the process will be much the same.

To install Windows 8, Microsoft has set a series of minimum requirements including a 1GHz processor, 1GB of memory (2GB for the 64bit version), 16GB of free hard drive space, and a graphics chip or card capable of supporting DirectX 9 graphics. Those specifications are identical to those Microsoft used for both Vista and Windows 7, making good the company's promise that the new OS will run on PCs able to handle either of these. How well it works on a low-powered system is, of course, a different matter.

You'll also need a monitor with a minimum resolution of 1,024 x 768 pixels to access the Windows Store – the sole source of Metro apps. To use the 'Snap' feature, which lets you keep a Metro app visible alongside the traditional desktop or display two apps simultaneously, you'll need a screen with a minimum resolution of 1,366 x 768 pixels.

To install Windows 8, Microsoft has set a series of minimum requirements

↑ Microsoft has overhauled the way Windows is controlled, and the latest version can now be controlled by touch; a nod to the rise of the tablet PC

A touching experience
One of Windows 8's big selling points is its compatibility with touchscreen devices. It will work with a traditional mouse and keyboard when you're in desktop mode, though. If you want to try out its multi-touch options, Microsoft has posted at tinyurl. com/6ocdfq2 a list of touch-enabled monitors, notebooks and tablets that the company used for internal testing. However, the company qualified those recommendations, hinting that users might not be completely happy with any device designed for Windows 7.

Before you upgrade to the new operating system, you'll need an optical drive capable of recording to DVD, or a flash drive, assuming you have multiple computers you want to upgrade, and you don't want to waste time downloading the 1.5GB to 1.9GB installation files on every machine.

Rather than use Setup, you can download a disk image (it's an .iso file), then 'burn' that to a DVD or flash drive to create bootable installation media that you can use on as many machines as you want. There are links to the .iso files for both 32 and 64bit editions, as are some tips on the tools you'll need to create bootable media on Windows 7, Vista and XP. The setup executable also offers an option to create a bootable DVD or flash drive rather than install on a single PC.

The Windows preview will upgrade – meaning all programs, settings, user accounts and data files are retained – a PC running Windows 7. On a Vista machine, the new operating system will bring along settings, user accounts and data files, but not applications. It's more scorched earth when moving from XP – the Consumer Preview migrates only user accounts and files. We assume the full version of Windows 8 will be the same deal.

If you are installing the Preview on a single PC, you won't even need an activation key. The alternative, creating a bootable installation DVD or flash drive, does demand a key, however. Fortunately, Microsoft has come up with a generic key that works for everyone. That 25-character key is: NF32V-Q9P3W-7DR7Y-JGWRW-JFCK8. An alternative key that the company has published elsewhere is: DNJXJ-7XBW8-2378T-X22TX-BKG7J. Microsoft has limited the Consumer Preview to English, Chinese, French, German and Japanese.

Time out
The Preview itself is not limited, although it will stop working a while after the full Windows 8 is released – on 15 January, 2013 according to the end-user license agreement (EULA). At this point, if you are using the Consumer Preview as your main operating system you will have no real option other than upgrading to full Windows 8 or reinstalling your previous version of Windows.

The Windows 8 EULA puts it bluntly: "You have no right to use the software after the expiration date. Starting from the expiration date, you may not be able to access any unsaved data used with the software. Any applications you receive through the Windows Store will also cease to be available to you in future versions, unless they are made available for redownload and you re-acquire them. You may not receive any other notice."

To return the PC to its pre-Windows 8 state, you'll need to reinstall the older operating system, and restore applications and data from a backup. Back up your PC before trying out Windows 8, or install it on a separate partition.

For further help and advice on trying out Windows 8, head to the Consumer Preview's support forum on the Microsoft Answers website (answers. microsoft.com), which offers user-to-user support, with the occasional Microsoft support representative chiming in. You could also check out *PC Advisor*'s Windows 8 Forum (tinyurl.com/cognj4o). ■

To install Windows 8, Microsoft has set a series of minimum requirements

↑ You should check that your computer is powerful enough to run Windows 8. Microsoft has a list of minimum system requirements on its website

Before you upgrade to Windows 8, you'll need an optical drive capable of recording to DVD, or a flash drive
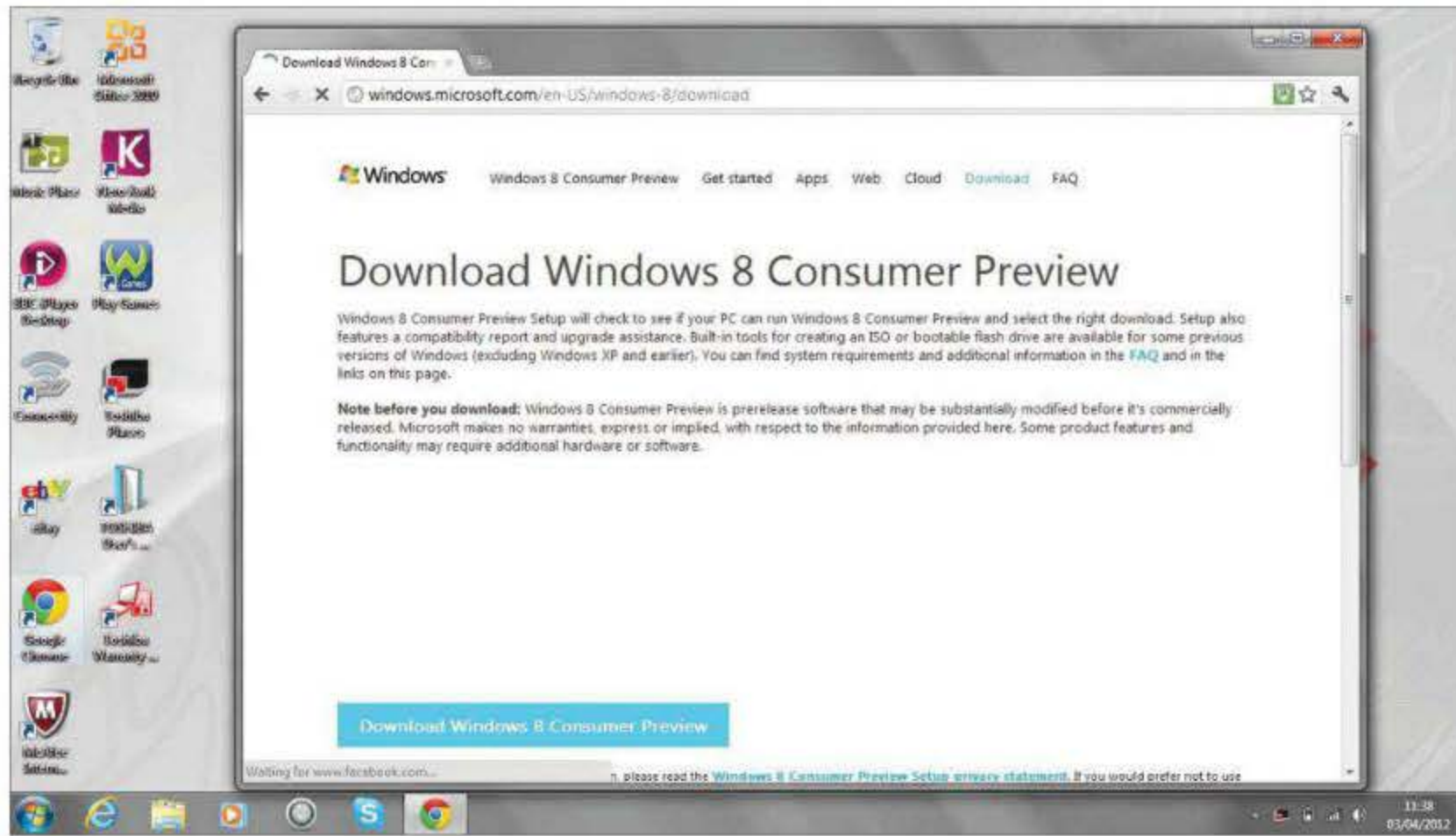
Upgrade to Windows 8

You can still get Windows 8 even if you don't want to splash out on a new computer. Here's how…

When it comes to moving to Microsoft's latest operating system, most people will do so when they buy a new desktop PC, laptop or even tablet. Following the horror stories of upgrading underspecced Windows XP PCs to the much-maligned Vista, even hardened tech upgraders have been fighting shy of 'upgrading' their computer's operating system. After all, a PC can be the third biggest investment you ever make, after your house and car, and the operating system is its blood supply.

But Windows 8 is different. You could make a good case for upgrading a Windows 7 PC at least, for two simple reasons. First, it's the most radical change in Microsoft PC computing since Windows 3.0 made way for Windows 95. And, perhaps more pertinently in this case, the system requirements are just the same as they are for Windows 7. Indeed, if your system can run Vista, it will handle Windows 8 with aplomb. And, some would argue the upgrade may make your computing experience smoother.

Things can go wrong, however, and upgrading a PC is nothing like trying out Windows 8 as a separate partition, or via a USB stick. So before you do anything at all, be sure to back up to a separate storage device any files, photos, music and video that you want to keep. It's important also to note the distinction between upgrading to Windows 8 from Vista or Windows 7; and upgrading to Windows 8 from XP. In the case of Vista and Windows 7, you can perform an in-place upgrade that will in principle at least allow you to retain all your files and settings. Upgrading from XP requires an entirely new install, and anything you don't back up will be lost.

We cover how to install a dual-boot version of Windows on pages 74 and 76, and explain in detail how to install Windows 8 on page 60. But here is a general guide on how to prepare for an in-place upgrade installation, using a download from the Microsoft website. If you have purchased Windows 8 on a disc, the process will be much more simple: just install the first disc and follow the instructions, keeping the box with the product key by your side.

Getting started

First, you'll need to create an image of your existing Windows installation. Insert a blank recordable DVD and, when the auto play options appear, choose Create Disc Image. You'll probably need several DVDs for this process. Our Toshiba Satellite needed four, and the image creation process took nearly two hours.

Next, browse to Microsoft.com and scroll down to the option for Windows 8. At the time of writing, to install Windows 8 you'll have to install the Consumer Preview. You'll need to enter your email address, location and other details. Read through and agree to the terms of the download. When Windows 8 is fully launched, you will have to purchase an install code.

Assuming you're downloading the OS to the computer on which you want to install it, Windows will now check through your existing hardware setup and identify any compatibility issues that it thinks you should be aware of. Click more details in the compatibility report to learn more. You will probably be advised that your existing security software won't work in Windows 8.
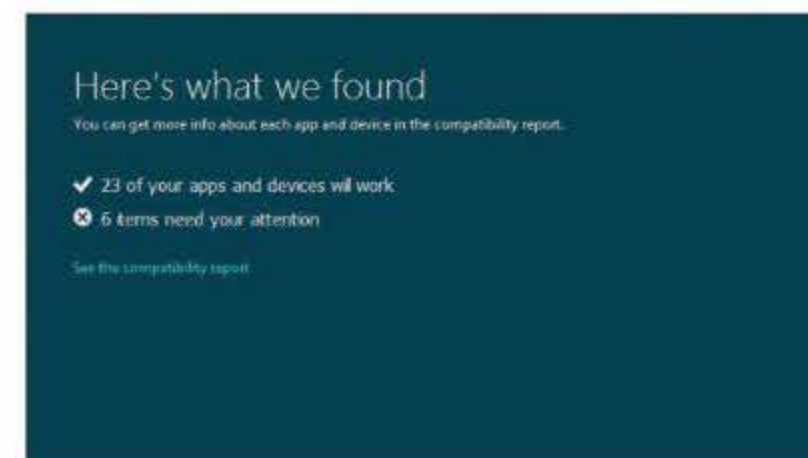
Once Windows has all the information it needs, you'll be asked to enter a product key. (If you are installing the Consumer Preview and this field isn't automatically completed, type in DNJXJ-7XBW8-2378T-X22TX-BKG7J.) Enter the code you received when you purchased Windows 8, either from Microsoft or a third party. Windows will prompt you to save the new operating system software to your desktop.

Once downloaded, Windows 8 needs to know where it should be installed. To overwrite your existing operating system, choose the Install Now option. Otherwise, select either install later or install to a partition. To install on a different drive or partition, Windows 8 needs to be saved to either a USB hard drive of at least 3GB or burned as an ISO file to a DVD. Make your selection and insert a blank disc or plug in your USB drive. Press to confirm you want to burn the disc. Restart the PC and insert the disc or drive containing the ISO file. Follow the prompt to install Windows 8, ensuring you browse to the right partition or drive. We found the OS wanted to install to the usual C drive by default, which would have overwritten our Windows 7 PC.

Once Windows 8 has installed on your machine, you'll be prompted to set up a Windows Live account that you'll log in to every time to use Windows. If you don't have a Hotmail account or Windows Live ID already, either create one or use another email address and verify the account through it. You're now ready to use Windows 8.

If you took the precaution of backing up files before the install, now is the time to check that everything is shipshape, and replace any missing files. ■

> Before you do anything at all, be sure to back up to separate storage any files, photos, music and video that you want to keep

> You will probably be advised that your existing security software won't work in Windows 8

↑ Before you install Windows 8 on your computer, it will check whether there are any compatibility issues it thinks you should be aware of

↑ If you want to install Windows 8 to a partition, you'll first need to save it to either a USB flash drive or burn it as an ISO file to DVD

Windows 8 versions

Microsoft has announced four versions of its new operating system, but what options does each one offer?

Microsoft's latest operating system, Windows 8, will be available in just four versions – three for Intel and AMD PCs and, intriguingly, one that will run on ARM processors, allowing for greater adoption of the OS in the tablet world. Only three of these will directly concern consumers, however.

Due to launch in late 2012, the four packages are: Windows 8; 8 Pro; RT and 8 Enterprise. The slimmed down line-up is designed to make things easier for consumers, many of whom were confused by the baffling number of Windows 7 versions. Customers currently using Windows 7 Starter, Home Basic and Home Premium will be able to upgrade to either Windows 8 or Pro. However, those on Windows 7 Professional and Ultimate will be able to upgrade only to Pro.

In announcing the line-up, Microsoft said: "We have talked about Windows 8 as Windows re-imagined, from the chipset to the user experience. This also applies to the editions available – we have worked to make it easier for customers to know what edition will work best for them when they purchase a new Windows 8 PC or upgrade their existing PC."

What are your options

Owners of Intel and AMD PCs and tablets with an x86 processor will be able to opt for Windows 8 and Windows 8 Pro. The latter is designed for "tech enthusiasts and business/technical professionals," according to Microsoft, and offers features including encryption, virtualisation, PC management and domain connectivity. Intriguingly, Windows Media Center will be available only as an economical 'media pack' add-on to Windows 8 Pro, making this version really only for those who wish to use their PC in a business environment.

Windows 8 Enterprise is the big business option and includes such extras as PC management and deployment, and advanced security. It will allow IT administrators to administer a fleet of Windows PCs from a remote location.

Microsoft's decision to call the ARM version of its new operating system Windows RT has led to a hefty amount of comments about how confusing and bad the name is. It will also be available pre-installed only on PCs and tablets with ARM chips; current owners of ARM computers won't be able to buy it. Touch-optimised desktop versions of Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote will be included, as will support for hardware-accelerated HTML5 with Internet Explorer 10. It won't come with Windows Media Player or support any installation of x86 software, though.
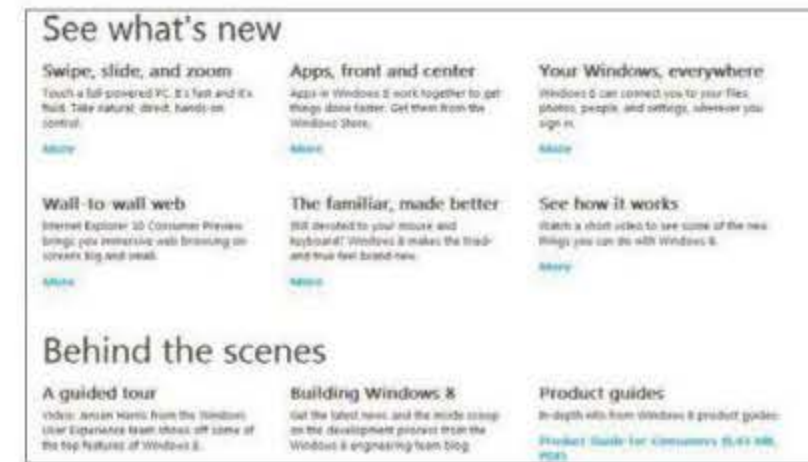
'RT' stands for 'runtime'. Microsoft explained that: "For new apps, the focus for Windows RT is development on the new Windows runtime, or WinRT, which we unveiled in September and forms the foundation of a new generation of cloud-enabled, touch-enabled, web-connected apps of all kinds."

Or, to put it English: Microsoft understands that apps and connectivity are pivotal to the success of Windows 8 as a tablet platform. So much so, in fact, that it's naming the OS after the developer tool. However, although Windows 8 and Pro are only distantly related to RT, Metro-style apps in the Windows Store can support both devices running Windows RT and Windows 8 on x86/64. If you buy an app on your PC, you'll be able to run it on your tablet. ∎

> Microsoft understands that apps and connectivity are pivotal to the success of Windows 8 as a tablet platform

Windows 8's features

	Windows 8	Windows 8 Pro	Windows RT
Upgrades from Windows 7 Starter, Home Basic, Home Premium	✔	✔	✘
Upgrades from Windows 7 Professional, Ultimate	✘	✔	✘
Start screen, Semantic Zoom, Live Tiles	✔	✔	✔
Windows Store	✔	✔	✔
Apps (Mail, Calendar, People, Messaging, Photos, SkyDrive, Reader, Music, Video)	✔	✔	✔
Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, PowerPoint, OneNote)	✘	✘	✔
Internet Explorer 10	✔	✔	✔
Device encryption	✘	✘	✔
Connected standby	✔	✔	✔
Microsoft account	✔	✔	✔
Desktop	✔	✔	✔
Installation of x86/64 and desktop software	✔	✔	✘
Updated Windows Explorer	✔	✔	✔
Windows Defender	✔	✔	✔
SmartScreen	✔	✔	✔
Windows Update	✔	✔	✔
Enhanced Task Manager	✔	✔	✔
Switch languages on the fly (Language Packs)	✔	✔	✔
Better multiple monitor support	✔	✔	✔
Storage Spaces	✔	✔	✘
Windows Media Player	✔	✔	✘
Exchange ActiveSync	✔	✔	✔
File history	✔	✔	✔
ISO/VHD mount	✔	✔	✔
Mobile broadband features	✔	✔	✔
Picture password	✔	✔	✔
Play To	✔	✔	✔
Remote Desktop (client)	✔	✔	✔
Reset and refresh your PC	✔	✔	✔
Snap	✔	✔	✔
Touch and Thumb keyboard	✔	✔	✔
Trusted boot	✔	✔	✔
VPN client	✘	✔	✘
BitLocker and BitLocker To Go	✘	✔	✘
Boot from VHD	✘	✔	✘
Client Hyper-V	✘	✔	✘
Domain Join	✘	✔	✘
Encrypting File System	✘	✔	✘
Group Policy	✘	✔	✘
Remote Desktop (host)	✘	✔	✘

See what's new

Swipe, slide, and zoom
Touch a full-powered PC. It's fast and it's fluid. Take natural, direct, hands-on control.
More

Apps, front and center
Apps in Windows 8 work together to get things done faster. Get them from the Windows Store.
More

Your Windows, everywhere
Windows 8 can connect you to your files, photos, people, and settings, wherever you sign in.
More

Wall-to-wall web
Internet Explorer 10 Consumer Preview brings you immersive web browsing on screen big and small.
More

The familiar, made better
Still devoted to your mouse and keyboard? Windows 8 makes the tried-and-true feel brand new.
More

See how it works
Watch a short video to see some of the new things you can do with Windows 8.
More

Behind the scenes

A guided tour
Video: Jensen Harris from the Windows User Experience team shows off some of the features of Windows 8.

Building Windows 8
Get the latest news and the inside scoop on the development process from the Windows 8 engineering team blog.

Product guides
In-depth info from Windows 8 product guides.
Product Guide for Consumers (6.43 MB, PDF)

↑ No matter which version you opt for, Windows 8 will come with a whole raft of new features including touch control and a dedicated app store

PC settings

Users
Notifications
Search
Share
General
Privacy
Devices
Wireless
Ease of Access
Sync your settings
HomeGroup
Windows Update

Libraries and devices

↑ New to Windows 8 is the PC settings page, which lets you personalise your OS. Here, for example, you can select the type of content you want to share

Which version is for you?

Tony Bradley explains why he feels there's only one version of Windows 8 that tech-savvy consumers should select

As reported on pages 18 and 19, Microsoft has revealed how many versions of its latest operating system will be shipped – Windows 8, Windows 8 Pro, and Windows RT (which is designed to run on ARM hardware). So far so simple. There is, however, also a mystery fourth version for customers on Software Assurance licensing agreements, which Microsoft has mentioned only in passing – Windows 8 Enterprise. And we're not even going to mention Windows Server 8. Despite the slimmed-down range, many will still be wondering which edition of Windows 8 they should they opt for.

With Windows 8, Microsoft has in essence narrowed the options down to consumer and business

Which version should you use?
The good news is that Microsoft has made things a lot easier. With Windows 7, customers have to wade through the features and capabilities of seven different versions in order to find the one that best meets their needs. With Windows 8, Microsoft has in essence narrowed the options down to consumer and business. There's Windows 8 for consumers, and Windows 8 Pro for business use. Period.

Yes, there's also Windows RT and Windows 8 Enterprise, but those are special cases for niche scenarios. Indeed, the first option can't actually be purchased – it will simply come pre-installed on ARM-based tablets or PCs. It can't join a Microsoft network domain or run traditional Windows

	Home Premium	Home Premium N	Professional	Professional N	Ultimate	Ultimate N
	£124.40 save £25 Buy it	£149.99 Buy it	£219.99 Buy it	£219.99 Buy it	£229.99 Buy it	£229.99 Buy it
Features						
Make the things you do every day easier with improved desktop navigation.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Start programs faster and more easily, and quickly find the documents you use most often.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Make your web experience faster, easier and safer than ever with Internet Explorer 8.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

↑ Windows 7 customers had to wade through a long list of features and capabilities before they found the version that best matched their needs

software, and appears to be about as close to Windows 8 as Windows Phone or the Xbox 360, so it barely even matters in the decision-making process. It certainly doesn't count if you are looking to upgrade an existing Windows 7 or Windows Vista PC or laptop. (See for more on Windows on tablet.)

The Enterprise edition is a wild card. In a blog post, Microsoft explained that: "Windows 8 Enterprise includes all the features of Windows 8 Pro plus features for IT organizations that enable PC management and deployment, advanced security, virtualization, new mobility scenarios, and much more." We tried to get some clarification on the specific differences between Windows 8 Pro and Enterprise, but at the time of going to press no extra details were available. Depending on the features included with Windows 8 Enterprise, it might make a compelling case for some businesses to switch to Software Assurance licensing to be able to take advantage of them.

Windows 8 vs Windows 8 Pro
For most of us, the choice boils down to only two options, though, the decision is easy. Get Windows 8 Pro. Technology journalist Harry McCracken recently stated in his Techland article for *Time* magazine: "I'm sure that some will insist that Microsoft should simply sell the best version, as Apple does with OS X – but I'm not that curmudgeonly."

Well we are. We always maintained with Windows 7 that Microsoft should have cut through all the nonsense and just sold Windows 7 Ultimate, and our feelings haven't changed with the Windows 8 versions.

Your grandmother, or your cousin may not need some higher-end Windows 8 Pro features such as the ability to join a network domain or use Group Policy. However, Microsoft has a habit of leaving out of the consumer version crucial capabilities – especially security features. With Windows 8 Pro, you get BitLocker and BitLocker-to-Go encryption, and Encrypted File System (EFS) to be able to encrypt and protect your data from unauthorised access. Windows 8 Pro also enables you to boot straight from a VHD which could come in handy.

Will everyone need these features? No, but enough will. It just makes sense to get the version that at least gives you the option if you need it rather than choosing the stripped down version lacking key features.

Oh, and if you already have Windows 7 Ultimate or Windows 7 Professional, the decision has been made for you. The only upgrade path is to Windows 8 Pro. ■

↑ To ensure that your computer's data is protected against unauthorised access, Windows 8 Pro will ship with BitLocker Drive Encryption

Windows and business

Its Metro interface may seem more suited to the consumer, but Windows 8 has more than enough features to keep the business user happy

A multi-touch interface might not seem ideally suited for a corporate environment, but Windows 8 seamlessly blends the best of tablet-like direct interaction and traditional desktop applications. We can see why this radically different-looking operating system might raise a few eyebrows in the boardroom, though.

For starters, Windows 8 doesn't look like a traditional business operating system. With its bright coloured, Metro touchscreen-enabled interface, it seems designed to appeal to kids. On the face of it, this departure from the windows and taskbars that we recognise seems to make the new OS less suited to business use than existing versions of Windows. Microsoft certainly intends to broaden the appeal of the OS with its new version, but there's also plenty under the hood that's aimed specifically at the business user.

Although Windows 8 looks different, it can do anything you can already do in your existing version of Microsoft's OS, be that a 32bit or 64bit environment. But it isn't just a desktop operating system – it's equally at home on a tablet PC or a dumb client, with only a log in to a web portal for a front end. It's a use-anywhere, the-same-experience-on-anything operating system.

Personal space

Whenever you log in to Windows 8, you're logging in to your own, personalised computer. Your apps, preferences and contacts are with you whenever you use Windows 8. This applies on your laptop, PC, tablet or Windows phone.

A separate Windows 8 To Go app supplied with the OS lets you use its features on a PC that doesn't have Windows 8 on it. The USB-based app acts as a portable OS and even lets you use the business-critical applications installed on your office network from a remote location. Documents you've saved can be pulled down from your free SkyDrive online archive or other cloud-based backup drives, edited and automatically saved back to your secure web store.

> Although Windows 8 looks different, it can do anything you can already do in your existing version of Microsoft's OS

You don't need to replace your existing Windows 7 PC or laptop to run Windows 8 – though you may want to invest in a touchscreen display to take advantage of the Metro interface.

The hardware you're running will comfortably support Windows 8 applications. It will work with the same connected devices too, so you won't lose any networking capability or connectivity. You'll also continue to be able to use your current programs, so there's no productivity loss to worry about. In fact, Windows 8 is designed to fit better around the individual than any previous version of the operating system.

Since October 2011, there have been millions of installations of Windows 8 betas, which has allowed Microsoft to identify and iron out any hardware compatibilities. Reports suggest that they are rare. In any case, you get a detailed compatibility report before proceeding with the upgrade process. Once installed, setup takes a matter of minutes. The most critical items – phone numbers, email addresses and business contacts – are automatically imported and saved to your Windows Live or Exchange account.

Business partner

Windows 8 will also offer the tempting possibility of a slick business environment on a tablet device – one on which you'll be able to use the programs you rely on. This means you won't need to lug about a hefty laptop just so you can attend meetings and give PowerPoint presentations.

The OS also offers improved support for virtualised environments and secure ways of working such as running applications from within a sandbox. Corporate users will find enterprise-grade business security in the form of BitLocker hard drive encryption and Trusted Module Platform.

Getting around the Metro interface takes a little getting used to, like anything new, but we've found using it surprisingly intuitive. We don't miss delving through folder after folder to find the item we need; with Windows 8 you can just scroll across and click to launch the item you want. There's also less in the way of distraction as clicking away from one task in favour of another hides but doesn't close it. When you want to return to that web page or email, a click on its tile returns you to the point at which you left off.

Tiles of recently used apps and screens are visible to the left, where they are easily called up. The 'traditional' Windows desktop, meanwhile, is always available from the bottom-right tile of the Metro Start screen. You can use the keyboard and mouse for anything, but will probably eventually find the side-scrolling menu setup is best used with a fast-flicking finger.

No one would argue that Windows 8 is the same as its predecessors – it's not intended to be. With support for the latest tablet and smartphone platforms and uniformity across these, as well as your PC and laptop, it offers a more cohesive way of working. Security and management tools are included, while the Metro interface provides an immersiveness that only a touchscreen environment can offer. ■

↑ You can move around Metro's 'live tiles', so that the apps you use most often, such as Finance, Calendar and SkyDrive, are closest to hand

> Windows 8 will also offer the tempting possibility of a slick business environment on a tablet device
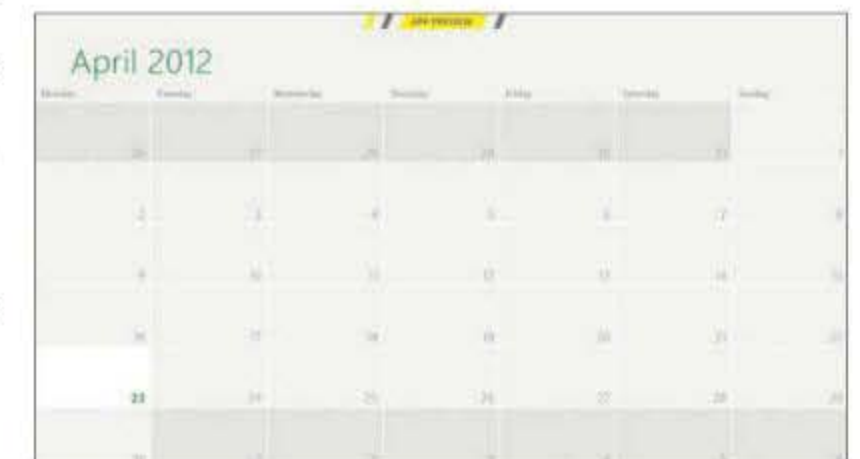
↑ To ensure you never miss an important appointment or deadline there's a Calendar app that can be synced over different Windows 8 devices

↑ Pinning an app to the Start screen is easy in Windows 8 – simply drag the program so that the bottom menu appear and then select 'Pin to Start'

↑ It's easy to move live tiles around the Start screen so your favourite apps always appear first – simply drag them to your favoured location

Windows 8 on a tablet

Windows 8 is the first OS that Microsoft has designed with touch control in mind. We see how it measures up
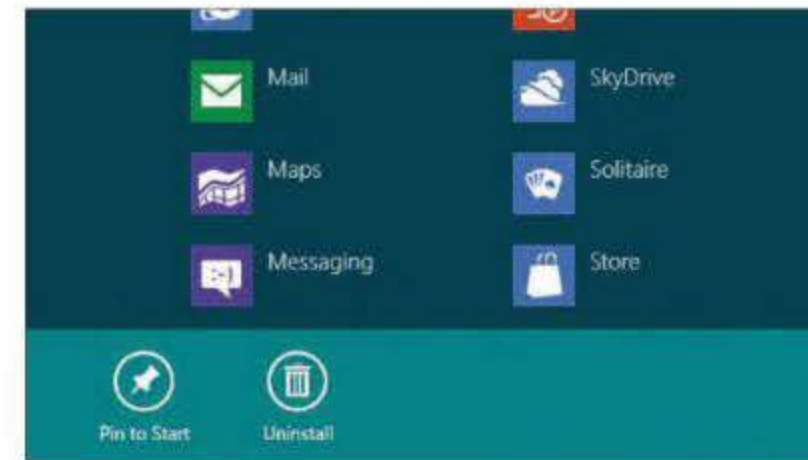
Windows 8 is a big step forwards for Microsoft, which hopes that the new Metro interface will help it carve out a place in the burgeoning world of tablets. If it is to do so, Metro will need to be finger friendly, bright, snappy and functional to compete with market leaders Apple iOS and Google Android, both of which have a considerable head start, and a large fan base.

Anyone who has used Windows Phone will find the tile-based look and feel of Metro instantly recognisable, and that's no coincidence. It features 'live tiles', which show live information such as the most up-to-date weather forecast, birthday notifications and information on the music track to which you are currently listening. Just as you see in Microsoft's mobile operating system.

But Metro isn't simply a port of the Windows Phone OS to a larger screen size. It has a range of extra features that help you make best use of tablet-sized screens. And it links in to the more Windows-like desktop-style screen, too. Here we'll take a look at what Metro has to offer to tablets, and how well Windows 8 functions as a touch-friendly interface. We used an Intel tablet and Windows 8 Consumer Preview as Windows RT was not available at press time.

The Metro interface on a tablet
It's worth noting at the very outset that the Metro interface isn't limited to interaction by finger alone. You can control it with a mouse and keyboard

→ If you want to see which programs you have, simply tap 'All apps' on the Start screen. This will show you a complete list

too, and there are keyboard shortcuts for lots of tasks (see box below). We plugged in a mouse and keyboard via USB, and had no trouble using them.

If you are working with a finger, which is most likely on a tablet, the Metro interface is comfortable to use. On our test machine, a Samsung Series 7 slate PC, it was responsive to finger presses and sweeps, and there are some interesting features. We like the way, for example, you can zoom into the interface so you can see all your shortcuts with a quick pinch in and out.

Viewing all apps is easy, too. A sweep upwards from the bottom reveals a menu bar. What's actually on offer here can vary depending on what you are doing at the time, but if you're viewing the Start screen and instead would like to see all your apps, just tap 'All apps' and you'll see a full list.

We're big fans of how easy it is to pin any app to the Start screen. It's just a case of sweeping upwards to get that bottom menu to appear, choosing 'All Apps', then dragging your chosen app down to the bottom of the screen to reveal the option to pin it to the Start screen.

You can also easily move tiles around the Start screen by dragging them, so that your most frequently used or favourite apps are always the ones you see first when you open the Start screen.

Just as with Windows Phone, the Start screen can display live information. If you are signed in to an email account, the Mail tile will provide alerts. If you allow Bing Weather to use your location it will show you the current weather situation, while the music tile will display information about the track you are currently listening to. It's all designed to keep you up to date without you needing to keep opening apps all the time.

Installing apps
One of the great plus points of this operating system is the Windows Store. Accessed via the Metro interface, it gives you a direct route to third-party apps, which take advantage of the Metro look and feel to provide a whole host of extra functionality. App stores are nothing new, but this will be the first time we've seen one integrated into Windows.

In the Consumer Preview we've been looking at, the apps are all free, which certainly won't be the case later on. Applications are categorised by subject, and you sweep through these to see what's new or being promoted. The look and feel of the interface is similar to that of the Start screen.

Whenever you choose an app, you'll be taken to a page that displays a lot more information about it.

Metro keyboard shortcuts

Not everyone is going to want to use a keyboard with their Windows 8 tablet. But if you do, here are a few of the shortcuts that can be brought into play to get around the Metro interface quickly:

Windows key Toggles between Start screen and primary running Metro app, or Start screen and the Windows desktop.
Windows key + C Charms bar
Windows key + F File search pane
Windows key + I Settings charm
Windows key + K Devices charm
Windows key + L Log out
Windows key + P Second screen Control Pane
Windows key + Q Apps search pane
Windows key + W Settings search pane
Windows key + Tab App switcher and cycles through apps

↑ The Windows Store offers an easy way to download third-party apps. Divided into categories, simply tap an app's image to find out more details

↑ Located in their own bar down the right-hand side of the screen, Charms give the user quick and easy access to a wide range of features

↑ If you need to input text quickly there are several styles to choose from such as this thumb-friendly option, which has been designed for tablet users

↑ Clicking on the Settings charm will give you access to a number of different options including the volume, screen brightness and notifications

On the right of the screen you can view images – just sweep one image to cycle through all that are available – app details and reviews, while on the left you are given the option to install it. Updating your apps is easy, indeed the Start screen tile tells you how many updates there are waiting to be installed via a small number in its bottom-right corner.

Charms

New to Windows 8, Charms provide quick and easy access to a wide range of options from both the Start screen and from within apps themselves. To access them using a touchscreen device, or your tablet, simply sweep inwards from the right side of the display. The Charms bar will appear on the right-hand side of the screen, featuring five options: Search, Share, Start, Devices and Settings.

The first of these lets you look for apps, settings and specific files – you can also use it to search within apps. The Share charm allows you to share content, while the Start icon opens the Metro Start screen and toggles through to the desktop view, too. If you want to access a peripheral that's attached to your tablet, a monitor for example, then you can do so using the Devices charm. The last of these five options allows you to change the settings within Windows 8.

Finally, a box displaying such information as the date and time, as well as the status of your tablet's battery and the strength of a wireless signal is located in the bottom-left corner.

Snap multi-tasking

In the Metro view, it's easy to see two apps at once. If you've got two or more programs running, slowly and gently sweep a finger in from the left of the screen and a small window will open showing another app. You can have one large and one small app onscreen, and can change the size of each by dragging the vertical bar that separates the two. It's a simple system that could be used to let you keep an eye on, say, a Twitter feed in the small window while browsing the web in the larger one.

Keyboard entry

Just because you might be using Windows 8 on a tablet doesn't mean you won't need to input text. Microsoft has provided a variety of options for entering text into applications like email, including a very neat split keyboard design. This ought to work

> *Updating your apps is easy, indeed the Start screen tile tells you how many there are waiting to be installed*

→ New to Windows 8 is snap multi-tasking, which allows you to have two programs open onscreen at the same time

well for those times when you are holding your tablet in both hands and want to type with your thumbs. There's also a more standard Qwerty-style keyboard design, and a 'keyboard' area that can cope with handwriting recognition, too. So there should be an option to suit every situation.

Settings

The Metro interface has been designed to give you quick access to a range of settings. Open the Settings charm and you can immediately connect to wireless networks or go into Airplane mode, alter volume and screen brightness, change the system language, toggle notifications on and off and sleep, shutdown or restart. By choosing More PC Settings you can open up a new Settings area.

This settings area isn't totally comprehensive, but it does cover a range of things you are likely to want to do, and everything is arranged in a finger-friendly way, with many of the settings simply altered via a slider. If you want to do something that isn't covered here, you can use the Search charm to look through the full gamut of settings.
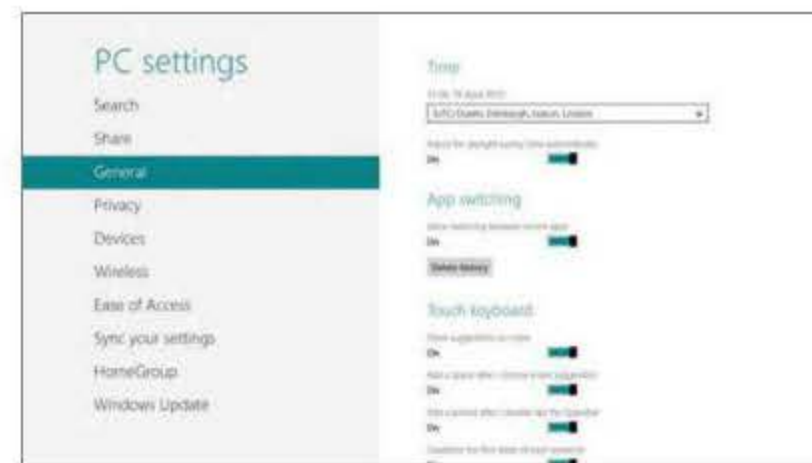
What's not to like?

We rather like the Metro interface. The concept is a smart one, and it's nicely responsive under the finger. The idea of being able to call elements up as needed out of the edges of the screen, such as the Charms that are hidden unless you sweep to bring them up, is neat.

But then again, we think there's room for improvement. The live tiles concept works well, but unless you pinch and zoom in you can't see an awful lot of these at once. We'd like to be able to reduced the size of the tiles by half in order to cram more onto a single screen.

Similarly, the ability to view two apps at once is great, but why can't we specify that both share the same amount of screen space instead of one having to take up a lot more room than the other?

Microsoft has gone for simplicity with Metro in many respects, and we'd actually like to see a little more flexibility and complexity. What Windows 8 really needs, though, is the test of time. Metro is going to need a lot of third-party app support to make it work well and give it a chance of rivalling the likes of Apple's iOS and Android on tablets. Clearly reaching critical mass will take a while. ■

> *We rather like the Metro interface. The concept is a smart one, and it's nicely responsive under the finger*

← The PC Settings page is laid out in a finger-friendly design, so changing the keyboard style, for example, is quick and easy

New features

Microsoft has taken a bold approach to its latest operating system, offering new functions and features, as well as touch control and a bold new interface

What's new in Windows 8? A brand new touch-friendly interface, app store and settings are just some of the new features in Windows 8. Often, the challenge for a market leader such as Microsoft when launching a new product is to convince existing users of the need to upgrade. Progress is inevitable, of course, but for users of Windows XP, the advent of Vista wasn't in itself a good reason to pay out again. So Microsoft added in shiny new features in an attempt to attract the hordes, with disastrous effects. As a consequence Windows 7 was much more of a point upgrade: a finessing of an existing, successful product, but no more than that.

This time Microsoft has been much more bold and, happily, more successful in its addition of new functions and features. Windows 8 looks different, and works in a different way. It has additional security and sharing features, and a new way of adding software. There's support for new hardware standards, and massively increased touch capability, but most of all, there's the Metro interface. When you first install and boot Windows 8, you'll be shocked by the change in the way the main interface looks. Gone is the traditional desktop – now available as one of many live, interactive 'tiles'. And even when you choose to use the desktop, you'll find one major change: the lack of the Start menu. It takes a bit of getting used to, but in general we are big fans of the Metro interface, and after reading the in-depth 10-page guide to Metro that follows, we're pretty sure you will be, too.

In this section, we kick off with that, before moving into deep-dive explanations of other features including the Windows Store, Charms and Snap Multi-tasking. We'll explain the benefits of USB 3.0, the virtual keyboard and changes to Windows Settings. This is the section of *The Complete Guide to Windows 8* that will help you familiarise yourself with a new and changed operating system.

When you first install and boot Windows 8, you'll be shocked by the change in the way the main interface looks

Metro interface

The Metro interface is as big a change from Windows 7 as the graphical interface of Windows 95 was when it replaced Windows 3.1

Windows 8 is a crucial operating system release for Microsoft. Unlike Windows 7, Vista and even XP before it, this latest OS isn't a mere evolution of the previous version. Windows 8 is as different from Windows 7 as Windows 95 was from Windows 3.1.

In this age of touchscreens and gestures, the keyboard and mouse seem almost antiquated and clunky. And Windows 7 looks and works pretty much exactly the same as Windows 95 did almost 17 years ago. In computing terms 17 years is a long time, and one could argue that Windows 8 is long overdue. However, as we'll see over the next few pages, it's also arguable that a touchscreen interface has no place on a desktop or laptop PC.

One OS to conquer them all
With Windows 8, Microsoft has created a single operating system that can run on all your devices, including tablets, laptops and desktop PCs. Regardless of screen size and how you interact with the device, Windows 8 will scale perfectly. That's the theory, but does it work?

We tried the new Metro interface on a range of computers, including touchscreen all-in-one PCs, laptops and tablets, and were surprised at just how well the interface copes with a huge range of screen sizes, from 10in right up to 27in. Although no version of Windows 8 is available for smartphones yet, Windows Phone 7 already uses the Metro user interface to good effect. Microsoft Xbox 360 owners will also be familiar with the tiled Metro interface, as it was rolled out as an update in late 2011.

Resistance to change
Many computer users resent even tiny changes to the user interface with which they're familiar, and struggle to cope with programs and settings being renamed or moved. Facebook is a classic example, with each of its frequent

> Microsoft has created a single operating system that can run on all your devices

updates and refinements met with a barrage of protest. The change from Microsoft's 'Classic' Windows desktop to Metro will no doubt lead to some people returning their new purchase to the shop from which they bought it.

The trouble is, without change there is no progress. Provided that you're willing to at least try the new interface – we'll hold your hand along the way – you'll quickly learn to appreciate many of Windows 8's new features.

And if your computer doesn't have a touchscreen, Windows 8 can still be controlled with a mouse.

The cloud
A key feature is Windows 8's integration with online services. As well as the new Store, in which you can buy Metro-style apps, you can also connect apps to your existing online accounts. For example, the Mail app can pull in email from Gmail, and the Photos app can display images from Facebook.

Your settings and personalisation are also stored in the cloud, so you can log into another Windows 8 PC and everything will look and work just as it does on your primary PC.

> If your computer doesn't have a touchscreen, Windows 8 can still be controlled with a mouse

Metro apps

The Metro interface comes with several key programs pre-installed. Here's our take on Metro's native applications.

↑ Microsoft has introduced picture passwords to Windows 8. You can use any image and then configure three gestures using circles, lines and taps

Lock screen and password options
With previous versions of Windows, you had to click on your username and enter a password to log in. Alternatively, if you weren't bothered about security, you could set Windows to boot straight to the desktop.

Windows 8 introduces a smartphone-style Lock screen, which you drag upwards to reveal a more familiar user list. The Lock screen can be customised to show your own photo, along with the time, date and app notifications. For example, you can see the Wi-Fi signal strength, the number of unread emails and battery level (if applicable).

New to Windows 8 are three types of authentication. You can type in a traditional password, a four-digit PIN or use a picture password. The latter requires to you complete three gestures on a photo, which is easier to complete on a touchscreen than keying in a password using an onscreen keyboard, and arguably more secure than a PIN.

You can choose any photo you like and then configure a series of three gestures using taps, circles and straight lines. You might draw a circle around a person's head, then tap each eye – the options are limitless. (See 'Secure Windows 8', on page 72, for further details).

Settings
Although the old Control Panel still exists, the new Settings app lets you tweak things much more easily with your fingers. On the left-hand side are 12 categories: tap each to show the options on the right.

Under Personalize, you can choose a picture for the Lock screen and select which apps show their 'quick status' and notifications. Using the links at the top, you can change your account picture and personalise the Start screen. There are six abstract backgrounds and a choice of nine colours.

Notifications are also new to Windows 8. As well as informative icons on the Lock screen, pop-up messages will appear within apps from the apps that
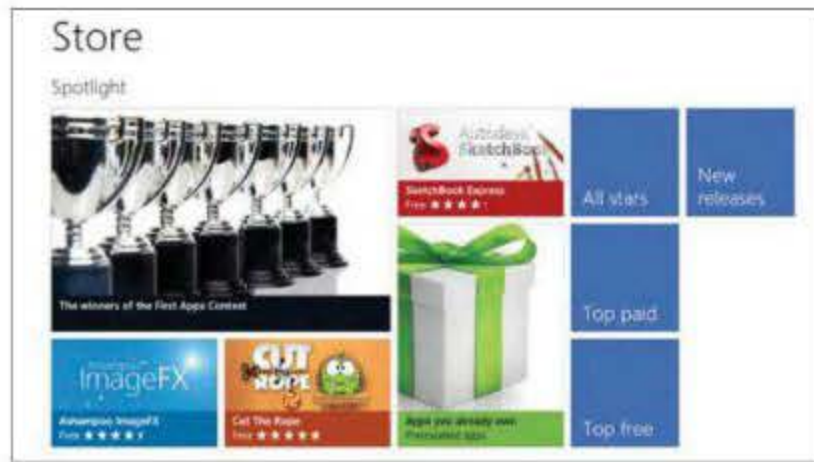
↑ The Windows Store should be your first port of call for downloading apps. If a program takes your fancy, click on it for a description and screenshots

you select here. Share options include whether to show a list of sharing methods that you use most often, as well as prioritising apps that you most frequently share from.

Other useful settings include the ability to prevent Windows downloading updates on metered internet connections. This is important for tablets, which could switch between Wi-Fi and a 3G network.

'Sync your settings' is another noteworthy feature. Here, you can select which preferences and personal settings to synchronise with your Microsoft account. Enable everything and you can log into another Windows 8 computer using the same account and feel as if you're using your own computer: it will look and work just the same. (See 'Sync your settings', on page 52, for further details).

Pre-installed software

Windows 7 came with far fewer pre-installed applications than Vista. Messenger, Movie Maker, Mail and more were stripped out and made available as free downloads. Windows 8 eschews this concept and there are more native apps than ever. As you'd expect, they're designed to match the new Metro interface and are controlled by touch.

Store

The first app you'll spot is for the new Windows Store. This is where you'll browse and buy new apps, just as you would on a smartphone. Various categories are available; pinch to zoom out and scroll quickly through each, then zoom in when you see something you like. Tap on a particular app and a description, screenshots and user reviews will be displayed. The choice of apps is currently limited, but expect lots more to appear when Windows 8 fully launches later in 2012. (See 'Windows Store', on page 40, for further details).

Maps

Maps uses Microsoft's Bing Maps service to provide worldwide search and directions. The interface isn't dissimilar from the Bing Maps website, but the entire screen is used for navigation. You can scroll around with your finger and pinch to zoom in and out. When you tap and hold the screen, top and bottom bars slide into view. You can set the map to your current location, switch from Road to Aerial (satellite) views, and search for a location or business. (See 'Bing Maps', on page 70, for further details).

People

The People app brings all your contacts into one place. It's hardly a new idea, but it's the first time Windows has had a native app that pulls in contact information from various websites. The most popular social-networking sites are listed, and it's simply a case of logging in with your username and password and allowing the app to access your data. Tap on a contact and you're given options for getting in touch, including phone numbers

↑ Windows 8 uses the Bing Maps service to provide directions. Simply enter your starting point and destination and Maps will calculate the quickest route

and addresses. A number of panes will appear to the right, depending on the information available. For example, a What's new pane might show recent Twitter updates. (See 'Social Media', on page 62, for further details).

Media

Although Media Center and Media Player are still present, music, video and photos are also catered for by Metro-style apps. Music combines your local library with the music marketplace, letting you quickly add to your collection. Video is a separate app; it looks identical to music and displays files stored in the Videos folder. There's no 'video marketplace' yet, but there almost certainly will be in the final version of Windows 8.

In both apps, it's easy to control playback with your fingers, but it's not so easy to find what you're looking for. Admittedly, most of the Metro-style apps are unfinished, which explains why it isn't possible to quickly jump to artists beginning with a certain letter, for example. Currently, you can browse media only by 'most played'.

Photos is perhaps the most polished of the media apps. It puts your pictures front and centre and is perfect for a touchscreen. As well as photos stored in your Pictures folder, you can link your Facebook, Flickr and SkyDrive photos, and view them all using the same great interface. Tap Facebook, for example, and you'll see a list of albums just as you would if you tapped on the Pictures library. A clever trick is the ability to pinch to zoom out from this view, displaying smaller album thumbnails that will save you scrolling horizontally through large images. You can use this trick when viewing photos themselves, letting you see more of the contents of an album onscreen.

Mail, Calendar and Messaging

Mail brings Hotmail to the touchscreen for the first time. The interface is split into three vertical panes. On the left is a list of folders (or accounts if selected), followed by the inbox in the middle, and messages on the right. You can link up other email services in accounts view, including Exchange and Gmail.

Messages are shown in the order they are received, rather than organised into threaded conversations. Reminder emails are automatically sent for appointments created in the Calendar app. This has the same colour scheme as Mail – grey and green – and can show day, week or month views.

Tap on a specific hour to create an appointment. All the usual options you'd expect are displayed to the left, including a list of calendars so you can select to which one the meeting belongs. By default you get three: your own, one for birthdays and a third for bank holidays.

Messaging is another app that shares a similar design. It's designed to run in full-screen mode, which can feel strange on a laptop or PC. Unlike Windows 7's Windows Live Messenger client, Messaging displays previous conversation threads so you can jump to one and continue chatting if the contact is online.

Internet Explorer

Windows 8 ships with Internet Explorer 10, which has a radically different interface for Metro. Controls are hidden until you swipe upwards, with the entire screen used to display a website. Swiping up reveals the URL and search bar at the bottom of the screen.

Gone is tabbed browsing. Swiping down from the top shows thumbnails of open sites, and you can scroll right to see the full list or tap the '+' button to open a new site.

↑ Internet Explorer 10's controls are hidden until you swipe upwards. When you swipe downwards you'll be shown thumbnails of open web pages

Music combines your local library with the music marketplace, letting you quickly add to your collection
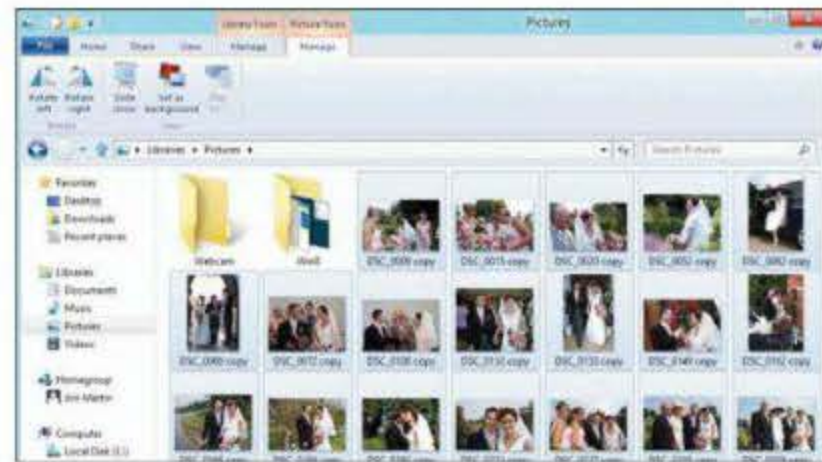
↑ Windows 8's Picture tools tab allows you play a slideshow of all your photos, set one as a desktop background or rotate the picture

Classic desktop

As you'll see from 'Metro's failings', on page 38 for further details, not everyone will fall in love with Metro. It's such a big change that this is inevitable. But all is not lost for lovers of the classic Windows interface.

If you're using a laptop or desktop PC, you'll see a Desktop icon on the Start screen. This launches the 'Classic' Windows interface, which looks almost identical to that of Windows 7. There's one obvious difference, though: no Start button. This also means there's no Start menu, which can feel quite disorientating. There are, however, various ways to launch applications. One is to use the Search tool on the Charms bar (swipe in from the right to display it); another is to right-click the bottom-left corner of the screen to display a Start menu of sorts. This lets you open a Run box, Command Prompt and various management programs.

You can also pin programs to the Taskbar, or create shortcuts on the desktop. The latter option is convoluted, though, since you have either to browse to the program's location on your hard disk or right-click on the desktop and choose New, then Shortcut, from the menu that appears.

Everything behaves as it did in Windows 7, so you can snap windows to the left- or right-hand side of the screen, for example. The notification area is also identical, as is the shortcut to the right that closes all windows and reveals the desktop. Where you might expect to find the Start button is a toggle that lets you switch to using the Metro interface; hover over this and tap the Start screen thumbnail to access Metro.

Open an Explorer window and you'll notice the other main change. At the top is Microsoft's 'Ribbon', which will be familiar to Office 2007 and 2010 users. The Ribbon is intended to replace traditional toolbars and menus, providing quick access to commands that let you quickly complete a task.

Each tab holds related commands, but in Windows 8 one or more tabs can be highlighted. In folders containing pictures, for example, a highlighted Picture Tools tab includes commands for rotating images, playing a slideshow and setting a picture as the desktop background. The Share tab makes it far easier than before to burn to disc, email, print and compress files.

When you start any program not designed for the Metro interface, it will launch on the Classic Windows desktop. The old-style Control Panel is still present, as is Network and Sharing Center. And it's still possible to add gadgets to the desktop and change the wallpaper, just as you did in Windows 7.

The Task Manager has had an overhaul. The main list is split into Apps and Background processes, and their memory, processor and network usage is now much easier to see. A new App History tab includes a Metered network column, so you can see which apps are eating up your monthly data allowance.

Touchscreen keyboards

Whether you're using Windows 8 on a PC, laptop or tablet with a touchscreen, there's a selection of onscreen keyboard layouts to choose between. The default view is a basic Qwerty layout and, even on a large screen, it lacks a number row. You have to tap the &123 button to display this.

A keyboard icon allows you to select two other styles: split and handwriting recognition. The former is ideal if you're used to typing with your thumbs, and it also includes a central numberpad. This may appear too small to be of use, depending on the size of your screen, but it's fine on screens up to and around 10in. (See 'Virtual keyboard, on page 50, for further details). ■

Everything behaves as it did in Windows 7, so you can snap windows to the left or right hand side of the screen

The Windows 8 Start screen explained

Tap this icon to change your account picture, lock your computer or sign out

Charms bar: The Charms bar appears when you swipe your finger in from the right edge of the screen. If you're using a mouse, point the cursor to the top- or bottom-right corner of the screen

Search: Tap this to open the search box. You can tap on a category to filter the search. For example, you can search for a TV show in Video or a place in Maps

Share: This lets you share items with people. The options will change depending on which app is running. Extra sharing options will appear when you install apps that can share content, such as Twitter clients

Start: This takes you back to the Start screen if you're in another app, or switches to the most recent app if you're on the Start screen

Devices: Tap this to show connected devices. For example, you could select a media streamer, such as a connected Xbox, to play a particular video on your TV

Settings: Shows six commonly used settings, including network status, screen brightness and power options. This also provides a link to the new streamlined Control Panel

You can select tiles by tapping (or clicking) and dragging them downwards (or upwards). Unselect tiles by dragging them upwards (or downwards)

Options bar: This appears when you select one or more tiles from the Start screen and provides contextual options. Certain tiles on the Start screen can be resized, but others can't

Top tips for getting around the Metro interface

■ Drag in from the left to switch to the most recently used app. Drag and hold to display it to the side of the current app

■ Drag down from the top to close the current app

■ Tap and hold your finger on the screen to access menus in some applications

■ Rearrange the position of tiles by tapping and dragging them to their new position

■ Pinch two fingers together to zoom out and see more apps at once. Alternatively, hold down Ctrl and use your mouse's scroll wheel to zoom in and out

■ Display all apps by dragging upwards from the bottom of the Start screen to show the All Apps button

■ Add apps to the Start screen either from the Store or by selecting them from the All Apps list and tapping the 'Pin to Start' button. 'Pin to taskbar' lets you pin the program to the Classic desktop's Taskbar

■ If you don't have a touchscreen, point your mouse at the top- or bottom-right corner of the screen to reveal the Charms bar. At the bottom-left is a shortcut to the Start screen. Drag down from the top-left to show thumbnails of running apps. On a touchscreen, drag right, then left, at the left edge of the screen

Windows' bold new face

In the first of our two pieces on the Metro UI, **Nate Ralph** explains why he believes it delivers a better user experience

Change is terrifying, and few things in technology have a greater capacity for setting us on edge than a fundamental re-imagining of the Windows OS – a piece of the PC that's as vital to our lives and productivity as our mice and keyboards. But change is afoot, and Windows 8 is designed to play a pivotal role in Microsoft's quest for relevance in a future awash with touch-centric devices.

I'm a big fan of Windows 8. The Metro UI is a breath of fresh air. Its modern approach to interface design brings Microsoft's OS into line with touchscreen devices. Applications are readily accessible and serve up useful information without forcing users to rely on shortcut icons or third-party applications. Gestures make getting around the PC faster and more efficient, and they work just as well for keyboards and mice as they do for touchscreen devices.

In defence of different

Metro isn't just pretty – it's efficient and supports considerably faster navigation than was possible with earlier incarnations of Windows. The large, unwieldy tiles that dominate the screen may be a bit disorienting at first, but think for a moment about the Start menu that we've all grown accustomed to. It's a mess – a list of apps and folders that necessitates either cramming the Taskbar with apps that you use often or cluttering the desktop with a sea of shortcuts.

Metro takes that clutter and makes it a little more aesthetically pleasing. But there's more – you can easily group and shuffle applications. Being able to organise them into groups simplifies the task of finding what you need to use.

Information is king, and Metro's live tiles – which can display dynamic content – are a crucial piece of the puzzle. The Mail app, for example, will display recent email messages; Calendar will show upcoming events; while the Photos app will cycle through images that are connected to your Windows account. Few apps currently available in the Windows 8 store take advantage of this

Information is king, and Metro's live tiles – which can display dynamic content – are a crucial piece of the puzzle

functionality, but being able to have useful information within easy reach is a wonderful step forward.

Then there's search. Can't find the classic Control Panel, or a particular file? When you're on the Start screen, just start typing – the search dialog box has been around for a long time, but getting where you need to be has never been this fast and easy.

Getting over the learning curve

Metro's gestures certainly take a bit of getting used to. To get started, you'll need to understand three important elements. The first is the Charms Bar – a set of five icons that fly in from the right side of the screen and provide access to Search, Sharing, Devices, application Settings, and a shortcut to the Start screen. To activate them either hover the cursor over them or press the Windows key and 'C' at the same time.

The second important element is the left side of the screen. Hover over the upper or lower left corner, and a list of all currently running apps will appear. Alternatively you can press Windows-Tab or Alt-Tab to bring this menu up.

The third crucial item is the right-click context menu. The drop-down menu that trails your pointer doesn't make much sense on a touch-centric interface. So instead, right-clicking on empty space in an app brings up a context menu bar that contains traditional context-menu features. This will be the trickiest piece of the Windows 8 puzzle to get used to. Drop-down menus haven't vanished entirely – right-click a link in Internet Explorer, and you'll get the familiar options. But it will be up to developers to listen to user feedback, and make design decisions that make sense.

A chance to get things right

As things stand there are a few things wrong with Metro. Multi-monitor support is lacking – clicking on the traditional desktop automatically switches Metro to a traditional desktop, which can make multi-tasking a pain. Clicking anywhere on a desktop program will flip the Start screen on the other monitor away to show whatever Metro app was last running.

Some gestures also don't work as smoothly as I'd like, particularly when dragging and shuffling apps around. I'm also not sold on full-screen apps. They make sense on small screens, but I've grown accustomed to the expanded real estate on larger monitors; empty space abounds in Windows 8, which feels wasteful. Alleviating this problem depends to some extent on application developers paying better attention to how their apps behave on PC monitors.

↑ The Charms bar on the right-hand side of the screen provides fast access to a selection of options, including Settings, Search and Devices

The search dialog box has been around for a long time, but getting where you need to be has never been this fast and easy

But that's the point of the Consumer Preview: to get the future of Windows in front of users so they can tell Microsoft what needs fixing.

I've already seen dramatic improvements in the OS since I began using the Developer Preview in September 2011. Now that everyone can get their hands on Windows 8, glaring user interface issues will surely be brought to light, so Microsoft can fix them.

Windows 8 has a long way to go, but it is going to be a huge step forward for Windows. ■

↑ The traditional desktop has been given an overhaul in Windows 8. The Start menu is gone, giving Microsoft's new OS a much less cluttered appearance

Metro's failings

Windows 8's Metro UI may be fun and innovative, but as **Edward N Albro** argues it can also be frustrating to use

A s everybody knows, the most striking thing about Windows 8 is its Metro interface – the tiles that serve as both shortcuts to programs and live widgets reporting data from those programs. But in the Windows 8 Consumer Preview, at least, Metro is as annoying as it is innovative, especially if you attempt to use it with a keyboard and mouse instead of with a touchscreen. Here's what's bothering me about Microsoft's new interface.

The gap between Metro and the regular desktop

With a Windows 8 PC, you can either be in the Windows Phone 7-style Metro interface or on a desktop that resembles the traditional Windows 7 desktop. These interfaces don't just offer two different ways to look at the same thing, though; they act more like two separate operating systems working side-by-side, with separate apps, different settings and different rules of operation.

Take Internet Explorer, for instance. On the traditional desktop, it has an ever-present address bar and navigation buttons, and you can run the window at whatever size you want. In Metro, the address bar and navigation buttons mostly disappear once you're on a page; and the window is always full-screen. Also, if you're browsing in the Metro interface but switch to the regular desktop and click the IE icon, you won't see the pages you were just viewing.

It's hard to stay in Metro

It may not be obvious from my complaining, but I actually like the Metro interface, which is why I'm frustrated that getting knocked out of it – especially on a dual-monitor system – is so easy. Typically, if you have two monitors, your primary display will use the Metro interface and the other will use the traditional desktop. Click in a window on the non-Metro display, and your other screen automatically switches from Metro to traditional desktop. If you're on the Metro start page and you choose the wrong option, such as a shortcut

In Metro, the address bar and navigation buttons mostly disappear once you're on a page

to an incompatible app, you get bumped out of Metro.

Metro shortcuts are tricky

Clearly Metro was designed, first and foremost, to work with a finger tip, but I found that trying to make it work with a mouse and a keyboard was often frustrating and seldom intuitive.

To open the Metro start page, for instance, you drag your pointer to the lower-left corner of your screen. A thumbnail of the start page pops out.

My instinct, honed by thousands of Flash interfaces on the web, is to move the pointer into the pop-up and click. But in Windows 8, if you do that, you click whatever icon beneath the pop-up window your pointer happens to be resting on. In Windows 8, you have to keep your pointer off-screen while you click.

↑ The Metro interface is best suited to touch control. Using a mouse and keyboard can be frustrating

Metro apps are easier to navigate with a finger than with a mouse

The interfaces in most Metro apps are wide and built to scroll horizontally, sometimes through screen after screen. This is great when you're navigating with a finger on a tablet; but with a mouse, not so much. Your options are to use the scroll wheel on a mouse or the scroll bar at the bottom of the page. I'd be able to left-click an empty area of the page, grab it and pull it to the side horizontally. To me that seems closer to the way people navigate by touch.

Apps display only at full-screen size

The look is striking and gives the apps lots of breathing space, but sometimes you need to see two programs at the same time, to compare information or to move data from one application to another. You can grab the top of a program and move it so that it sits in a vertical panel on the side of your screen, but that orientation isn't useful for most current apps.

Metro apps show little information

The Music app is one example of a Windows 8 app that supplies a low density of information per screen. Albums, artists, and even songs appear as an array of tiles. On my widescreen monitor, I can see only 24 tiles at a time. To see more albums, I have to scroll horizontally; and if I scroll too fast I see just generic grey tiles, which persist for a few seconds while the app populates the tiles with album names and art. Once the images are in place, the app has an attractive look, but it's not an efficient way to scan a library of hundreds of albums.

Windows 8 menus are contextual

If you click the Settings icon while you're in the Metro start page, you get settings specifically for the start page. You can click a link below for 'PC Settings', but those settings don't include everything you're used to having access to in the Windows Control Panel. To obtain a link to the Control Panel, you must click the Settings icon while you're in the traditional desktop. Perhaps this is something users will become accustomed to as it is how many mobile apps work, but I think users expect more consistency from their desktop OS.
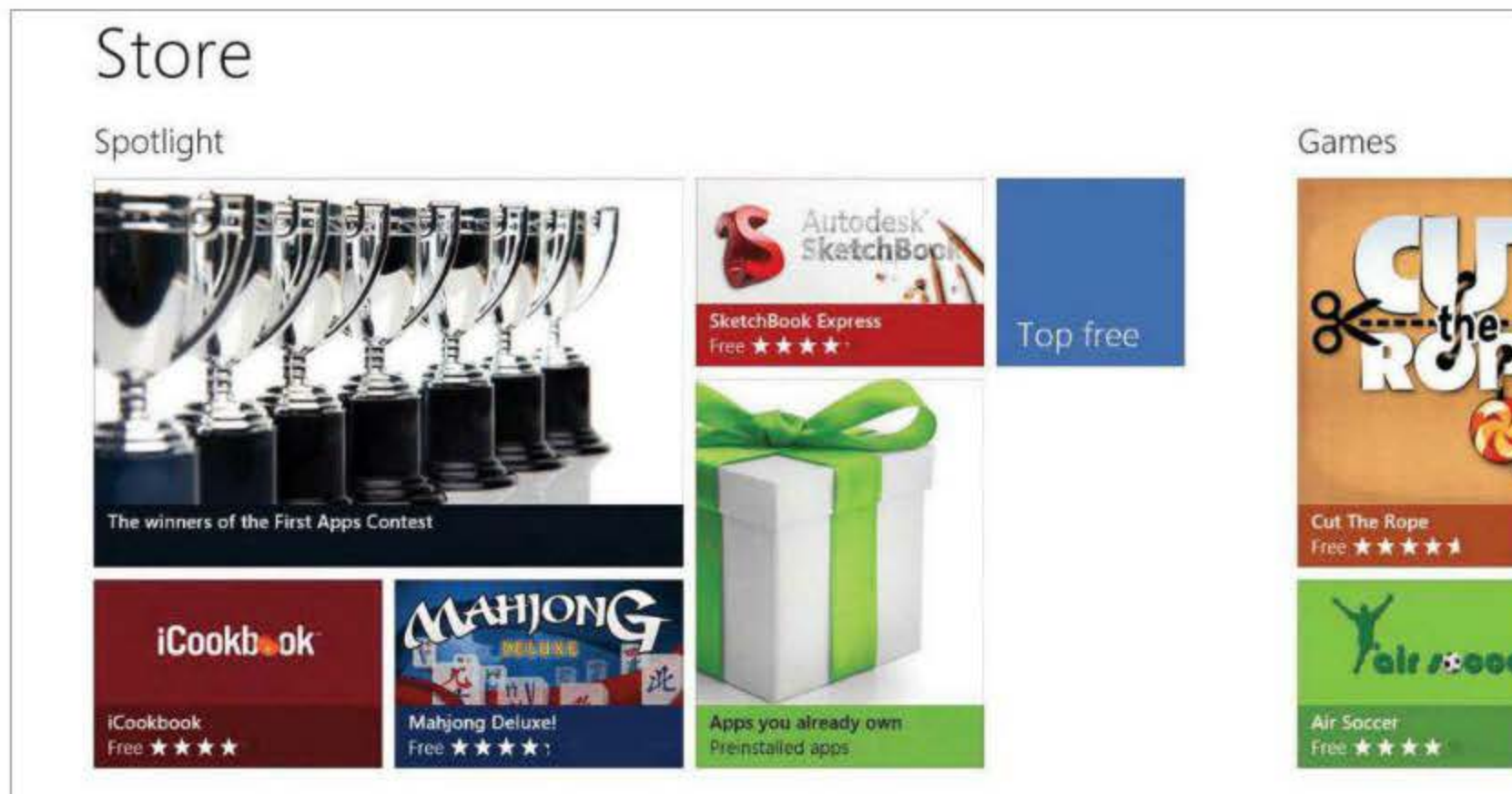
How much can Microsoft fix?

I want to stress again that, appearances to the contrary, I really like the Metro interface. I think that many of my gripes involve problems that Microsoft could probably fix fairly easily. Other issues, however, such as the tablet-oriented design of apps and the fact that the Metro and traditional desktops feel like separate operating systems, make me wonder whether Microsoft can come up with a solution that makes Windows 8 feel like a cohesive unit. ■

I found that trying to make it work with a mouse and a keyboard was often frustrating and seldom intuitive

Windows Store

The new store in Windows 8 means that the latest software is only ever a button press away

The concept of app stores started with smartphones. Before they came along getting hold of apps was a complex matter. You either had to use specific websites dedicated to collecting and organising third-party apps, or trawl through the internet to find the ones you needed.

Just as with phones, a dedicated store sitting on your computer makes it easy for you to browse, search and make choices between different apps. It can open your mind to the huge variety of offerings – possibly including ones you've never have thought of.

Introducing an app store into Windows 8 was, in many ways, an obvious thing for Microsoft to do. To find it just go to the Start screen in Windows 8 and you should see 'Store' in the top-left corner. A simple tap if you are using a tablet or a click with the mouse will open up the store. Of course, you can drag

↑ To access the Windows Store, simply click on the Store icon on the operating system's home screen

↑ There's plenty of information to help you decide whether to get an app. On the right there are three useful headings. If, for example, you choose the Reviews tab you'll see what others have to say about each app

↑ The star rating tells you how well other users have liked the app you are considering. And you can see how many people have rated it too. This information gives you an idea of whether it is any good or not

↑ There are usually multiple screen shots for each app – you can scroll through them with a finger on a touchscreen device

its around to a different position if you prefer. Once you've found the Windows Store you'll notice that, just like the operating system's home screen, large icons are used to identify different apps. If you want to see more at once, just pinch into the screen if you have a touchscreen device, and the icons will get smaller so you can see more of them. Alternatively, simply scroll left and right to see more apps. Just in case you forget where you are, there's a 'Store' marker at the top-left of the screen.

A different class

Apps are located into categories. The first one you'll see is called 'Spotlight' and features a range of information, such as the top free apps and software you have already installed. As you move through the store you'll see different categories including games, social, entertainment, photos, music and videos, books and reference, news and weather, food and dining, shopping, travel, productivity, security and education.

You can easily view a list of any apps you have downloaded by selecting the 'Apps you already own' button.

Not all the apps in the store are free, but if you choose the Top Free icon you'll immediately be linked to the most popular free applications. You won't always want what everyone else has chosen, but this is a potentially handy way to discover new and interesting apps.

If you see one that you like the look of, simply select its icon. You will then be taken through to the full information page, where you can decide whether you want to download the program. ◼

> Just in case you forget where you are, there's a 'Store' marker at the top-left of the screen
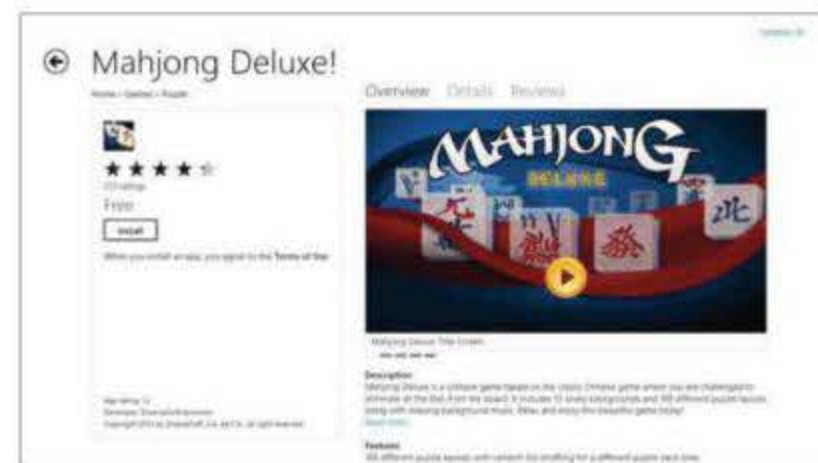
Updating apps

Applications are always being tweaked and updated. The store icon on the Start screen will often have a number in its bottom-right corner. This indicates how many of your installed apps have been updated. In the store itself, there's a reminder in the top-right of the screen of how many updates there are to installed apps.

Click this and you're taken to the app updates screen. Here you can choose to update some or all of the installed apps – click apps to select them or use the 'Select all' button, then choose 'Install'.

Navigation by touch

The ability to access all your favourite sites by touch will prove a real boon to Windows 8 users

I f you've surfed the internet on a tablet or a smartphone, then you'll probably be frustrated by the desktop PC experience. Web browsing is arguably one of the activities to have benefited most from multi-touch technology. Sweeping through pages, pinching to zoom in and out, quickly accessing bookmarks and links by tap, all feel much more intuitive.

With Windows 8 Microsoft has taken the idea of touch-based browsing and built Internet Explorer 10 around it, making a browser that prioritises touch for use within the Metro interface. Of course, you can use it with a mouse too, and in the standard, more old-fashioned Windows interface, but touch is really intended to be the primary methodology. As well as catering for a more intuitive way of using the web, touch gives you fast-and-easy access to a range of tools that can make browsing more productive. So, lets jump right in and explain what that means in the real world.

Getting started

When you first open the web browser there's a navigation bar along the bottom (as shown in the screen above). This offers some basic tools for getting around such as reloading or revisiting a web page, the ability to search for a term or complete URL, and the option to pin a page

→ Returning to open web pages is easy in Windows 8 – just make a sweeping movement towards the top of the screen

↑ Whenever you start typing in a search for a specific term or a web address a series of navigation tiles will appear. These show you all the sites that you've pinned to the Start screen, along with ones you've regularly visited

↑ If you prefer the more traditional-looking desktop interface, simply sweep your finger upwards and then tap the Tools icon

to the Start screen. Whenever you choose to pin a page to the start screen a small box will appear. Type in a reference name for the web page that means something to you, hit 'Pin to Start' and your web page is on the Start Screen (this already works in Internet Explorer 9).

You can drag it to a location that works for you. This gives you quick, easy access to all your favourite web pages. Users of Windows Phone will be very familiar with the concept and it saves you firing up the browser every time you want to go to a site you regularly visit.

Access all areas

If you want to revisit open web pages, then a sweep upwards from the screen bezel on to the application window gives you precisely that capability. You can close any open web pages by hitting the 'X' in their top-right corner, jump to any web page by tapping it, open a new window by hitting the '+' sign and close all but the currently open web page by hitting the three dots icon.

If you start typing in a search term or URL a new screen appears showing what are called Navigation Tiles. These show all the sites that you've pinned to the Start screen, as well as the sites you've visited frequently. As you type, the tiles are filtered to combine your favourites, history and popular web sites. The idea is that you might not need to type much in at all. If what you want is on one of these tiles, just tap it to go to the site you need.

Traditional look

Of course, if you want it, the good old-fashioned desktop-based interface is present too. Just call up the navigation bar (with a sweep of the finger upwards onto the Metro screen from the screen bezel), and then hit the Tools icon to the right of the navigation bar. Now you can choose 'View on the desktop' and what you'll get is a very familiar looking Internet Explorer screen. ■

As well as catering for a more intuitive way of using the web, touch gives you fast-and-easy access to a range of tools

Edge-to-edge browsing

When using the Metro interface Internet Explorer offers 'edge-to-edge' browsing. The whole screen is occupied by the web page you are looking at – and not by extraneous boxes and information. You can pinch to zoom, flick to scroll, tap to open links, and sweep left and right to move back and forth between web pages that you've opened.
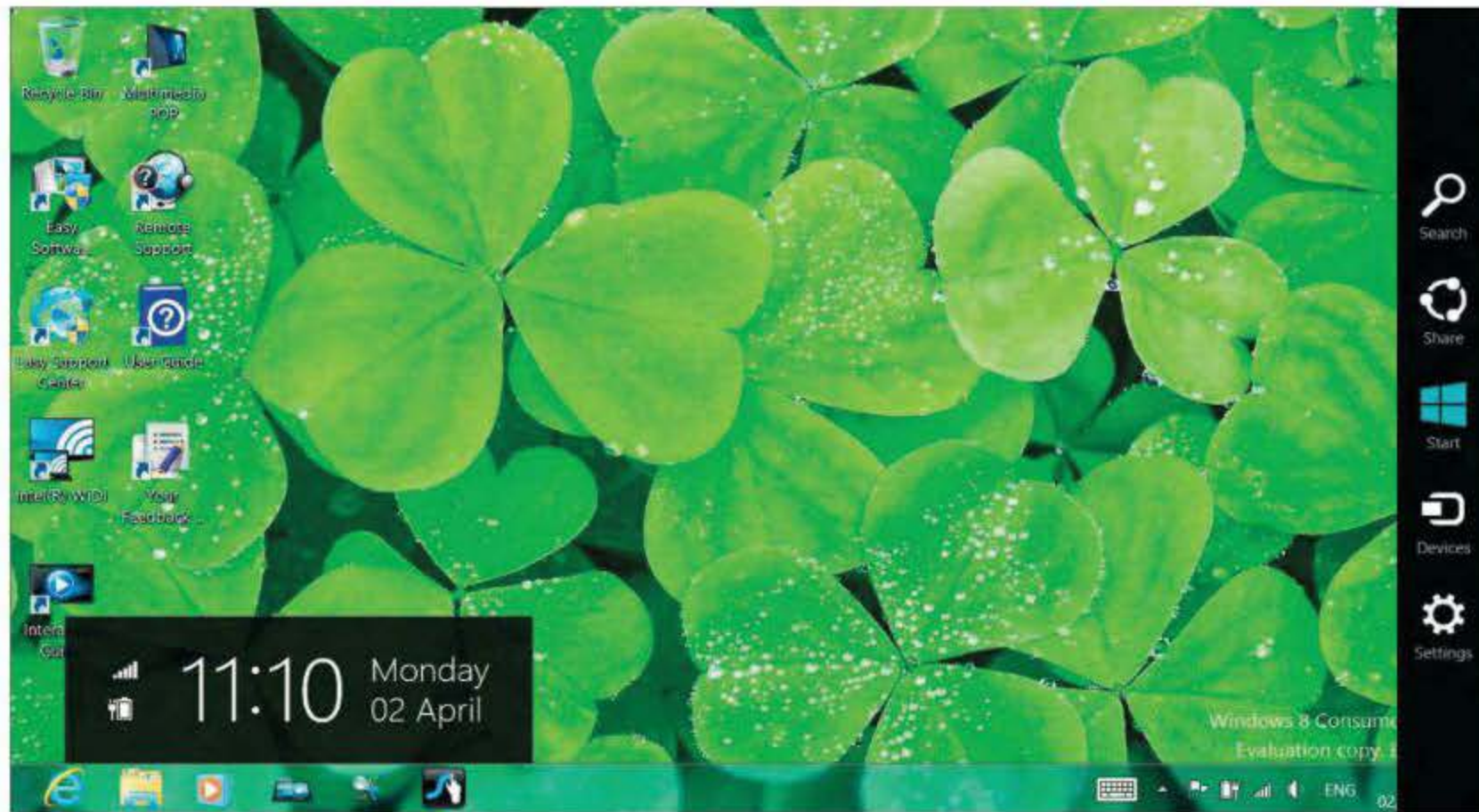
Charms

New to Windows 8 is the Charms Bar, which gives you
quick and easy access to a range of different options

Windows 8 brings an entirely new word to the computing lexicon –
Charms. The word sounds lovely, doesn't it? Not the kind of thing you
might associate with a new feature of an operating system at all. It
sounds pleasurable, easy to live with and something you'll actually want to use.
And this is just as well, because Charms have a lot of work to do. With no Start
Menu in Windows 8, they provide access to features such as search, changing
the settings and the Control Panel.

Charms also provide access to data sharing via email or social networks. And
it isn't only Windows that has access to Charms –applications can access them,
too. In the end, the overarching point of Charms is to give you quick-and-easy
access to a range of features, from within any application, and within either the
Start screen or desktop interfaces.

Finding the Charms

If you are using a touchscreen, then a
quick drag from outside the right edge
of the screen on to the desktop itself
is required to access Charms. If you are
using a regular display, then press the
Windows key and 'C' at the same time,
or drag the mouse pointer along the
right edge of the desktop screen into
the top or bottom corner.

→ The Search charm is a sophisticated tool
that allows you to look for lots of different
types of information

↑ If you find something of interest that you want to email to a friend, simply
click on the Share tool. In this example we're sharing a web page

↑ If you want to tweak Windows 8 to, for example, change the desktop
image, you'll need to click on the Settings charm

All these actions will open up two areas – the Charms Bar and an information
box. The latter is located in the left-hand corner and displays the date and time,
how much battery power remains (or if the battery is being charged, its charge
status) and wireless connectivity strength. It's particularly useful if you are
working on a tablet and need a quick status check, though, it isn't interactive.

The Charms bar

Located down the right-hand side of the screen, this is very interactive. It has
five different icons, each offering a specific function. The first of these is the
Search charm, a comprehensive tool that lets you look for different types of
information. You can choose to search in Apps, Settings, Files, the Internet,
Music, People, and more – you can even search the Weather app to find out
what it is like in particular locations. Choose where you want to search by
selecting something from the right-hand column, then type into the search
box. The results of any search will appear on the left of the screen. If you are
searching within an app, the app will display the results for you.

The Share Charm, as its name suggests, allows you to share items. Apps with
content need to be designated as able to share their content, and apps that do
the sharing need to be designated as able to. Out of the box the list of apps is
small, but if you add Twitter, Facebook and other social media apps with sharing
capabilities you could find this charm grows in usefulness, and means you don't
have to keep opening new apps to do sharing tasks.

Next up is the Start tool, which allows you to toggle between the Start
screen and the main Windows screen – you can do the same task by hitting
the Windows button on your keyboard.

The Devices charm gives you quick access to any peripherals that are
attached to your computer. For example, if you have a second screen attached
you can use the Devices charm to quickly configure it as a main, second,
duplicate or extended screen.

The final icon is the Settings charm, and this is your route into the Control
Panel and to detailed, in depth tweaking. Here you can discover basic

*The point of
Charms is
to give you
quick and
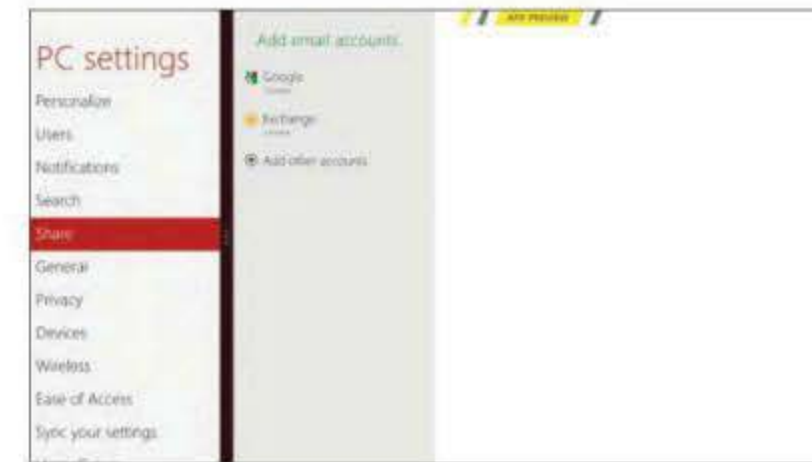easy access
to a range of
features, from
within any app*

information about your
system status and change
the settings in Windows
Control Panel. This is also
the tool to opt for if you
need access to the Windows
Help and Support Centre. ■

← Clicking the Devices icon
lets you quickly see which
peripherals are attached to
your computer

↑ Snap one program to the left-hand side of the screen, leaving the rest of your workspace available for others. You can adjust the space each takes

↑ Thumbnails of other active apps will appear in the desktop pane, should you choose to keep that open, allowing you to quickly multi-task

Snap multi-tasking

New to Windows 8, snap multi-tasking lets you dock one program in a small strip on the side of the screen, while working in another

Running more than one application at a time, so called multi-tasking, is not new to Windows. The old Alt-Tab convention has been used to switch between open programs in Windows for a long time, and you'll still find it in both the desktop and Start screen versions of Windows 8. You can also sweep a finger on to the screen from the left bezel and flick to scroll through everything you've currently got open in either desktop or Start screen views. But there's something new in Windows 8 too, by way of snap multi-tasking. This function allows you to dock one application into a small strip on the left- or right-hand side of the screen, while continuing to work in another program in the main area of the display.

In the dock

There are plenty of potential uses for this system. You might, for example, want to keep a Twitter feed live in the narrow panel while browsing the web in the larger part of the screen. Strangely, you can use this system to combine Metro and desktop apps, and while the difference in looks can be jarring, there's no doubt it has its uses.

→ As you drag, the new program will appear as a thumbnail and the application already onscreen will move over to make room

Because you can still use the Alt-Tab system to switch between programs, snap multi-tasking arguably adds a whole new dimension to working with multiple applications. But it does have its limitations. The tab sizes are limited, for example, so you can't have two programs taking up equal screens space, nor can you multi-task three or more applications in this way. And if you are working with a finger on a touchscreen device you can't pre-select which two programs you want to be using – you need to have one open, then gently slide the next one open. The second application is simply the next one in the queue of opened software, and if it isn't what you were after you need to slide the next one in, then the next one, till you get the program you wanted. Things are easier if you use a mouse (see the box below).

How it works

If you are working with a finger, drag in applications that are already open from the left-hand side of the screen. If you are too quick they'll open up full-screen and that's not what we are looking for here. As you drag, the new program will appear as a thumbnail, slowly sliding in, and the application that's onscreen will move over to make space for it.

As you can see from the main image at the top of the opposite page, a vertical line separates the new application from the one that was onscreen initially. The program you are using will take up a larger chunk of the screen than the other. This could be a web browser, for example, or some other program that needs a lot of screen space. If you decide you want to change the relative amount of desk space shared by the two applications, simply drag the vertical bar that separates them to the left or right. The more visible program will become the smaller one, and vice versa, but you won't be able to have both share the same amount of screen space. ■

The program you are using will take up a larger chunk of the screen than the other

Snap multi-tasking with a mouse

The convention for starting snap multi-tasking with a mouse is slightly different to working with a finger and it allows you more control over selecting the applications you want to use.

When working full-screen, you'll need to put the cursor in the top left of the screen and then pull down (without pressing any mouse buttons) to reveal thumbnails of all your opened programs. Now left-click and grab the application you want, dragging it away from the other thumbnails. Drop it into the smaller space (if you drop it into the larger space it will simply take up the full screen).

Now you can repeat the process to choose a program for the larger space. You can drag the vertical bar left or right with the mouse to alter the relative size of your two multi-tasked apps.

Native USB 3.0 support

With USB 3.0's significantly improved speeds, Windows 8 users will be able to transfer all their music, photos and files faster than ever

We all connect some sort of device to our computer, be it an iPod, smartphone or camera, and the vast majority of us do so using USB. The standard has been around for a long time, and its use is pretty much second nature for most of us. As time has gone on, it's developed as a data transfer mechanism, getting faster with every new version and, of course, it allows us to charge our mobile devices, too.

The latest version is USB 3.0, and today's computers often incorporate one or more compatible ports, allowing for faster data transfer between a PC and an attached peripheral than its predecessor; USB 2.0. But it is only with Windows 8 that Microsoft has been able to introduce USB 3.0 support natively within the operating system, and thereby really give users an opportunity to take advantage of the latest standard. What, however, does that mean for how we can work with data, and with USB itself, in Windows 8?

What USB 3.0 offers

The most significant feature of USB 3.0 is its fast data transfer. Known as SuperSpeed, it can move data at a rate of up to 5GB per second (GBps). USB 2.0 tops out at 480MB per second (MBps). That's a massive tenfold increase in data transfer speed.

This giant leap forwards in transfer speed means all activities that involve

→ It may not look any different on the outside, but USB 3.0 offers significantly faster download and upload speeds
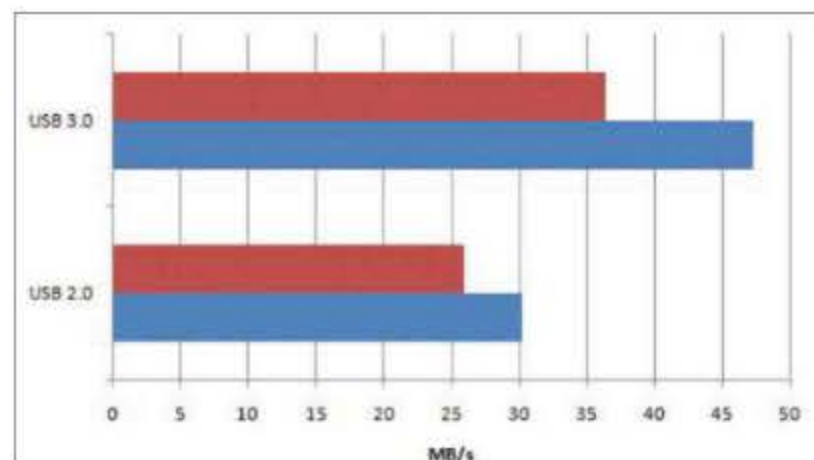
moving data around, from making your daily backup to sending music to your smartphone will be a lot faster to complete, and therefore less hassle.

Upping the transfer speed is important because we tend to have more data to move these days. Five years ago we might have had a few photos and the odd tune. Today, we'll have hundreds or even thousands of photos and tracks, along with video to swap between devices and, of course, to back up. The faster we can all do this, the happier we are.

USB 3.0 can also provide more power than USB 2.0, which most importantly means faster charging of external devices. That's great if you find yourself relying on the technology to charge your devices rather than the mains, and good news if you appreciate power efficiency, too. This comes into play because USB 3.0 is better at powering down when it's not doing being used, and can help extend a laptop's battery life and reduce the power consumption of desktop computers.

All these plus points are integral to USB 3.0, and you'll find it on many Windows 7 computers. But by building support into the operating system natively, Microsoft is helping to ensure you get the very best experience. For example, USB 3.0 devices shouldn't need third-party drivers – they should just plug and play. And without the need for custom drivers, the speed and efficiency benefits should be much more apparent. If you are worried about your USB 2.0 devices, don't be. There's no need to upgrade as USB 3.0 is backwards compatible, so any devices that only support the older, slower standard can still be used. They'll be slower, though.

The history of USB

In computing terms, USB is an ancient technology, first appearing back in 1996. There were two speeds back then – a full rate of 12MBps and a lower one at what today seems a snail's pace of 1.5MBps. What helped make it such a success was the fact that most of the work is done inside the computer, not on the attached device. This made USB, at the device end, relatively inexpensive to produce, and that in turn helped it achieve popularity and become a universal standard.

Fast forward to 2000 and USB 2.0 appeared. A massive speed increase to 480MBps was implemented. Then in 2008, USB 3.0 was announced, and the first compatible devices started to appear in 2009. Fully certified products didn't start appearing till the start off 2010. Slowly USB 3.0 has started to appear in computers, and today it's easy to find. We aren't expecting it to be seen in smartphones for a bit, though. Current predictions suggest we'll see it at the end of this year or early in 2013.

Had Microsoft not included native support for USB 3.0 in Windows 8, it would have come in for severe criticism. As it is, we now have the opportunity to see how the fast speeds of USB 3.0 can make data transfer quicker and more power efficient on a daily basis. ■

↑ USB 3.0 connectors look and act in the same way as their USB 2.0 predecessors. But the internal spec means connectivity speeds are quicker

USB 3.0 is backwards compatible with USB 2.0, so any devices that only support the older, slower standard can still be used

← Although the spec has been around since 2008, USB 3.0 isn't likely to make it into devices such as smartphones until 2013
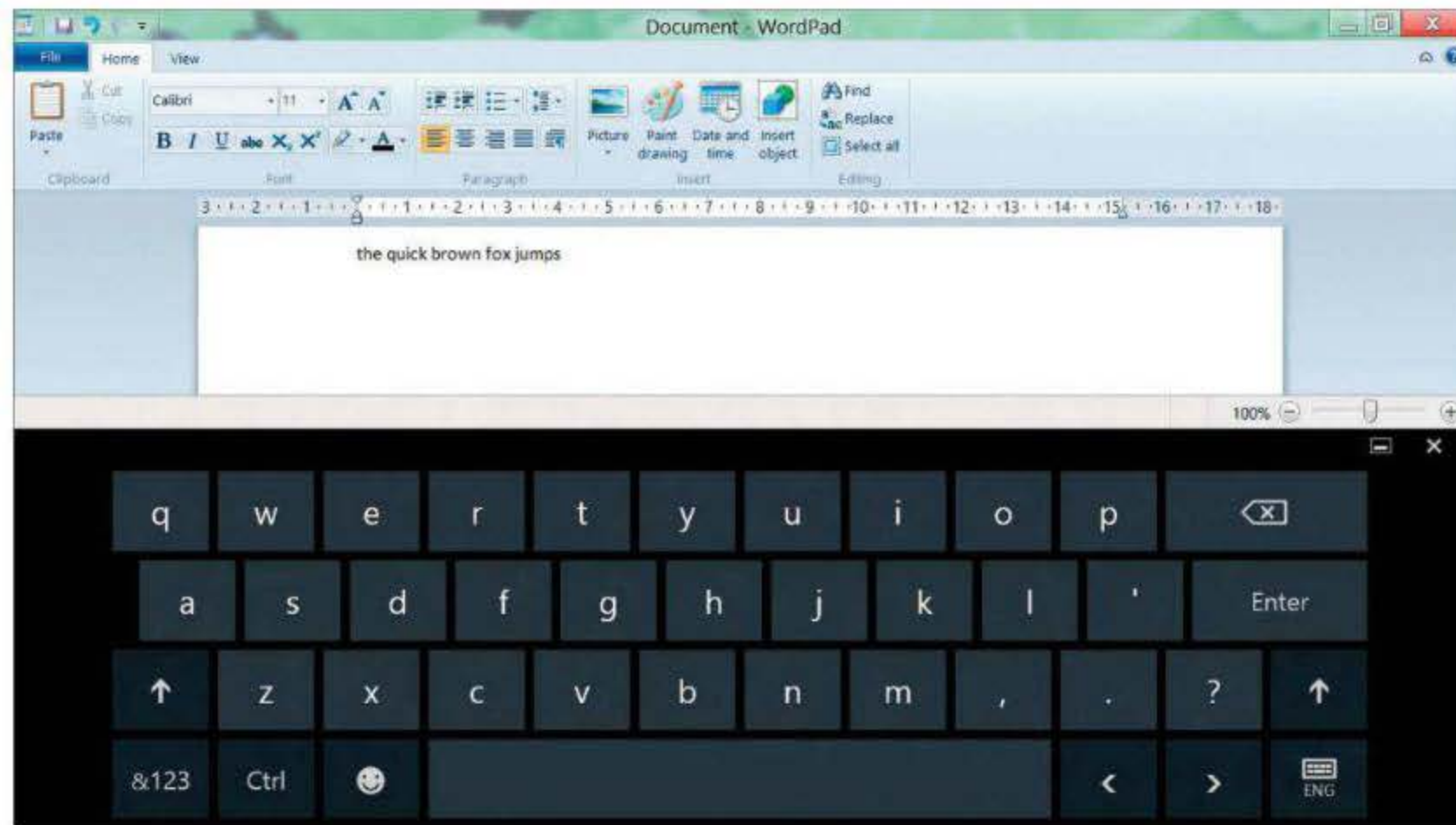
Virtual keyboard

For those who want to use Windows 8 on their tablet, Microsoft includes a range of virtual keyboards

A lot of time and effort has been spent by Microsoft in making Windows 8 finger friendly. The prime example of this is the Metro interface. If, however, the operating system is to be used successfully on tablets it needs more than just a 'prod and stroke' friendly interface. You need to be able to enter text too, and that means you need a keyboard.

Microsoft is no newcomer to touch-based interfaces and it has a pedigree in supporting touch-based text entry. First there were Tablet PC editions of Windows XP. Then touch support was integrated fully with Windows 7. In these cases, the company in essence converted the standard OS into a touch-friendly system. Though precisely how touch friendly is a matter of opinion and opinions are divided over its success.

A crucial part of the touch-friendly versions of Windows that have existed in the past has been the inclusion of a keyboard and handwriting recognition. With Windows 8 things have moved on, and it isn't only with the Metro interface that this is the case. The virtual keyboard is now available in a number of options, which are designed to appeal to the tablet and touchscreen fan.

Keyboard capers
To get started you simply tap the keyboard icon in the Taskbar in the
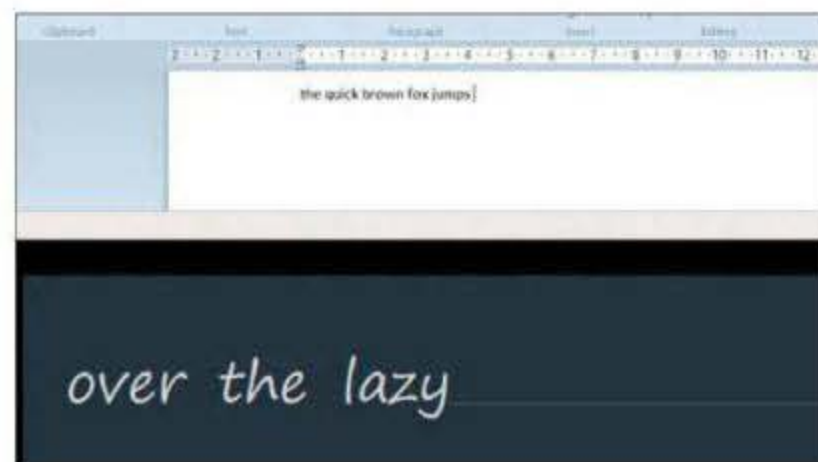
↑ One useful option is the handwriting recognition feature, which converts whatever you write into editable text
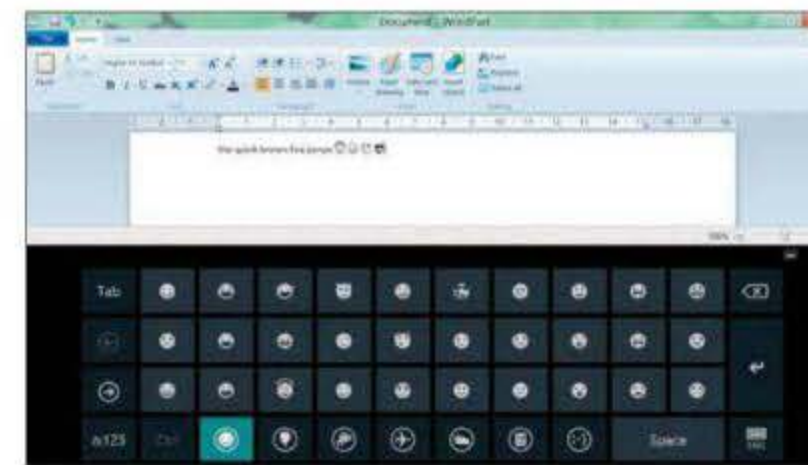
↑ It's easy to insert smileys into any document by hitting the Smileys button next to the space bar. There are plenty to choose from, too
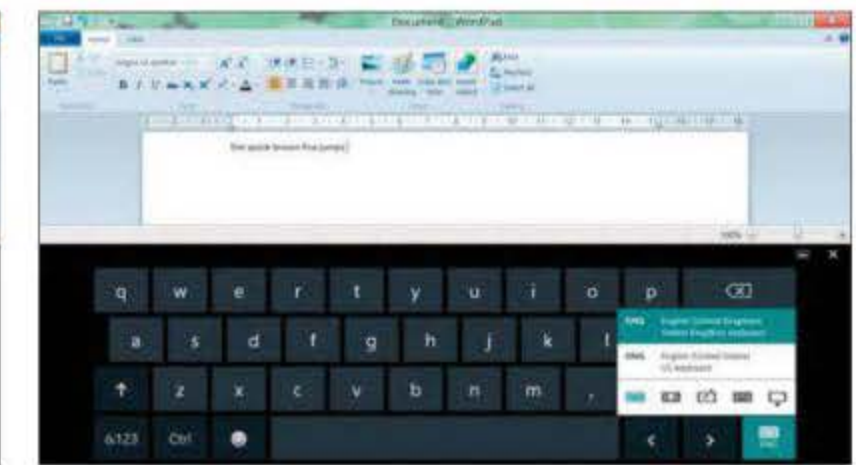
↑ If you tap the keyboard symbol at the bottom right of the space bar row you can switch between different types of keyboard

desktop. It can be resized as needed, and pulled around the screen too, though it does take up a lot of space – about half the screen on our tablet.

One of the options on offer is the thumb-friendly keyboard, which will appeal to anyone using Windows 8 on a tablet. The idea is that you can hold the device in both hands and tap the keys with your thumbs. It's more difficult to get to the number square in the centre of the keyboard using this method, but with practise the design could prove very useful indeed.

Another useful feature is the handwriting recognition keyboard, which allows you to write with your fingertip. It then converts your notes into editable text, and only inserts these into the main body only when you hit the large Insert button. It was pretty good at recognising our scruffy handwriting, and if it identifies a word incorrectly, a quick backstroke with the finger through the word removes it.

There's also a keyboard for proper touch typists. This includes a range of keys over and above the main A to Z and number keys. It is a little small for some hands to use comfortably, but it might suit some people. You'll note that because this is a more 'serious' style keyboard, the smileys are gone.

The full monty
There's also another option – and another keyboard. In Metro view, open the Search Charm and make sure Apps are selected, then search for Keyboard. Now you can choose 'On Screen Keyboard'. This opens up an altogether better featured keyboard complete with Esc, Caps, Shift, Fn and Ctrl keys, and a whole bank on the right offering additional features.

To be frank, we found this particular keyboard had so much crammed on to it that individual keys were too small to use accurately with any degree of speed on the tablet we had, and it was a large tablet – the Samsung Series 7 slate with its 11.6 in screen. ■

Another useful feature is the handwriting recognition keyboard, which allows you to write with your fingertip
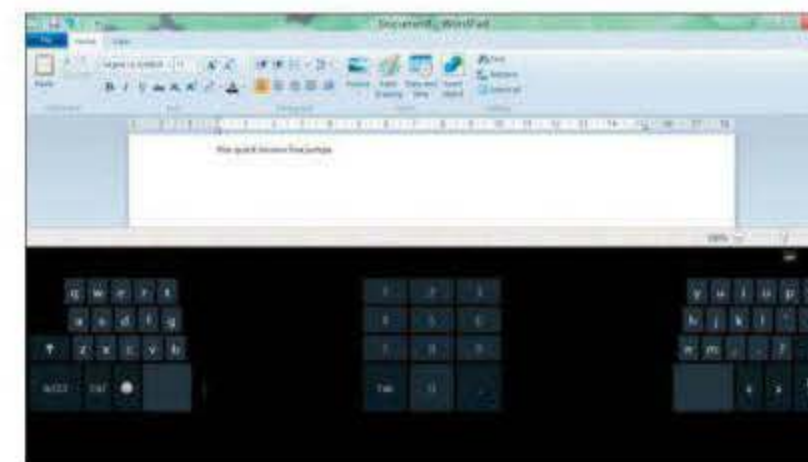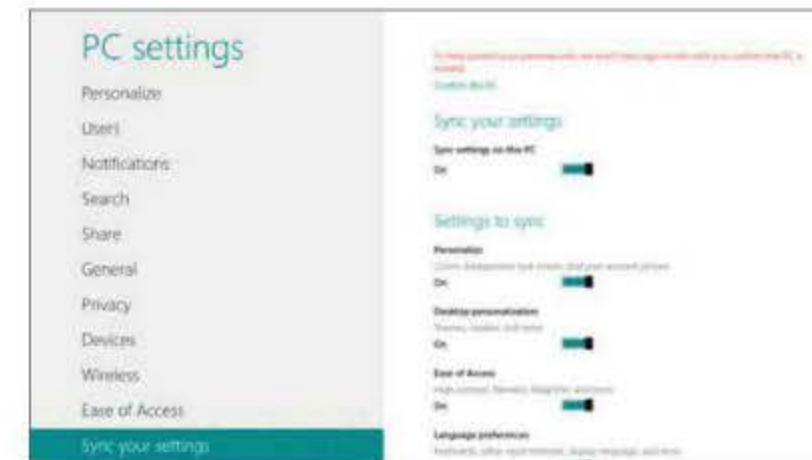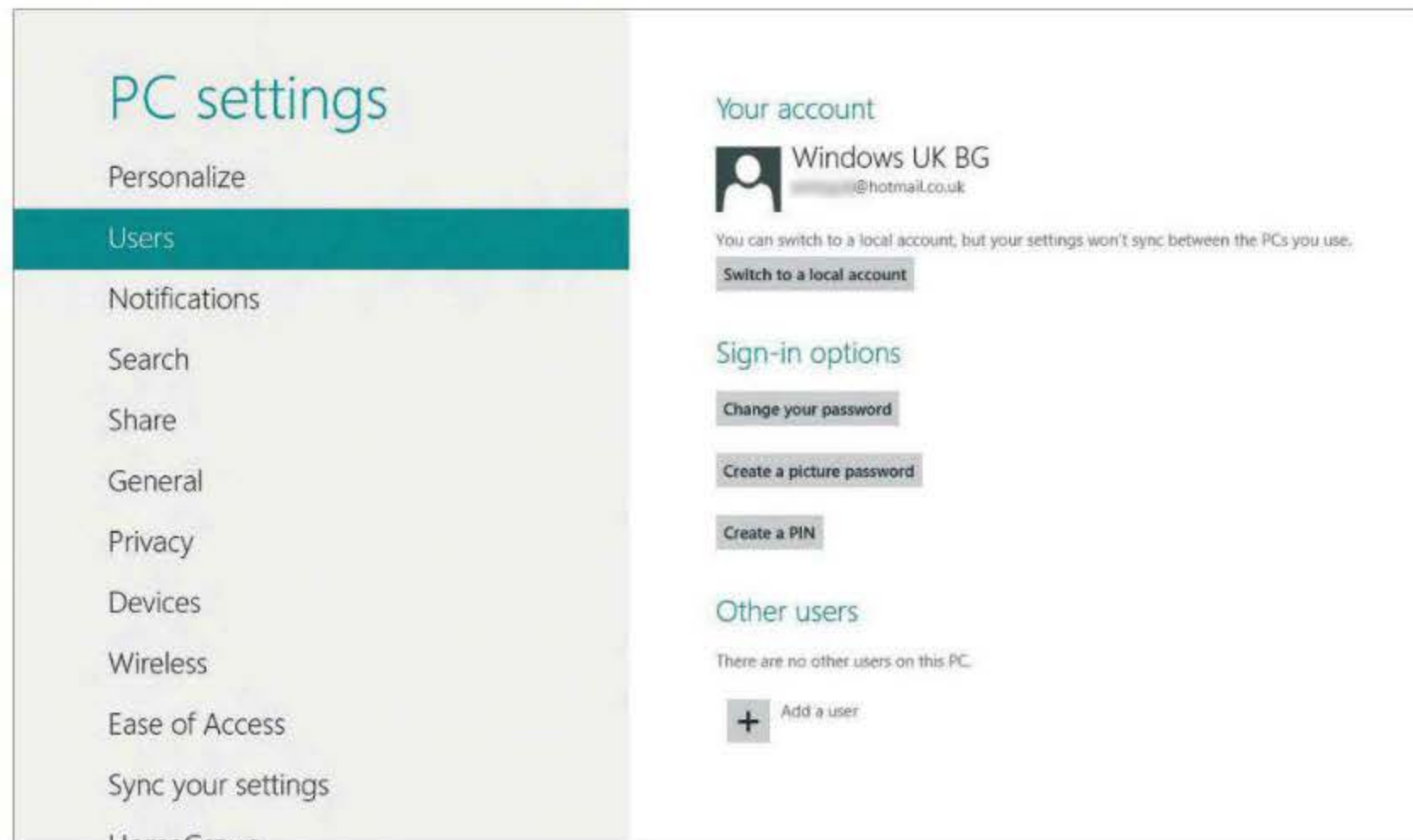

↑ Specifically designed with mobile users in mind, this keyboard design allows you to hold your tablet and type with your thumbs.
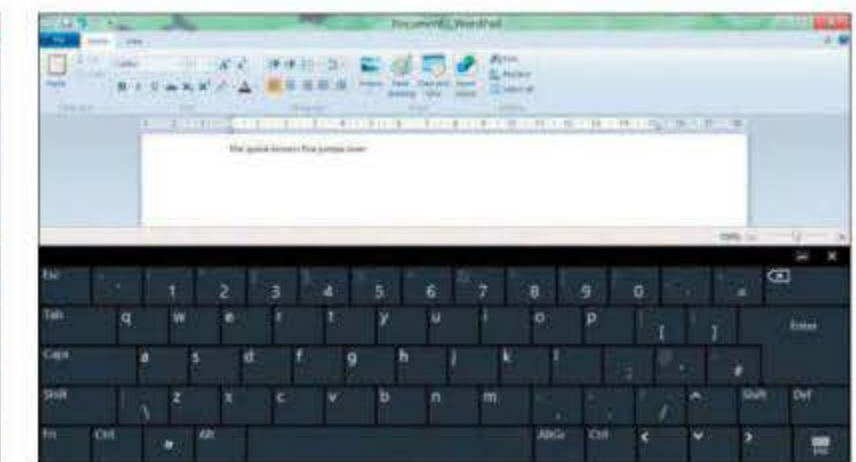
↑ Touch typists will appreciate the ability to have a proper keyboard, though some may find the keys too small to use comfortably.

PC settings

Personalize

Users

Notifications

Search

Share

General

Privacy

Devices

Wireless

Ease of Access

Sync your settings

Your account

Windows UK BG
            @hotmail.co.uk

You can switch to a local account, but your settings won't sync between the PCs you use.

Switch to a local account

Sign-in options

Change your password

Create a picture password

Create a PIN

Other users

There are no other users on this PC.

+ Add a user

Sync your settings

For those who use multiple computers, a new option in Windows 8 will allow you to sync personal settings across all devices

If you have a multi-computer setup involving two or more mainstream computers, and maybe also a tablet, do you find it irritating that you have to spend time changing the settings on each device? Thankfully, Microsoft's new Sync Your Settings option will help you avoid this.

The idea of synchronising settings across several devices isn't new, but it's only ever been implemented in a partial way across specific applications and not across a whole operating system. How does it work? Well, in essence Microsoft stores information in the cloud, where each computer you want to synchronise can get hold of it. You'll need a Windows Live ID to take advantage of this, and when you log in to each computer it needs to be able to get onto the internet to access any settings changes you may have made and update itself according to your preferences. So, let's look at how it all works.

Setting up a user

Your first task is to set up a Windows Live account. Open the Charms bar by using the Windows key and 'C', or sweep inwards from the right edge with a finger. Next choose Settings and then More PC Settings, and finally select Users. You'll need to make sure

→ Windows 8 comes with plenty of synchronisation options. These are all easily managed using on/off sliders

↑ There are plenty of options to personalise the way things look, including the colours, background, themes, account picture and lock screen used

↑ Before you can sync your computer's settings with other Windows 8 machines, you'll be asked whether or not you can trust that PC

that Users is selected in the left-hand PC Settings pane (see the top image on the opposite page). You can add different users so that other people can share access to the computer and synchronise settings how they want – click 'Add a user'. If users want to synchronise settings, though, they must have a Windows Live account – you'll also need this to download apps.

When you choose to add a new user, you do so with an existing Windows Live ID. If you don't already have one of these, then you can choose to sign up for one at this stage. There are a couple of basic screens of information to be gone through to do this, though, nothing too complicated. You'll need to be logged in as the new user to make settings that will synchronise with that user's wishes, so if you are already logged in with a local account you may have to log out and in again before making any changes.

Confirm and verify

You'll have to go through a confirmation stage before sign-in information is synchronised, which is a way of protecting your personal identity. Once you are logged in as the new user, go back to PC Settings and now choose 'Sync your settings' instead of Users in the left side of the screen.

First, select 'Confirm this PC' at the top of the screen. Internet Explorer will open and you'll be logged in to your account. You'll see a new entry for the new computer. You can either delete this – which we wouldn't expect you to want to do – or confirm that it is indeed a trusted PC.
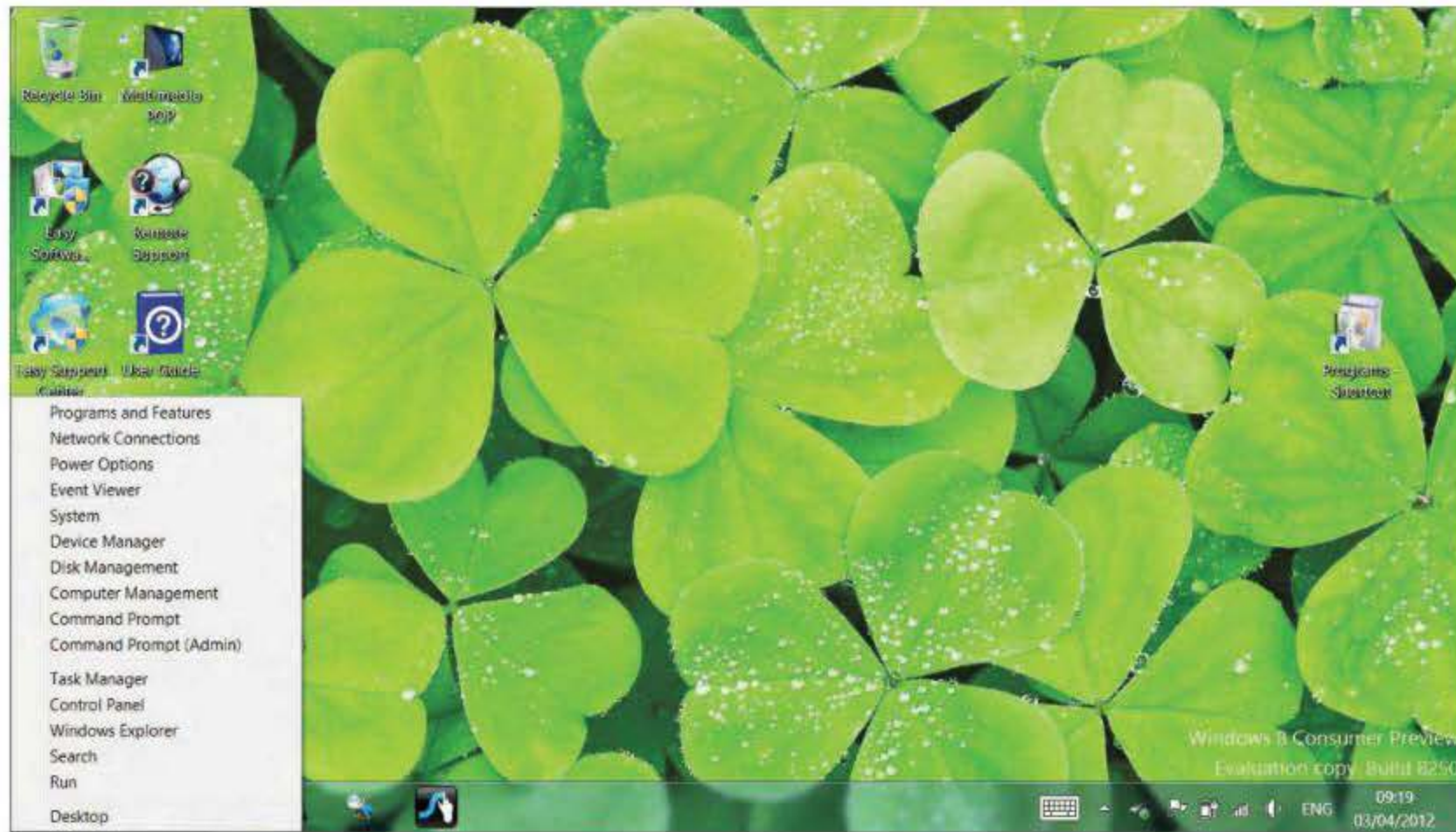
Now it's back to the 'Sync your settings area' again. There's a wide range of synchronisation options and they're all easily managed via on/off sliders. Sliding the 'Sync settings on this PC' to On enables or disables all synchronisation for this computer. You can now scroll down the screen and decide what you want to synchronise simply by using the slider against each option. There are plenty to choose from, making it easy to personalise the way things work, including Personalize, Ease of Access and Language preferences. ■

You can add different users so that different people can share access to the computer and synchronise settings

Saving on roaming data

When you change any settings that are synchronised, Windows 8 will send information off to your cloud-based storage, so that they can be synchronised with other computers. You might not, however, want this to happen when you are away from free Wi-Fi, for example when you are using a tablet that has mobile internet, if you'd rather not use up your data on this activity. You can turn off synchronisation on metered internet connections to stop this happening.

↑ Located in the left side of the screen is a long list of options for you to change, including search, privacy, share and wireless settings
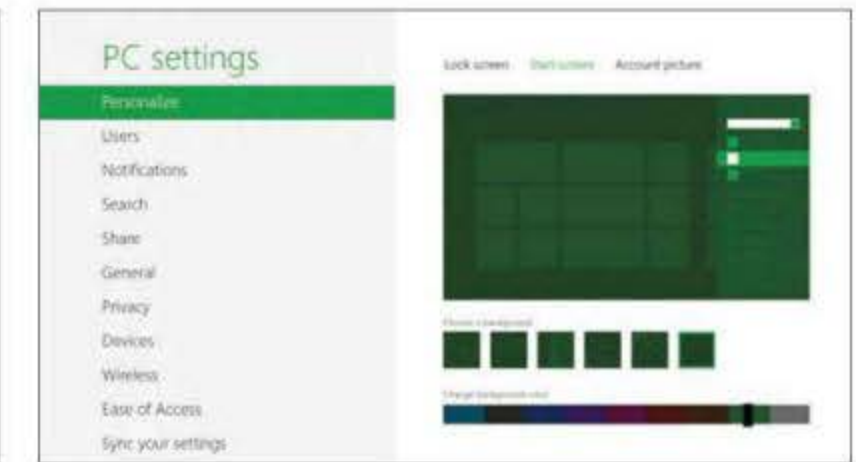
↑ Clicking on 'Start screen' allows you to select a background or change the background colour

More PC settings

We've already shown how to sync your settings, so here we demonstrate how you can give your PC a more personal touch

One of the changes that has really got people talking about Windows 8 – and not in a good way – is Microsoft's decision to abandon the Start Menu. This has been something of a Windows staple over the years, providing access to a PC's applications, settings, hard drives and search features, and is where many go to begin their computing tasks.

In the desktop view there's still a Taskbar and programs can be pinned to it, but there's no Start Menu button. You can, however, get some its functions by hitting the Windows key and 'X' on your keyboard, or by hovering the cursor in the bottom-left corner of the screen and right-clicking. When you do this a menu will appear offering options such as Windows Explorer, Network Connections, Task Manager, and more (see the main screen above).

If you are wondering what this means for the Control Panel, fear not. It's still here, in the desktop view, and easily accessed via that new smaller menu. It looks very familiar, and anyone acquainted with recent versions of Windows should have no trouble finding their way around it.

The PC Settings screen

There is also, however, a new addition to the configuration and settings options in the shape of the PC Settings

→ Windows 8 still includes the Control Panel, which can be used to change your computer's settings

screen, which we first looked at on page 52. To access it, select the Settings charm, then hit 'More PC settings' at the bottom of the panel. A whole new range of options will now be available, designed in the Metro style and offering a touch-friendly design. A lot of the changes you can make here are reminiscent of those you might carry out on an Android tablet or iPad. If you don't have a touchscreen device, they can still be accessed with a mouse.

Down the left-hand side of the screen is a long list of settings you can change. Under Privacy, for example, you can determine whether applications are able to use your location, name and Windows Live account details. If, however, you choose the Wireless option, you can go into Airplane Mode or turn wireless networking off completely.

On the right-hand side, you'll see a list of all the options available in your chosen setting's category. In the case of our example (see the above-left screen), these allow you to give your Windows 8 device a personal look. To change any of the image settings for these areas, simply tap one of its three options. When you select 'Lock screen', the picture currently being used is shown at the top, and beneath it you'll see a set of alternatives. If you click one of these, it will replace the main picture. To view other images on your device that you might want to use, tap 'Browse'. Moving along to the 'Start screen' settings, and here you can opt for different backgrounds and colours. If you select the final option, you can decide on an image to use for your account.

Searching settings

Windows 8 now comes with the option to search through the new operating system's settings. This ought to make it easier finding out precisely how to make the tweak you need to. To get started, call up the Settings charm and then make sure that Settings is selected. Next, you'll need to type in the search window. This narrows down what starts out as a complete list of all the possibilities to

Windows 8 now comes with the option to search through the new operating system's settings
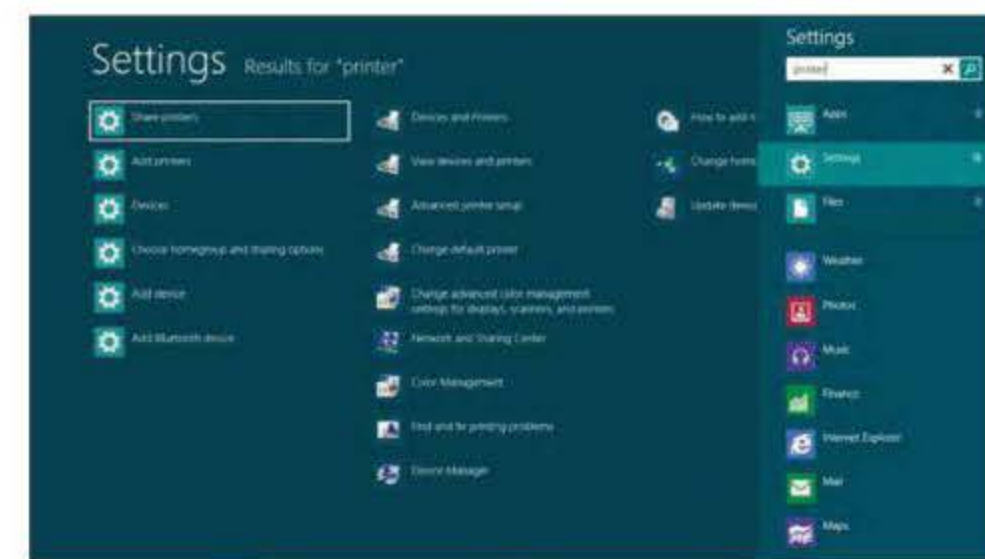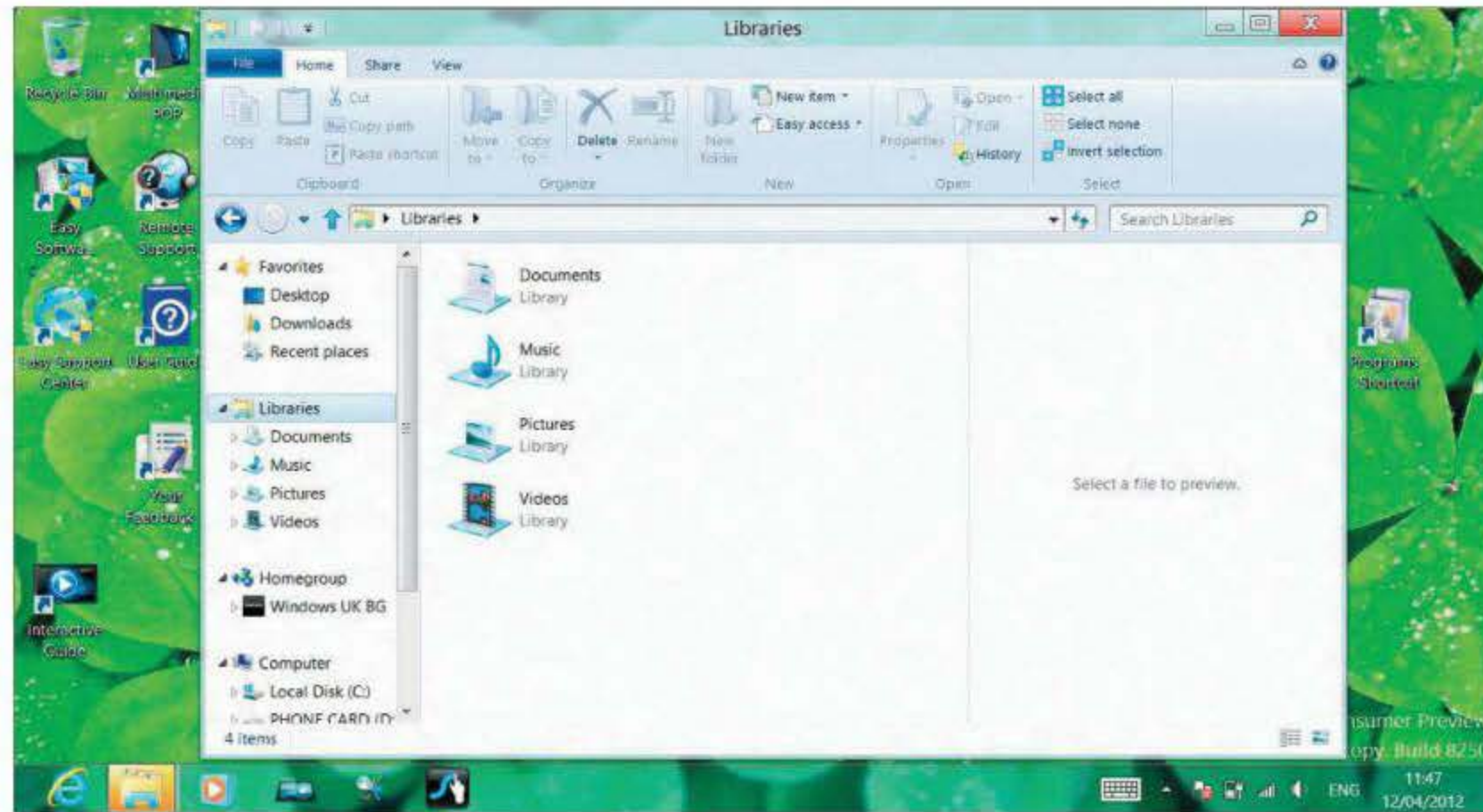
just those that have a match to your search term. Click the setting you want to go into.

You should be able to choose from the results of your search, so that the settings area you select is the one that most precisely matches your need. ■

← If you are unsure of a particular setting's location, you can do a quick search

Exploring ribbons

The ribbon interface has now made it on to Windows Explorer, allowing quick access to all your tools

When the ribbon interface was first introduced in Office 2007 there were, from some quarters, howls of pain. A few years on and it's been introduced to Windows Explorer. Microsoft is, however, mindful that its new operating system is designed as much for finger-friendly tablets as it is for mainstream computers. Small icons on a ribbon don't really lend themselves to finger-based computing, and the ribbon is fairly tall, so that when it is visible smaller-screened tablets might suffer from having a reduced viewing area in Windows Explorer.

With those two things in mind, Microsoft has made the Explorer ribbon optional. By default, it's hidden away, but you can easily call it up when needed. In this way Microsoft hopes to satisfy everyone. Those who don't like the interface don't have to use it, but if you are a fan it's ready to be called upon.

Calling up the ribbon in Windows Explorer is easy. When first opened, you won't see a ribbon. There is, however, a small downward pointing arrow in the top right of the application window. Tap this and down drops the ribbon. You can also toggle the ribbon with Ctrl-F1 on the keyboard.

Basic ribbons

The ribbon might seem a little bit complex at first, because what's available by way of ribbons varies

→ Options on the Home ribbon will be greyed out if they are not appropriate for the task at hand
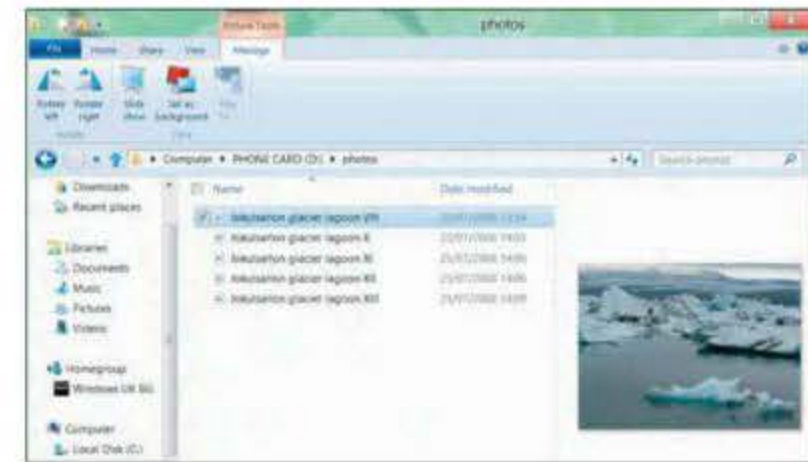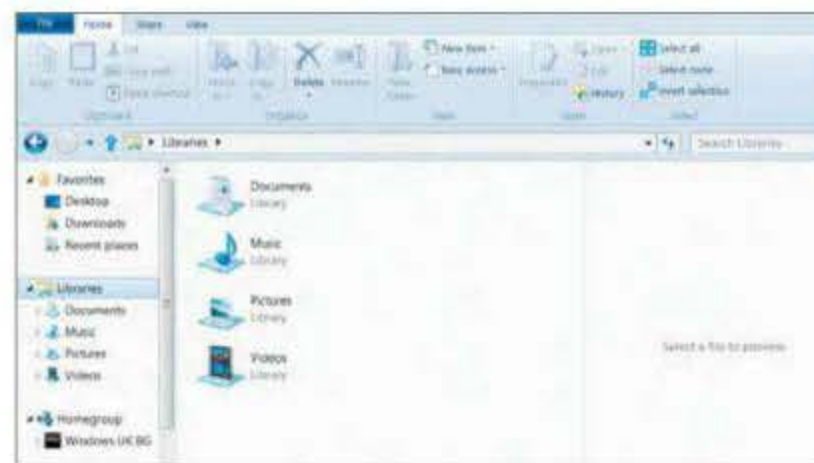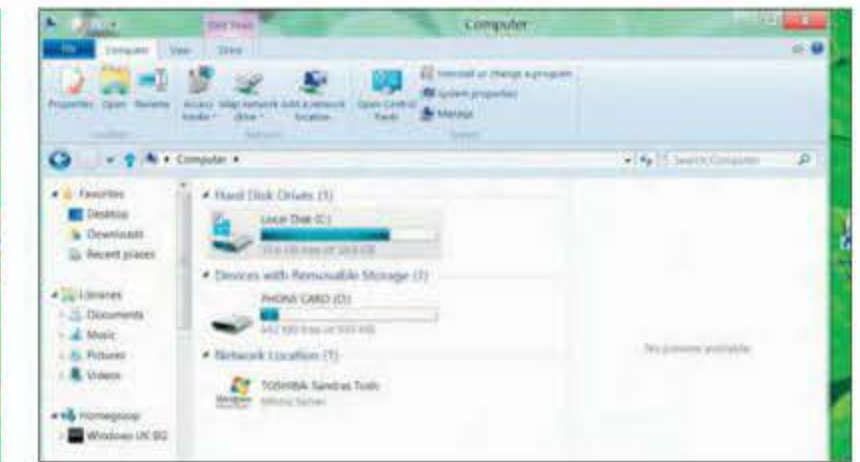
depending on what you are actually looking at. The default view has four tabs – File, Home, Share and View.

The first of these gives you a range of useful options. As well as letting you get quickly to places you've visited often before, and giving the option to pin items to it so that they always show, File allows you to open a new window, delete your history and get to the Command prompt and PowerShell (this lets you create automated tasks). The Home ribbon provides access to the range of common commands like copy, paste, move, rename and selection options that you'll use for file management.

Next up is the Share ribbon, which gives you access to a range of options for sharing files and folders with others. The final tab lets you customise how you view data. You can, for example, change between thumbnail and details views, change the sort order, and more.

Additional ribbons

In addition to these basic ribbons there are a number of extra ones that become available if you are accessing specific file types. These are easy to spot as they have a colour highlighted header sitting above them.

For example, when you select photos in the Picture ribbon, a Picture Tools tab will appear. Choose this and you'll get a range of image specific options for rotating images, creating a slideshow and using the current photo as the background image. Another option is the music ribbon. Select some music and up pops a ribbon with some tools specific to audio, making it easy to play music.

In addition, you'll find that there are new ribbons that become available at specific times. Again this happens because there are certain activities that can only be performed when particular items in Windows Explorer have been selected. So, if you select Computer from the left-hand Windows Explorer pane, a new tab labelled Computer appears. Select this and you'll have access to hard drive level features, as well as an option that takes you straight into the Control Panel. And if you select a particular disk drive, then you'll find several relevant options including BitLocker, format, clean up and optimise. ■

In addition to these basic ribbons there are a number of extra ones that become available if you are accessing specific file types

The ribbon and the keyboard

Not everyone will want to use a mouse or their finger to take advantage of the ribbon. But you can use the keyboard too, just as you can within Microsoft Office. When any particular ribbon is in view, simply press the Alt key to see which keyboard shortcuts apply to which options.
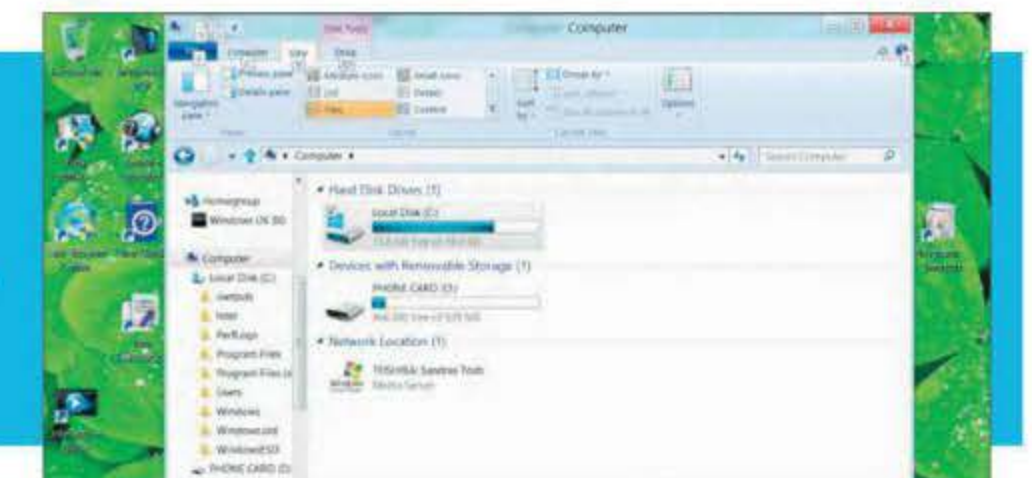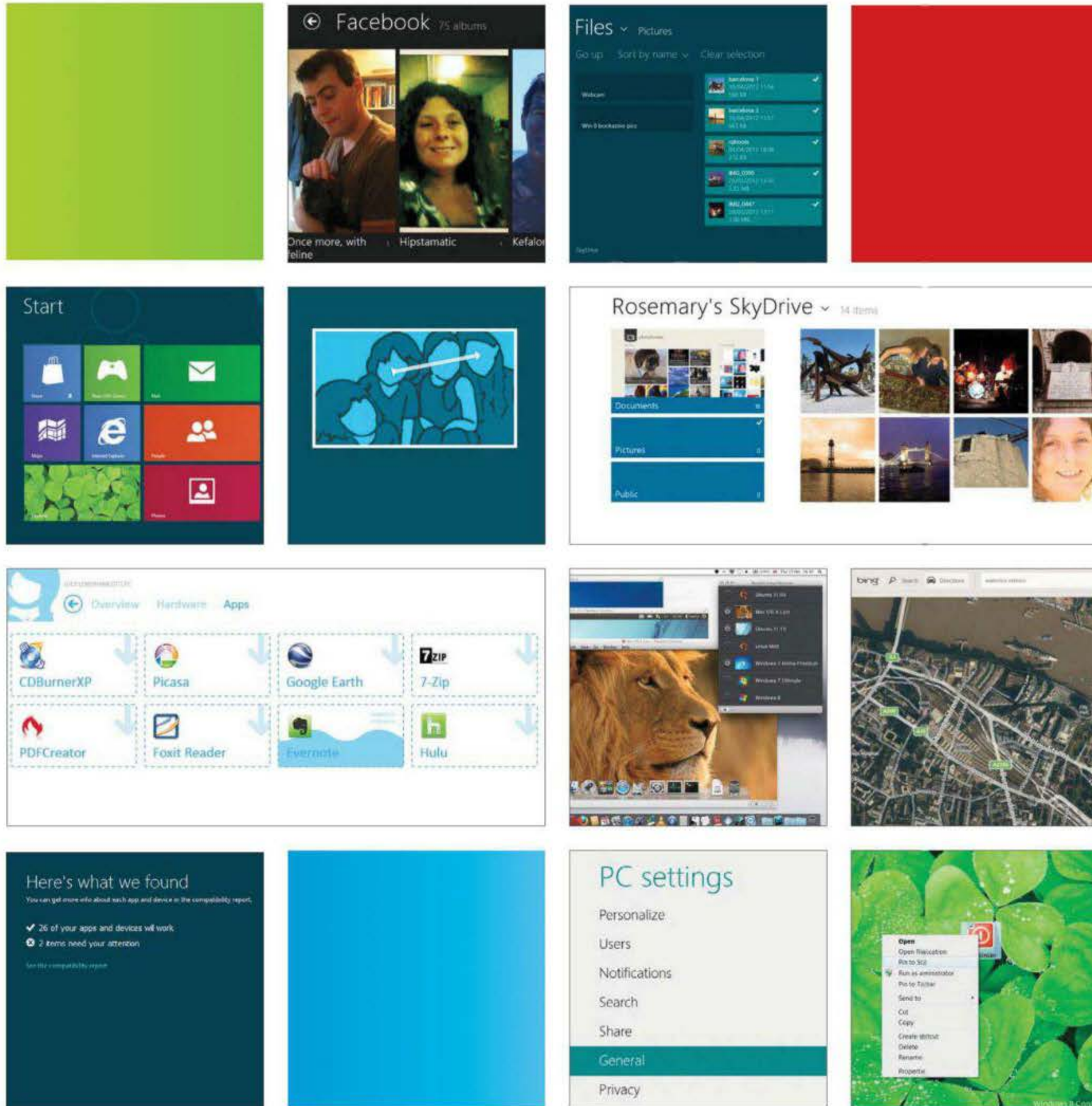
How to use Windows 8

Your shiny new Windows 8 PC is just waiting to be used to its full potential. And if you use our 20 pages of tutorials, tips and tricks, it will be

N o one likes to read the manual. And with Windows 8, it's a moot point: install your new operating system, or buy a new PC, and you won't find pages of guidance on how to use it. It shouldn't matter, of course, but anyone who has spent time trying to get to grips with a new OS will understand that to unlock its full potential, it pays to take time understanding how things work. And very few computing platforms are as radical in their development as is Windows 8.

Fortunately, if you are reading this you have already taken the opportunity to learn more, and over the next 20 pages or so, we are going to explain exactly how to wring every last drop out of Microsoft's latest OS. On every page we take on important computing tasks, in the process introducing you to Windows 8's many features and functions. It's not an exhaustive guide, but if you work your way through our tutorials, we guarantee you'll soon be up and running.

We kick off by explaining what you need to get started with Windows 8, and swiftly move on to sharing: both linking up all of your social accounts and email, and sharing information using Windows 8's SkyDrive app. This operating system is social to its core, and you will find it allows you to collaborate and communicate in ways never previously possible.

We'll explore navigation with Windows 8, as well as the crucial matter of how to secure your PC, tablet or laptop. Finally, we'll show you how to dual-boot Windows 8, so you can enjoy the new with the old, and explain how to customise Windows 8 to make it your very own personal PC. Enjoy.

Very few computing platforms are as radical in their development as is Windows 8

Install Windows 8

You can install Microsoft's latest operating system on any Windows 7 PC. Here's how to get started with Windows 8

With Windows 8, Microsoft has taken a radical departure from its previous desktop OS mould. Windows is no longer solely a 'desktop' OS, but one that's also optimised for tablets, with fingertip-based input.

The main interface is the new 'Metro' workspace, which borrows heavily from Windows Phone 7 with large tiles that contain information updated in real time. Metro is optimised for touchscreens, but you can still operate it using a mouse. For pure keyboard-and-mouse-driven input, though, the 'Classic' desktop is tucked away and accessible via what used to be the Start button.

More than 10,000 changes are reported to have been made since the first public demo of Windows 8 in September 2011. At press time, Microsoft is offering consumers the chance to preview and try out the new features for free.

The process for installing the full version will be the same, in essence – but you'll have to be sure before you make the shift. We advise against overwriting your existing system. If you do that and decide the OS isn't for you, you'll need to reinstall your previous OS from a recovery DVD and will lose all your installed programs, settings, documents, photos, video and music. You might prefer to install the Consumer Preview on a separate drive partition or a second hard disk, or run it as a virtual PC within Windows 7.

(Note that once the final version of Windows 8 is released the Consumer Preview will end. You will either need to buy a licence for the new OS, reinstall your previous copy of Windows or delete the partition.)

The main interface is the new 'Metro' workspace, which borrows heavily from Windows Phone 7

Installing Windows 8
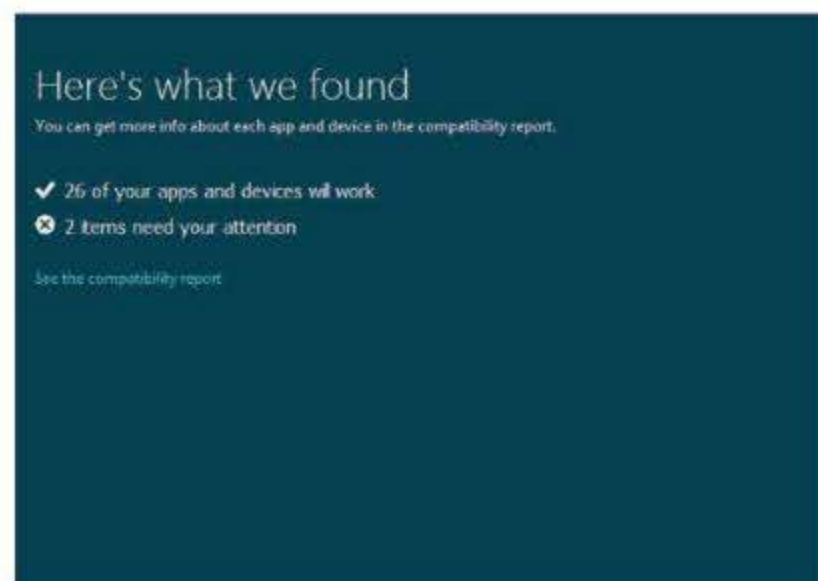
1 Browse to microsoft.com and click the link to its Windows 8 Consumer Preview. Click the 'Download Windows 8 Consumer Preview' button to download the 5MB file, then allow it to run. The program will probe your machine and determine whether your hard- and software are compatible.
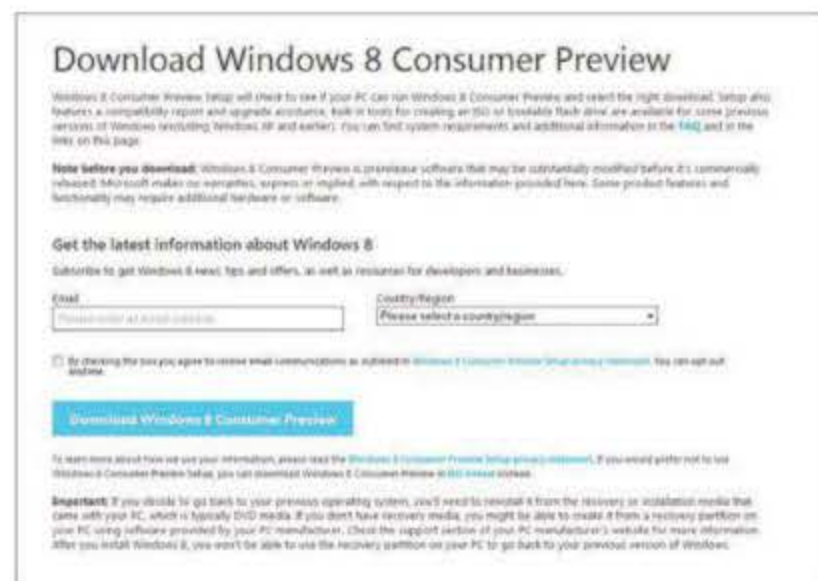
2 Return to the Consumer Preview area of Microsoft's website and click the 'ISO format' link below the 'Download Windows 8 Consumer Preview' button. Most people will be able to run the 64bit version and should do so, but anyone wanting to run 32bit programs can plump for 32bit.
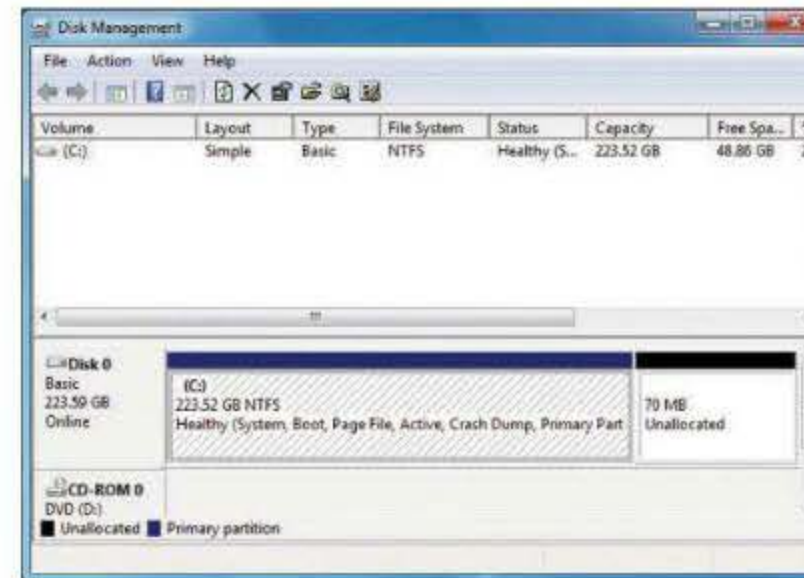
3 Next, you need somewhere to install the Consumer Preview. If you don't have a spare hard disk, create a partition of at least 4GB for a dual-boot system. In Windows XP, Vista or 7, go to Start, Control Panel and choose Disk Management to check how much free space is available.
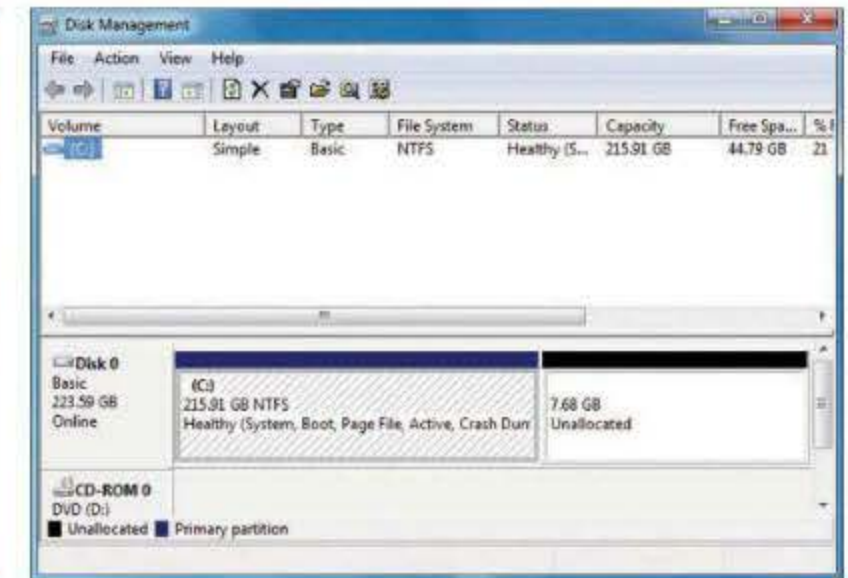

4 Right-click the drive you want to partition, then choose Shrink volume and Windows will determine how much unallocated space is available. Right-click on the free space and choose 'Create new simple volume'. Next, follow the setup wizard's prompts to create a new partition.
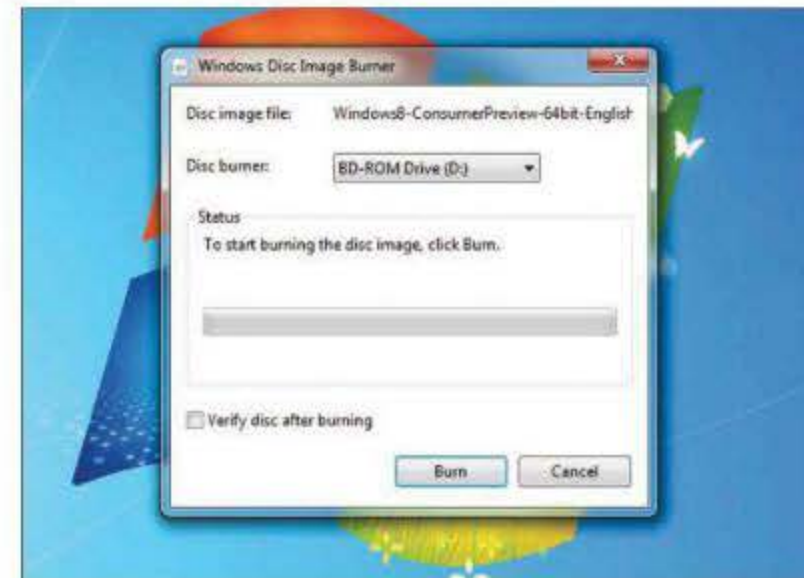
5 Burn to a DVD the ISO image you downloaded in Step 2. If you're running Windows 7, you simply need to double-click the file to launch the Windows Disc Image Burner tool. If you're running Windows Vista or XP, we recommend downloading the free CDBurnerXP (cdburnerxp.de).

6 Reboot your PC, leaving the DVD in the drive (or insert it into the drive of the computer you want to install the OS on). If your PC doesn't boot from the disc, reboot again and enter the BIOS. Look for a 'boot priority' menu and make the CD/DVD drive the first boot device.
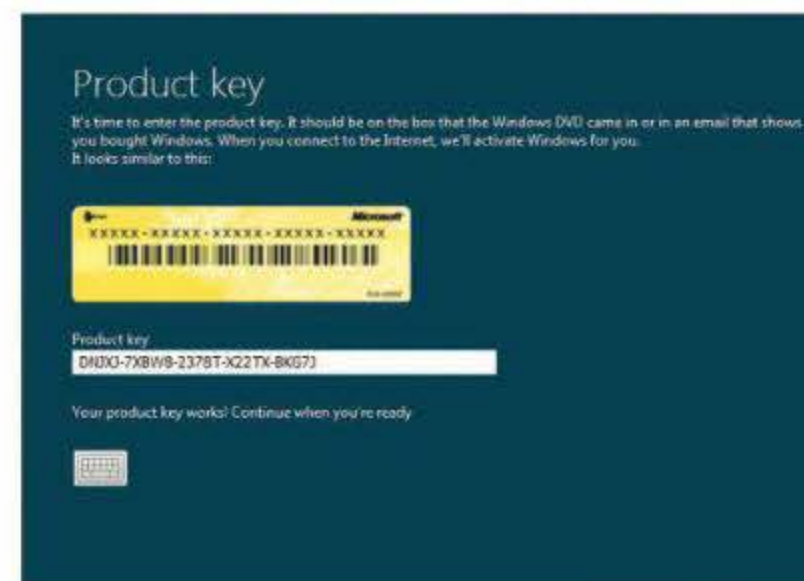
7 Next, follow the instructions and enter the product key when prompted – it's DNJXJ-7XBW8-2378T-X22TX-BKG7J for the Consumer Preview. Click Install Now to proceed. Choose Custom install, then select the new partition you created or you will overwrite your existing installation.

8 During the installation process your computer will reboot itself several times. Eventually, the machine will boot into Windows' new Metro user interface, pictured above. For a guide on navigating this new and unfamiliar desktop, head to PC Advisor's website at tinyurl.com/8xjhpw5.

Social media

Whenever you use Windows 8, you're logged in, ensuring updates are delivered without you needing to think about it

T he easiest way to start linking accounts and sharing with other people is via the Express settings that are offered when you first set up your Windows 8 account. Here, you can import contacts and emails from Hotmail, Gmail and other accounts, and have Windows automatically find contacts on any subsequent social networks to which you link. You don't have to share anything you don't want to either. Windows Location Platform options in Windows 8 custom Settings menu lets you specify whether other users' locations are requested, as well as whether yours is displayed.

You can share all sorts of things simply by linking your accounts. If you have a Flickr account or a Twitter feed, these can easily be associated with the Windows Live account that you use for everything in Windows 8. Once the accounts are linked, feeds for each of them show up in the Metro interface. So once your Facebook albums have been linked, you'll see any photo albums you've created on that site in the Photos tile. Windows 8 automatically updates the photo library you create from the Pictures folder on the desktop.

Similarly, clicking on the Metro People tile takes you to status updates from friends on Twitter and Facebook. What's more, if you have friends who you follow or chat to through more than one social network, you'll see icons for the others next to their profile photos. LinkedIn users can see each other through their Facebook accounts, for example.

Once your Facebook albums have been linked, you'll see any photo albums you've created on that site in the Photos tile

Stay connected with Windows 8
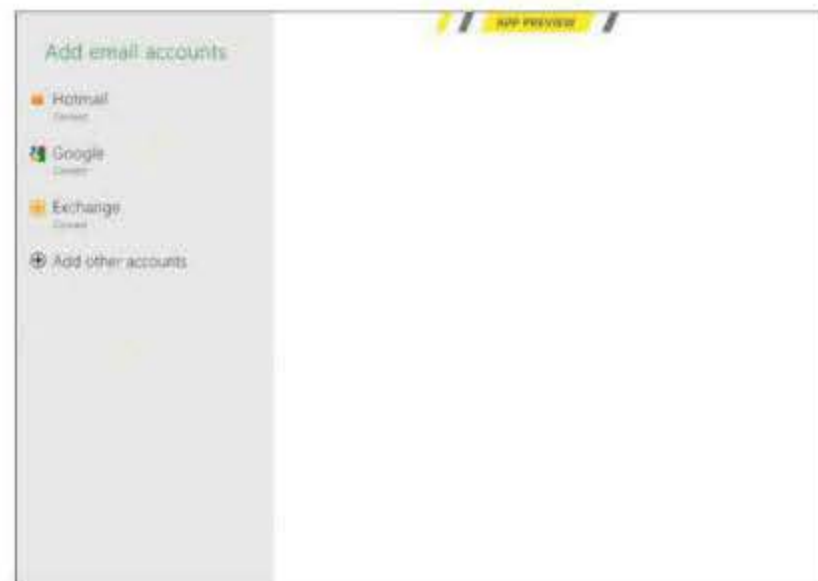
1 To make the most of Windows 8's connected features, import your contacts from your email accounts and your chat sessions. You can do this when you first set up the operating system.

2 Once the email address you use to log in to your Windows 8 account has been verified, Microsoft will give you the option to import from an Outlook or CSV file, link your Hotmail account, and to associate other webmail accounts such as Gmail.


3 You can also connect any IM accounts you may have, such as MSN, plus your Facebook, Flickr and Twitter accounts. For each, enter the relevant email address and password, tell Windows you want to go ahead and connect the accounts, and confirm it with the other app.

4 With Facebook you get an overview of the information you'll be able to access from your account and the details you'll share with friends. You have the opportunity to review and edit your sharing preferences, before clicking to proceed with the Windows Live and Facebook connection.

5 Once your accounts are connected you'll notice that your Facebook photo albums appear in the Photos pane of Windows 8's home screen. You can now view your albums as you would any other photo collections stored locally or on a third-party service such as Flickr.
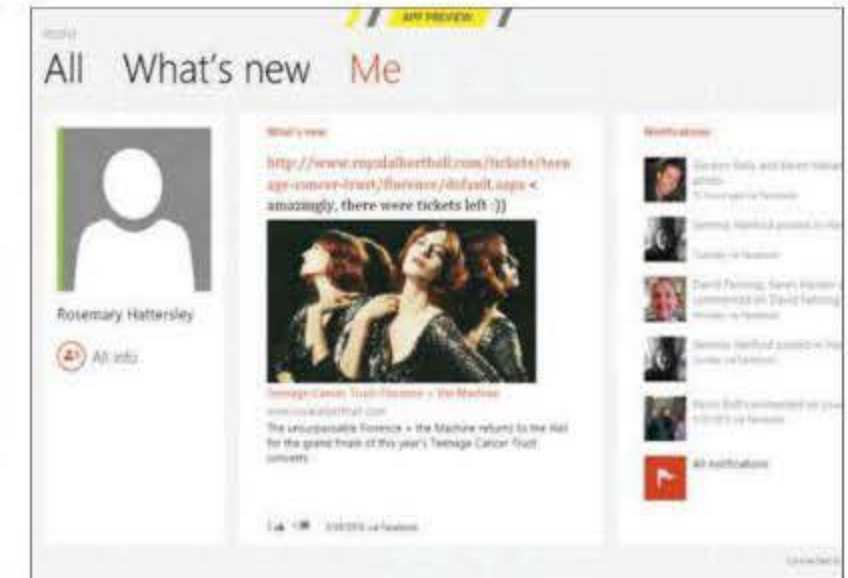

6 To view your own and other people's updates, click on your user name in the Messaging pane. You'll see the three most recent Facebook status updates. To the right appear any comments or notifications from friends. To see their updates, click the What's new option at the top of the screen.

7 Click the 'All' option to view your list of Facebook friends, plus options to add people to your contacts. You can also connect to other social media services such as LinkedIn and Twitter. Enter your account details, then simply scroll down to the Authorise app option.
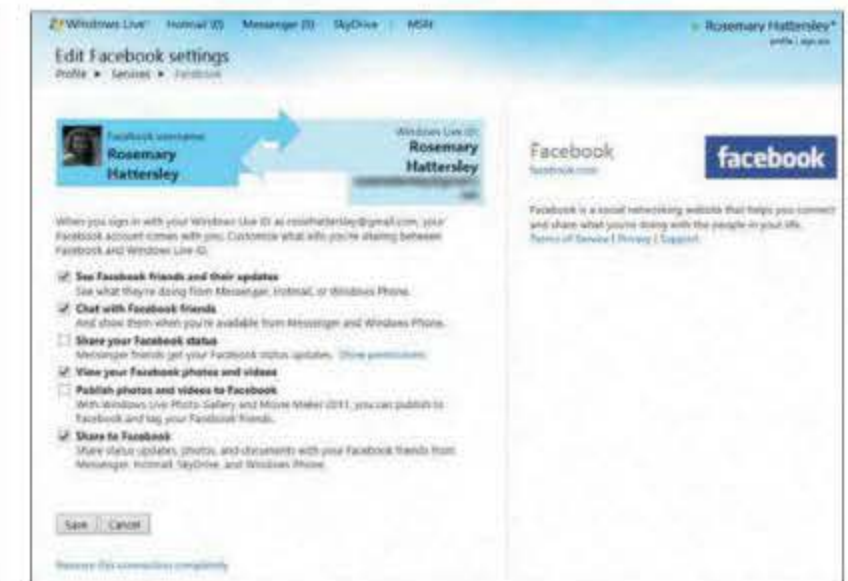
8 You can flick between your social media accounts by clicking their icons at the bottom of the screen. The All button below your photo shows the personal details you're sharing from that account. Click on My Profile for an overview of your connected services and privacy settings.

Sharing with SkyDrive

Perfect for sharing and editing documents with colleagues, SkyDrive is certain to become an everyday essential

SkyDrive is one of the best free web storage services we've tried, offering up to 25GB of web space in which to store your photos, videos and documents. By comparison, many other online services offer only 1GB or 2GB of space before they start charging. It also works with Microsoft Web Apps – the collaborative version of Office. In other words, SkyDrive is ideal for sharing and editing documents with colleagues. For many Windows 8 users, it will become an everyday essential.

With this important use in mind, we have one caveat to highlight: SkyDrive is a means of ad hoc sharing and access. It isn't a commercial backup service, so you shouldn't rely on it to store the only copy of an important document. Instead, it should be viewed as a convenient service via which you can get at photos and documents as and when you need them. Nonetheless, it's worth while taking a look at what SkyDrive can do, both for photo archiving and sharing, and for working on documents with other people.

SkyDrive is pre-installed on Windows 8 – it's listed in the 'Apps you already own' section of the Metro interface, but also has its own Metro tile. We found we had to track it down via our Windows Live account and remind it that we already had a SkyDrive account. Simply visiting the skydrive.live.com web page seemed to jog its memory, though.

It should be viewed as a convenient service via which you can get at photos and documents as and when you need them

Sharing photos and files with SkyDrive

1 SkyDrive is found in the Metro interface. A SkyDrive is automatically created when you set up your Windows 8 user account. If the details don't show up in the Metro interface, go to Internet Explorer and type in: skydrive. You should see it along with your Windows Live account name.
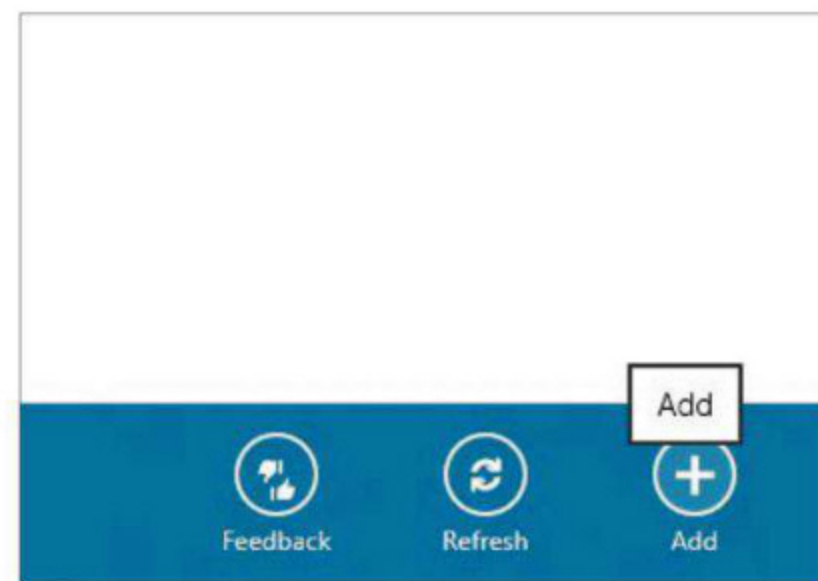
2 Back in the Windows 8 app, you'll be presented with a blank SkyDrive and a choice of Documents, Pictures and Public locations. Choose one of these and you'll be told the folder is empty. Clicking Add will allow you to populate it. Unfortunately, no options are visible.
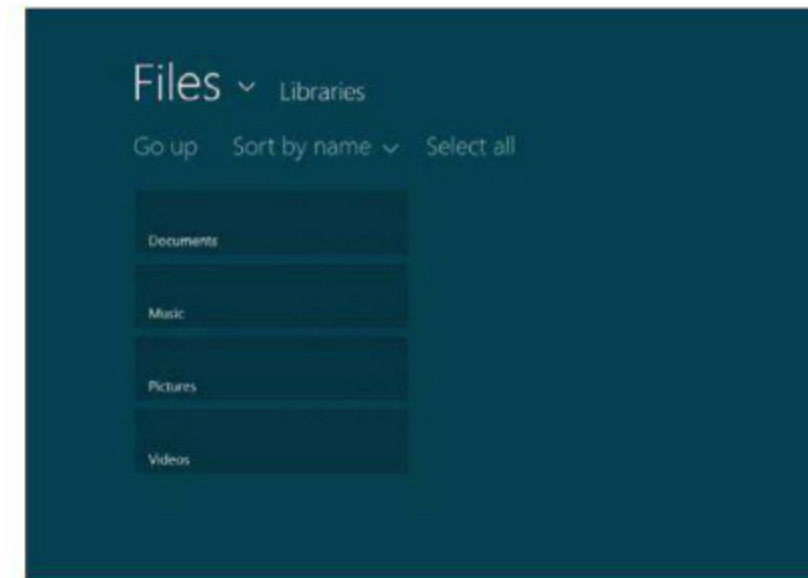

3 In its bid to be unobtrusive, Windows 8's instructions are often notable by their absence. Click or tap at the very bottom of the screen to bring up the option to Add items to your SkyDrive. You should see options for Documents, Music, Pictures and Videos.
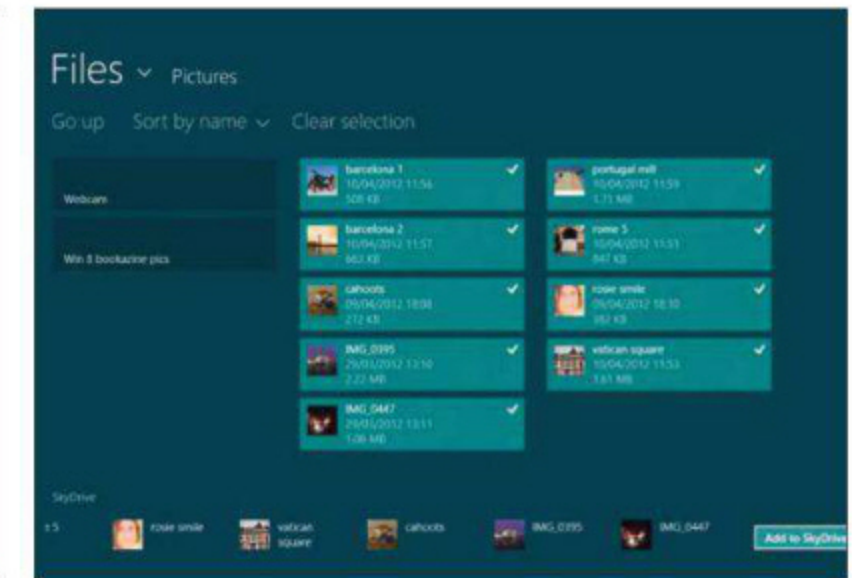

4 Depending on the sharing settings you've specified and the types of app you've installed, you may see additional folders for sharing SkyDrive items. We been using Photobucket, so this also appears in our folder options when we want to add items to our SkyDrive.


5 You can add items to your SkyDrive from within Windows 8, but if you want to move any of them – perhaps from your Pictures folder to your Public one so other people can view them – you'll need to use SkyDrive's web interface. Click on items you want to move and right-click to move them to a new location.
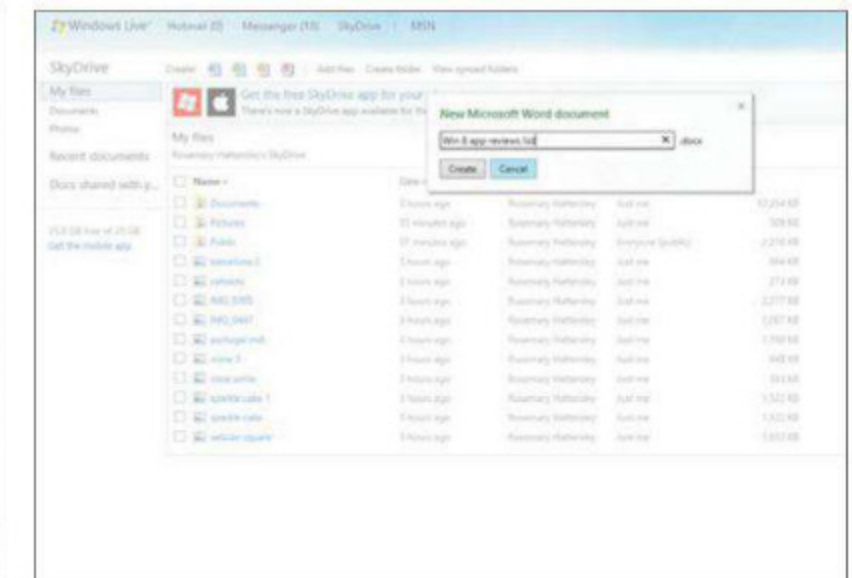
6 Items in your SkyDrive can be saved to your current device by clicking the option on the bottom left to Save local. You can make items in your Public folder accessible by someone else by providing them with a link to the folder. Make sure you only share items you're happy for others to make use of.
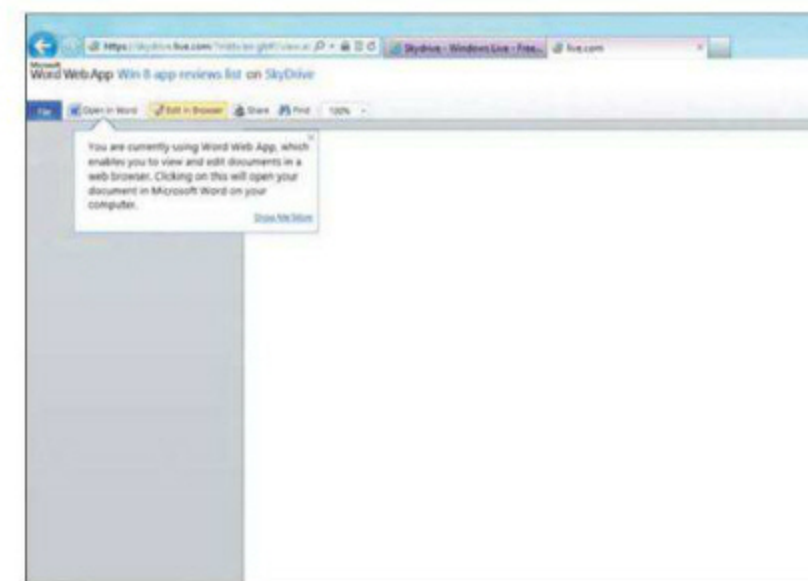
7 Document sharing using Microsoft Web Apps is easy. You can upload documents you've already created or create documents via the SkyDrive web portal. If you don't have a copy of Word, Excel or PowerPoint, click the Edit in Browser option rather than Open in Word (or Excel, and so on).
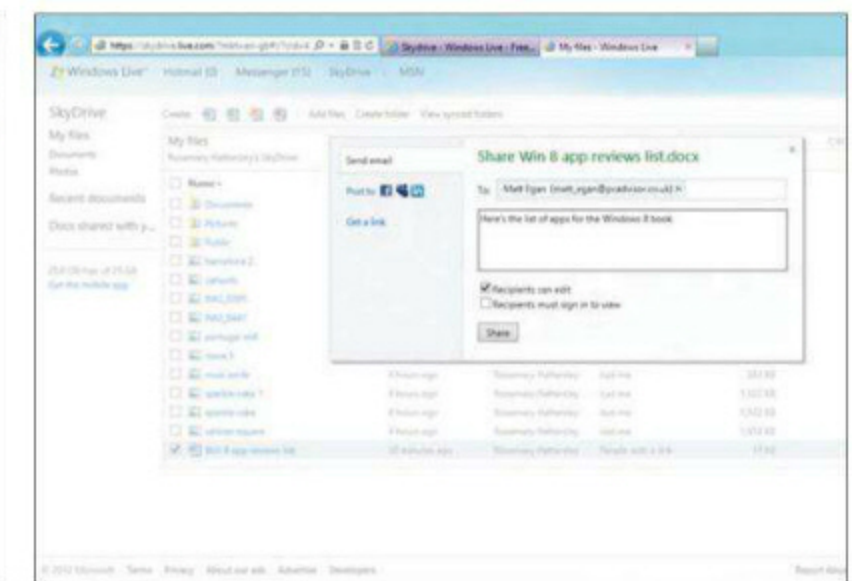
8 Create your WebApp document and save it to the SkyDrive. In My Files, you'll see details of each document and whether it's accessible only by you or has been shared. Right-click on a file to share it directly with someone by email. Add a message if you wish, before pressing Share to send.

Set up email with Mail app

If you need to email friends or colleagues in a hurry, then you'll find Metro offers a quick and easy way of managing all your messages

Email is vital for all of us these days, whether at work or at home. In many instances, it's the only way to communicate certain types of information; a spreadsheet, for example. Capable of providing more detail than texting and able to support attachments, it holds its own against other, newer ways of communicating such as Twitter or Facebook.

Microsoft's operating system has supported email for a long time, and Windows 8 has integrated email support. This time around there's an email app within the Metro interface, providing a visually rich, finger friendly way of managing messages. If you've used a Windows Phone, the interface will be familiar; if not you'll find things look and feel rather different to the way they do within Outlook, but getting to grips with everything is easy.

The email client in Metro has its limitations, and if you don't want to use it then you've got the alternative of Windows Live Mail in the desktop view. This looks a lot like Outlook and may be preferable for some people. Here, though, we'll show you how to set up and use the Metro email client.

*If you've used Windows Phone, the interface will be familiar*

Limited email accounts

As we wrote this guide, we were working with the App Preview rather than the final version of the Metro email client. At this stage, the email client in Windows 8 Metro view would cater only for Hotmail, Gmail and Exchange accounts. It's not clear at present whether you will be able to add other account types in the final version, including POP3 accounts.

If you do end up with just Hotmail, Gmail and Exchange in the metro email client, it will be rather limiting. Anyone relying on other types of email client may find it doesn't hit the mark for them. But if you really need POP accounts, then you can use Windows Live Mail in the desktop view.
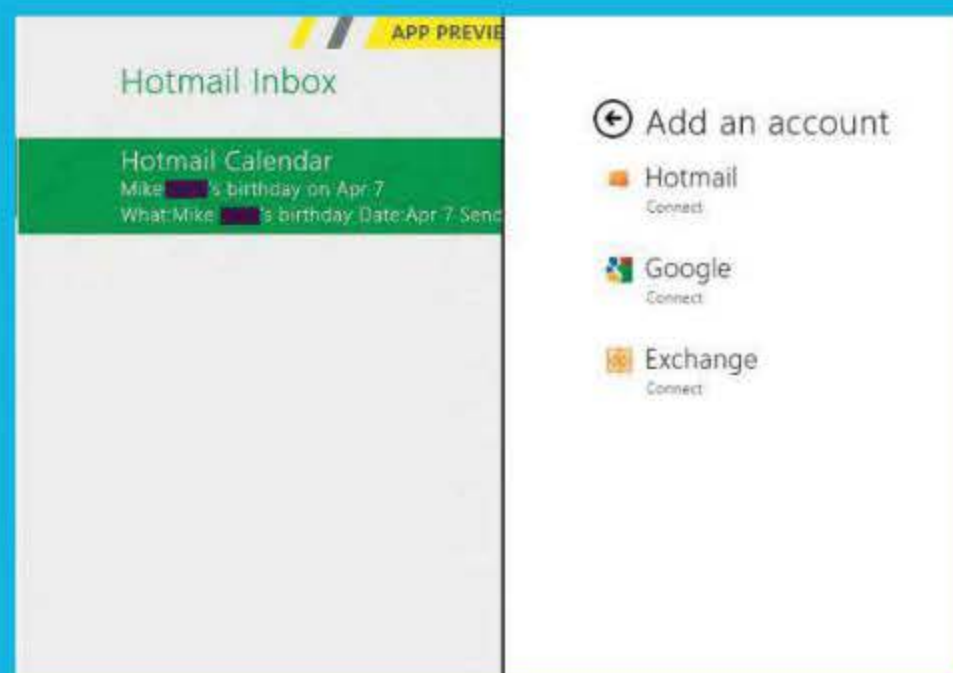

1 When you first create an account in Windows 8 you'll be offered the opportunity to log in with your Windows Live ID. If you don't have one, it's worth setting one up. Once you've done that, and signed into Windows, open the Metro interface and click on the Mail icon.
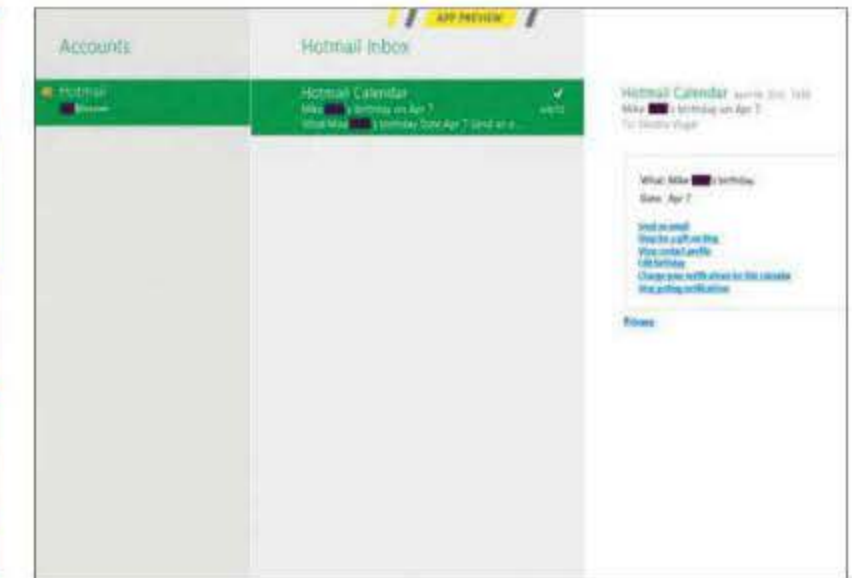

2 You'll see a screen with three panes on it. The far left one shows your accounts, the centre pane your messages, and the far right one displays your Hotmail (aka Windows Live) calendar along with any alerts there might be. This is great, but what if you want to add other email accounts?
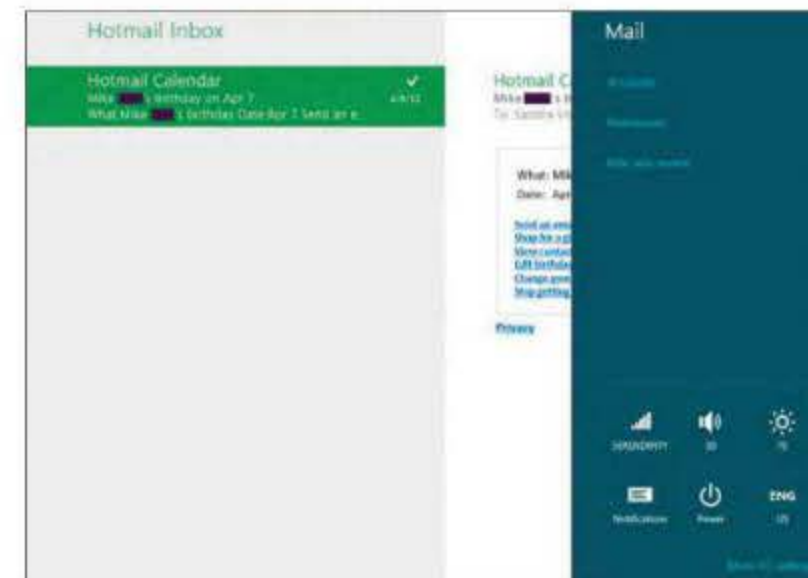

3 You can add a new account with the Settings charm. Sweep a finger inwards from the right side of the screen, move the cursor vertically to the top or bottom corners of the right edge of the screen, or hit the Windows key and 'C' at the same time. Then choose Settings and then Accounts.
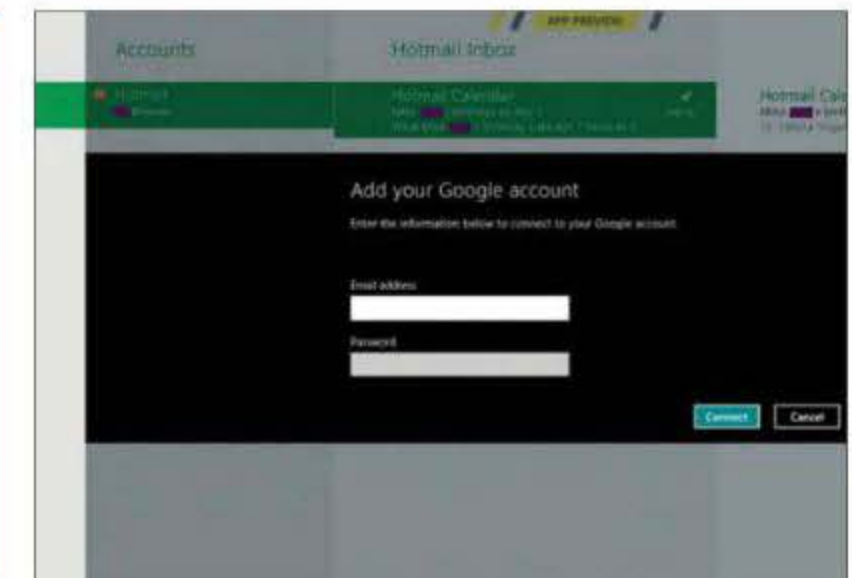
4 A new pane will appear. Tap 'Add an account' to enter the details for a new email account.
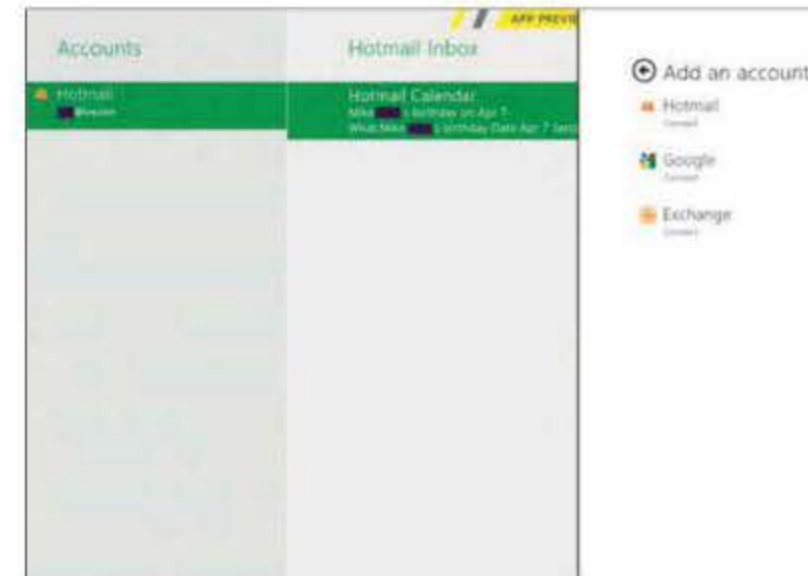
5 Pick the account type you want from the selection on offer. You can choose between Hotmail, Google and Exchange.
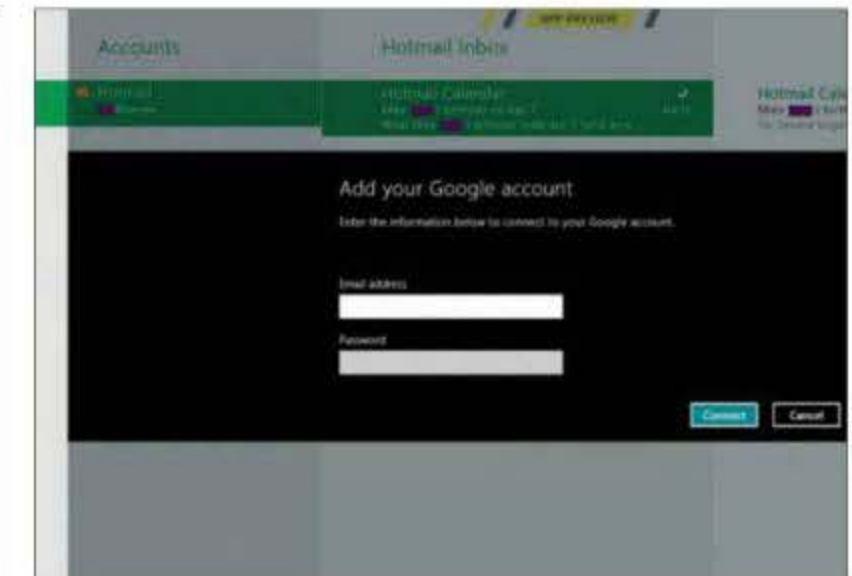
6 Now just type in your email address and password for the account you want to add, and choose Connect. You can repeat this process to add multiple accounts. If you want to delete an account, just tap and hold, or click and hold on it and a delete option will appear.

Access a PC remotely

Using the free Soluto app, you can remotely diagnose and fix problems with up to five linked computers

One of the useful things about Windows 8 is that you can connect with people in lots of useful ways. Linking all your contacts so you've got a range of options when you need to get hold of a friend is one thing. Being able to help them solve a problem with their PC just by being connected through email and the web takes it to another level.

You might have heard of remote assistance before. It's a way of one person logging on to another's computer or laptop (with their permission and for a specific session only), helping diagnose a problem and attempting to fix it for them. Technical support staff for computer companies and internet service providers sometimes use remote assistance in this way.

Soluto uses remote desktop – the technology that allows someone to securely log on to your PC – in a slightly different way. It offers the sort of troubleshooting and diagnosis we've just described, but it also lets you tinker with remote computers to improve their everyday performance.

This means you can you keep a benign watchful eye over the state of a PC you may well be called upon to fix when things go wrong, so you'll have an idea of what the problem might be. And if it's something as easily remedied as the antivirus software not being kept up to date, leaving the computer vulnerable to infection, you can prevent the PC encountering such issues in the first place.

*It also lets you tinker with remote computers to improve their everyday performance*

Installing Soluto on your PC
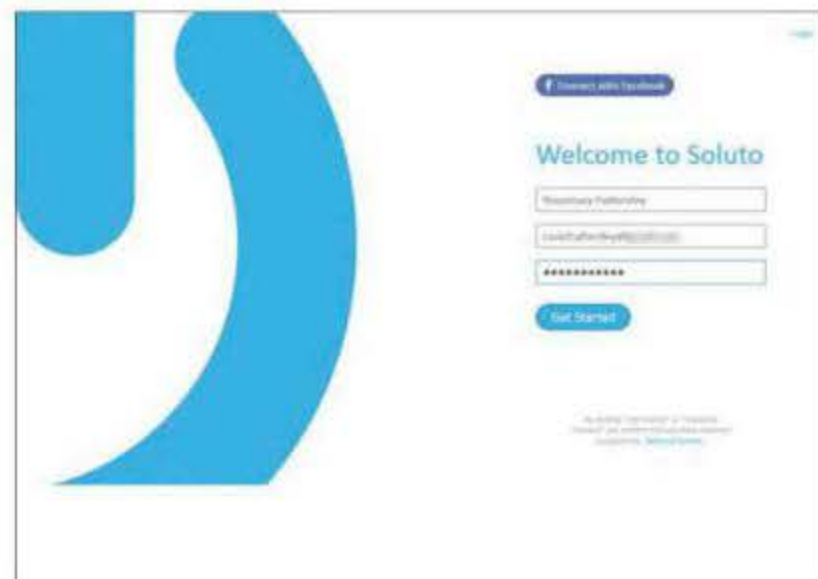
1 To get started with Soluto, install the app from the Windows 8 Marketplace. It's free. You'll need to enter your email address – the same one you use for other things is fine. There's no need to create a specific Soluto email address unless you wish to.
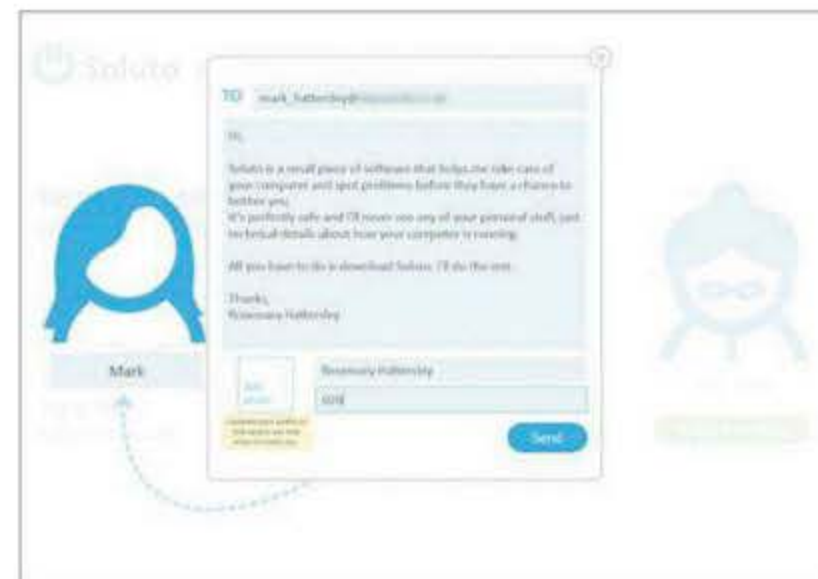

2 Click in the space underneath the person's graphic, type in a name and click 'Add this person'. Enter their email address and add your photo or phone number if you want to reassure the person you're inviting to Soluto that it's a legitimate offer of help.
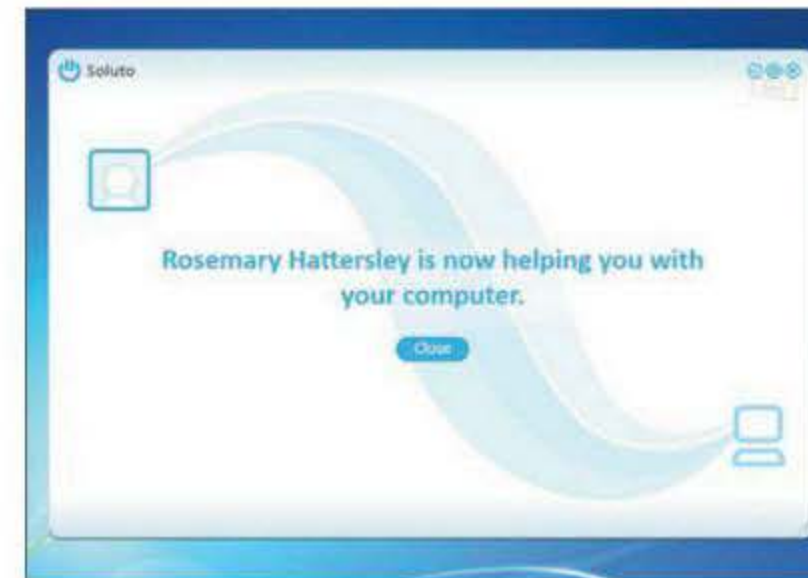
3 The recipient of the invitation now needs to follow the link in their email to download Soluto to their Windows PC or laptop. Once set up on the remote computer, Soluto informs the user that you are helping them with their computer. You'll get an email notification, too.
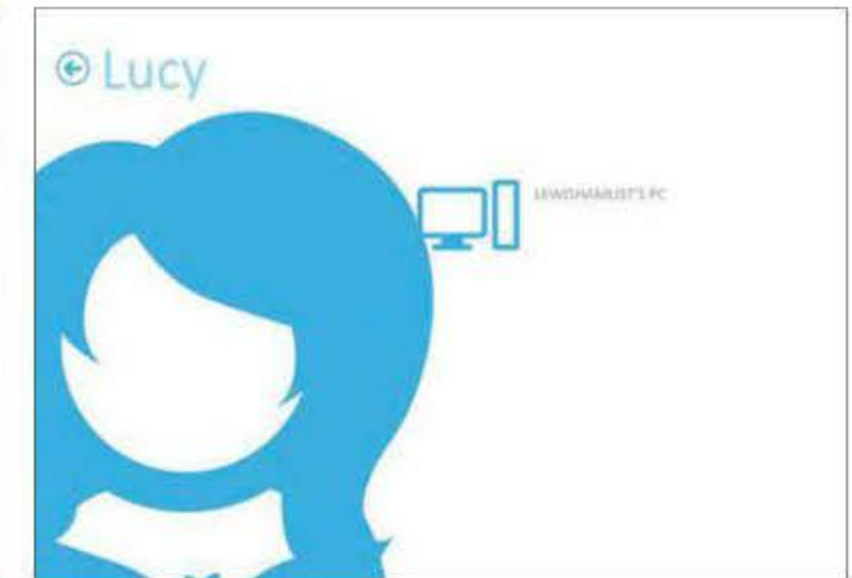
4 On your Windows 8 PC or tablet, you'll now see that the avatar for the connected person is a darker blue, while other invited are shown as a paler blue. Click on the connected person's graphic to access their PC. Soluto indicates that you're connected via Internet Explorer.
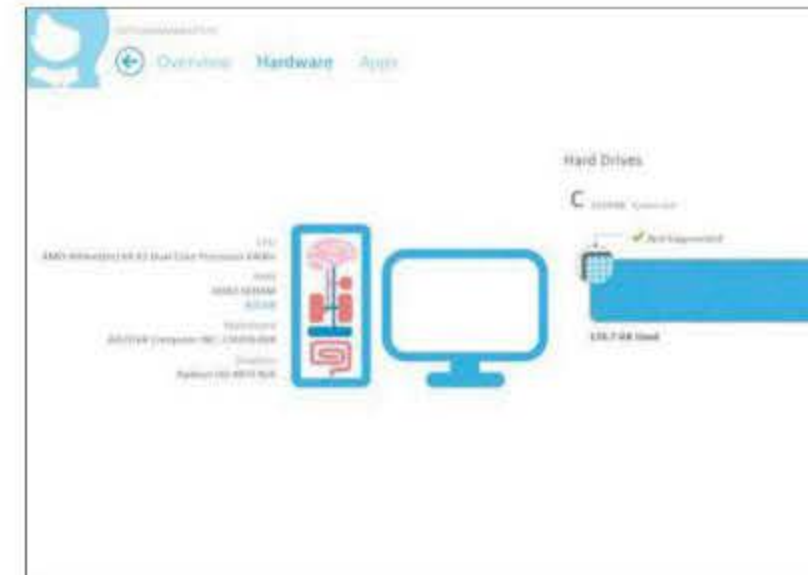
5 You'll see an overview of the PC itself, its age and operating system. Click on the Hardware option at the top of the screen to view component details. Scroll to the right of the screen to view details of any additional hard drives. A green tick next to a drive indicates that it's healthy and does not need defragmenting.

6 The Apps section lists installed programs. Any that need updating are clearly marked. Click on those you think should be updated. Many will only update when the PC is preparing to shut down or when it restarts. To signal that it knows to initiate the update, the Soluto message now changes to 'update in progress'.

7 Soluto suggests apps that may be useful to the user. Scroll to the right of the Apps screen and you'll see details of browser adds-ons, free security software and utilities that could improve their computing experience. Click to install items you think will be worth having.

8 Soluto allows you to offer support and remotely access up to five PCs for free. If you have more than one home computer, it can be useful to include these. To add more people, click on the lower portion of your Windows 8 screen and press Add to bring up the invitation list again.

Bing Maps

If you need directions in a hurry, then Bing Maps will ensure that wrong turnings are a thing of the past

F or many people, the mapping apps on their smartphones are crucial. They can be used to help you find places and deliver turn by turn navigation instructions. Microsoft's Bing Maps is the mapping application of choice in Windows 8, and it has its own shortcut within the Metro interface. It offers the essentials of finding locations and route planning services, and it's easy to use. When we tried it, on a Samsung Series 7 slate PC, it looked great on the 11.6in screen.

You should find plenty of apps incorporating Bing Maps as time goes on, because Microsoft is allowing app developers access to it for Metro apps.

Bing Maps is the mapping application of choice in Windows 8, and it has its own shortcut within the Metro interface

Getting started

You'll find Bing Maps on the Metro screen (see left screen). Just give it a tap if you are using a touchscreen or use the mouse to left click on it.

You can easily pan around maps with a finger, or if you are using a mouse use the left button to drag the view around. When you are panning with the mouse, two magnifying glasses will appear in the bottom-left corner of the screen, with '+' and '−' signs on them. These are the zoom buttons, and can be tapped with a finger or activated with a left mouse click. To zoom in and out of map views with your fingers just use the conventional pinching action.

Map views

There are two different map views – the classic road map view and what Microsoft calls Aerial View (see right screen), which is a satellite map. You can switch between the two by using the Map Style button on the bottom menu bar.

There's also a facility to view traffic, though, this wasn't working on our Consumer Preview version of Windows 8 so we can't show you how it looks or give an indication of its accuracy.
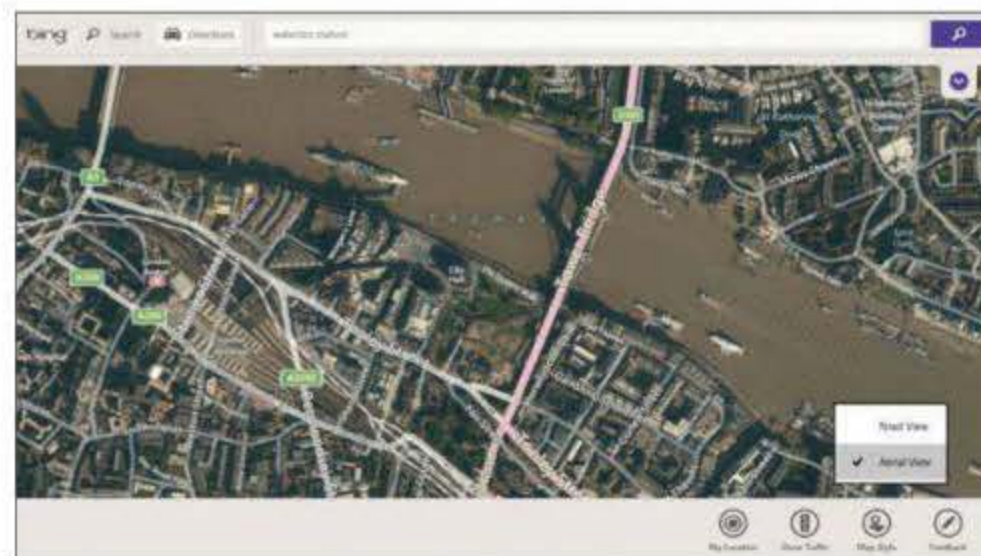

Finding places

You don't actually have to be in Bing Maps to search for a location. If you call up the Search charm by sweeping inwards from the right edge of the screen or mousing to the top or bottom left corner, you'll notice the option to search Maps (see top-right screen). The search panels stay live during searches, while the bulk of the screen is taken up by Bing Maps.

An alternative way to search is to open Bing Maps and then sweep up from the bottom of the screen or right-click to open up the menus. There are two of these – one along the top of the screen and one along the bottom.

Along the top of the screen is a search box (see right screen). If it isn't showing, tap the Search button towards the top left. Now you can tap the search box, type the name of the place you want to find, and then tap the search button to the far right.

A standard feature of mapping apps is to pinpoint where you are at present. Sweep up from the bottom of the screen or right mouse click and then tap or click the My Location icon towards the bottom right of the screen, and the map will centre on where you are, if you are using a device with a GPS receiver.
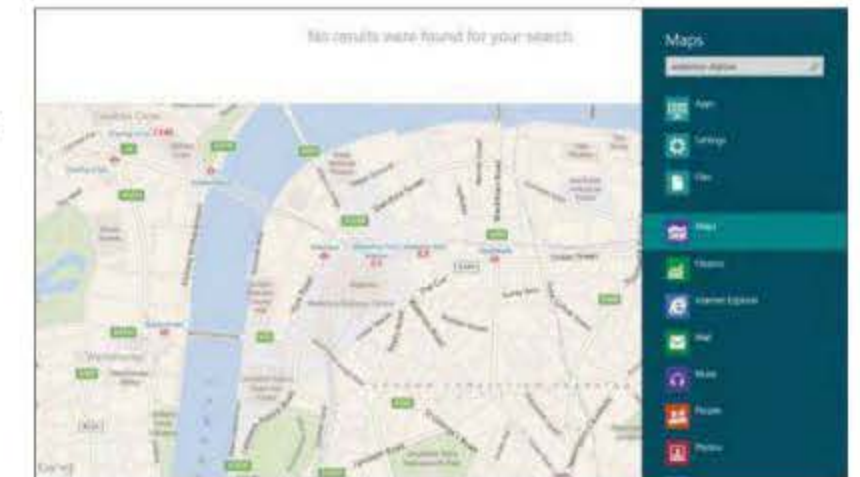

Getting directions

A key function of any map is the ability to direct you from one location to the next. The top menu bar lets you do this very easily – simply type in your start and end points, and then hit the Go button. A route will quickly be calculated.

This is shown onscreen visually and in a series of steps that you can zoom into by tapping any of them. Panning with a finger, scrolling with a mouse or using Ctrl and arrow keys on a keyboard will take you through the routing steps. You can close the window by tapping the small up arrow in its bottom-right corner, leaving you with just the map again. To reverse a route just hit the double arrow sitting between the two location boxes on that top menu screen.

This is all pretty sleek and fast, but we did encounter one issue – entering a street name that's used more than once. In
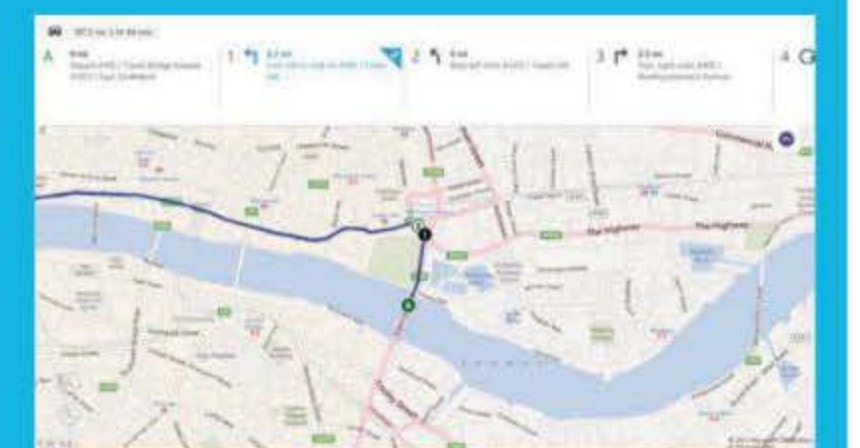
our Consumer Preview, Bing Maps just decided which one we wanted and didn't offer us the option of choosing between the various streets sharing the same name. Presumably that will be ironed out – if it isn't it will be a real problem.

Secure Windows 8

We often use our computers to store sensitive personal information, so it's vital you keep it secure from prying eyes. Here's how…

Y our computer can contain some pretty sensitive information. Everything from passwords to online accounts, from contact details and private photos to documents that could contain personal information such as legal letters or financial spreadsheets. We're sure you can add more to that list. With so much information stored in one place, it's vital you keep your computer secure, and that means both ensuring other people can't get at what's on the internal storage and making sure you don't get compromised by malware coming at you over the internet.

Microsoft is no stranger to catering for password-protected login, or to providing on board anti virus protection. Windows 8 builds on what has gone before, so let's talk a look at what's on offer and how to use it.

Microsoft has implemented a boot system to make sure everything that's pre-loading actually has a right to do so

Secure Boot

Secure Boot might not be the most exciting of security features, but it could help you out a lot. There's malware that can get itself ready to do its worst as your computer boots up, so in Windows 8 Microsoft has implemented a boot system to make sure everything that's pre-loading actually has a right to do so, by verifying its security certificates. In theory, nothing should be able to lurk and boot without permission.
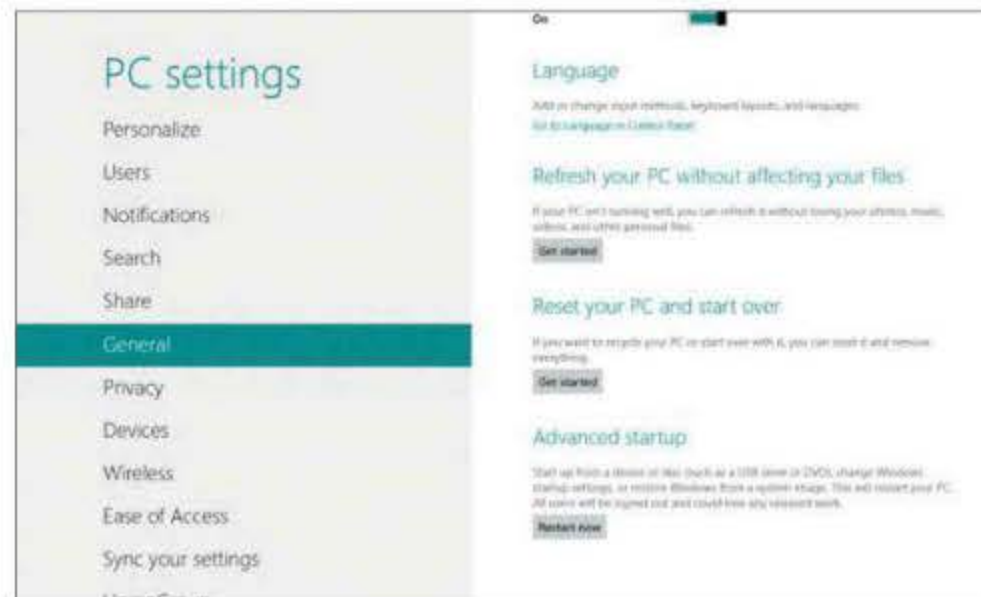
Factory Reset and Refresh

If things go completely pear-shaped and you find yourself wishing you could start all over again, Windows 8 offers two ways to do this: Refresh, and Factory Reset.

Refresh reinstalls the operating system, but keeps all your data, settings and any installed Metro apps safe. It will remove any non-metro programs, though. Refresh also helps you with the application reinstall process by making a list of removed apps, so you can easily work through that to get back to a working state.

Alternatively, you can implement a Factory Reset, taking your operating system right back to how it was when you first took it out of the box. That ought to get rid of lurking malware, but it will also remove all applications, personal data and settings – everything, so it needs to be used with great care. With luck you'll only need factory reset once – when you decide to sell or pass your computer on to a new user.

To use either Refresh or Factory Reset, choose the Settings Charm, then More PC Settings. Now scroll down the left-hand settings options till you get to General and select that. Scroll right down to the bottom of the options on the right-hand side and you'll find both Refresh and Factory Reset there.

Secure Windows with a password or gestures

Just as with earlier versions of Windows, you can login using a password. What's different here is that you can use a mouse or your finger to draw a gesture onto an image to do so. This is thought to be more secure than using a password – people generally aren't very good at choosing secure passwords, but the number of permutations of gestures on a photo are vast, and so much more difficult to second-guess. If you do choose gesture based login, though, make sure that nobody is watching the patterns you create, as they may be able to copy them.
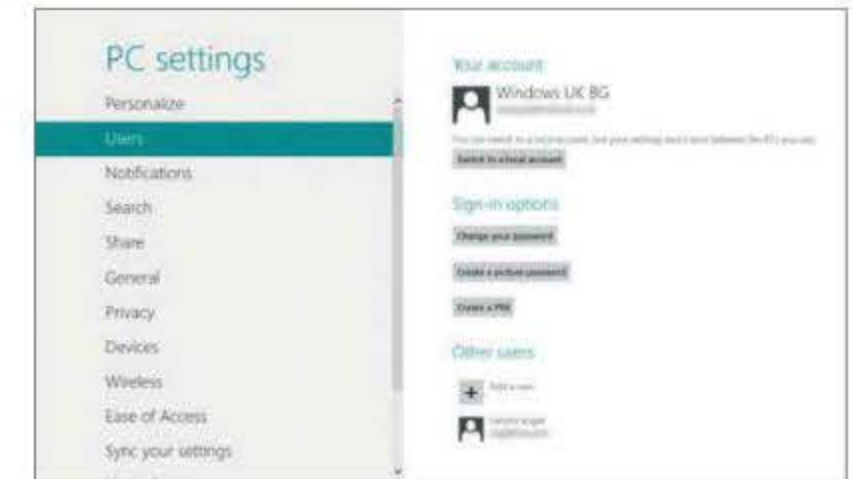
1 To set this up, go to the Settings charm and choose More PC Settings. Next, choose Users from the left-hand PC Settings options, and select Create a Picture Password.

2 Now you'll need to verify yourself by entering your current password – just to prove you have the authority to create this new login. That done, you are taken to a new screen, which explains how picture passwords work. Read the text, then select Choose picture.

3 Next scroll through the photos you have till you find the one you want to use, and click Open. The next screen lets you move the picture around a little, and when you are happy, you can choose Use this picture. Now comes the important part. Draw three gestures on the picture, they can be any combination of circles, straight lines and taps. Complete the process by repeating the gestures. You have to be quite precise. Now whenever you login, you'll have to repeat the three gestures.

Windows Defender

Windows Defender is Microsoft's very own anti-malware client, and it's been updated in Windows 8 so that it will protect against viruses and spyware, and provide real-time detection. You can scan your computer and any attached devices any time you want, too.
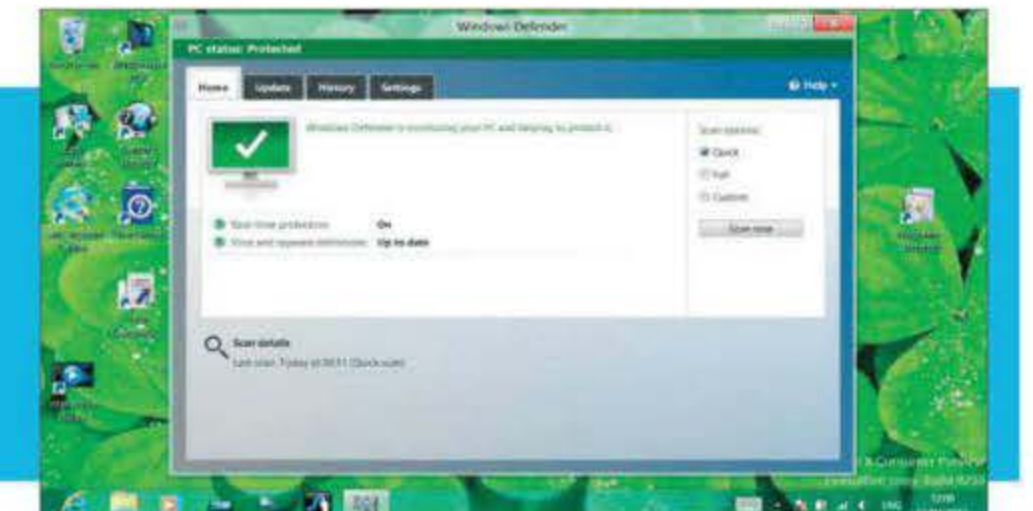
Install Windows 8 on a Mac

If you're an Apple fan but want to check out the competition, installing Windows 8 on a Mac is easier than you think

W hy would you want to run Windows on a Mac? It's a valid question. In fact, there are many reasons. To test out programs that are Windows only, play games that aren't available on a Mac, or enjoy media files that Apple doesn't support. Being able to run more than one OS on the same machine also means you can in essence take two laptops with you on the road.

Installing an extra operating system on a Mac works via a process called virtualisation. You can do this through either Boot Camp or VMware Fusion, but the easiest option is to use Parallels Desktop 7 for Mac. It costs £69, but offers full control over both desktops and lets you install more than one extra OS, assuming your Mac has the resources to do so – an Intel Core 2 Duo processor and at least 2GB of RAM (preferably 4GB) are needed to run Windows.

Switching between desktops doesn't even involve logging in and out of your current OS – you just switch windows. Once installed as a dual-boot OS, you'll be able to drag items from your Windows 8 PC into the Mac OS and vice versa. You'll need a separate user account besides the standard Administrator account once Windows 8 has installed on your Mac, though. This option is supported only on Parallels Desktop 7 (the latest version of the software); if you've got an older edition of Parallels, you'll need to upgrade at a cost of £34.99.

Windows 8 Consumer Preview is free to download, but will become inactive shortly after the commercial launch. UK users will need to buy a full copy of Windows 8, and either install it from a USB drive or burn the ISO file to DVD.

Switching between desktops doesn't even involve logging in and out of your current operating system

Installing the Consumer Preview on your Mac

1 Install Desktop 7 and set up your account. If you're upgrading from an earlier edition, you'll need to quit out of Parallels Desktop and Parallels Virtual Machine and let the new version replace them. Your settings will be migrated, along with any operating systems you may have running in it.


2 Go to microsoft.com and click on the Windows tab. You'll see an option to try the Consumer Preview and another to buy Windows 8. You'll need to enter your email address, and accept the terms and conditions in order to initiate the download. Verify your details by email when prompted.


3 Back in Parallels, click on the Parallels Desktop menu bar and choose File, New. Select 'Install Windows or another OS from DVD or image file'. A prompt to insert an OS disc appears. Assuming you downloaded the Consumer Preview to your Mac, choose the Other media option. Parallels should locate the Windows.iso file on the OS X desktop. Click to install.


4 Note that the pre-filled product key may not work. If this is the case, enter the generic code that Microsoft provides for use with the Consumer Preview – DNJXJ-7XBW8-2378T-X22TX-BKG7J. If you are installing full Windows 8, use the code provided at purchase. Click Continue.
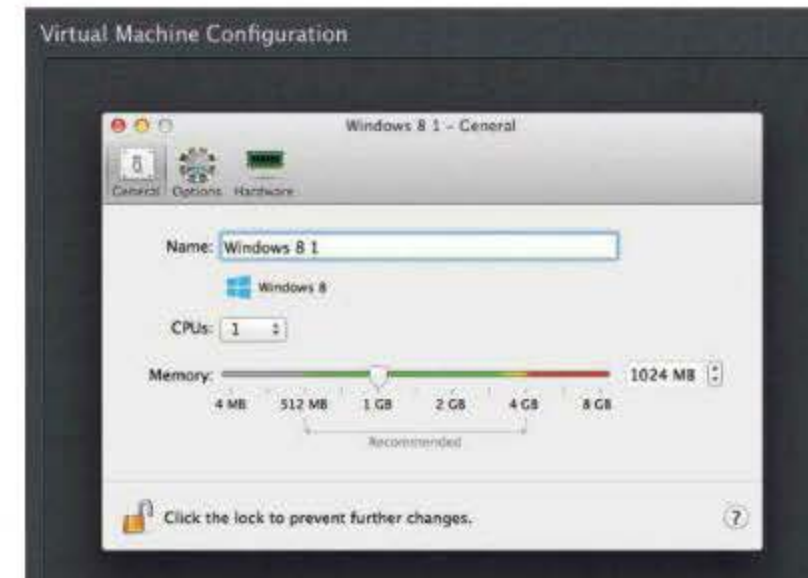
5 Next tell Parallels how you want to use Windows. It can run as a self-contained OS or simply run specific programs. Confirm your preferences on the next screen including where Parallels should save the installation files. You can also adjust its default memory allocation. Windows 8 Consumer Preview will now start installing.
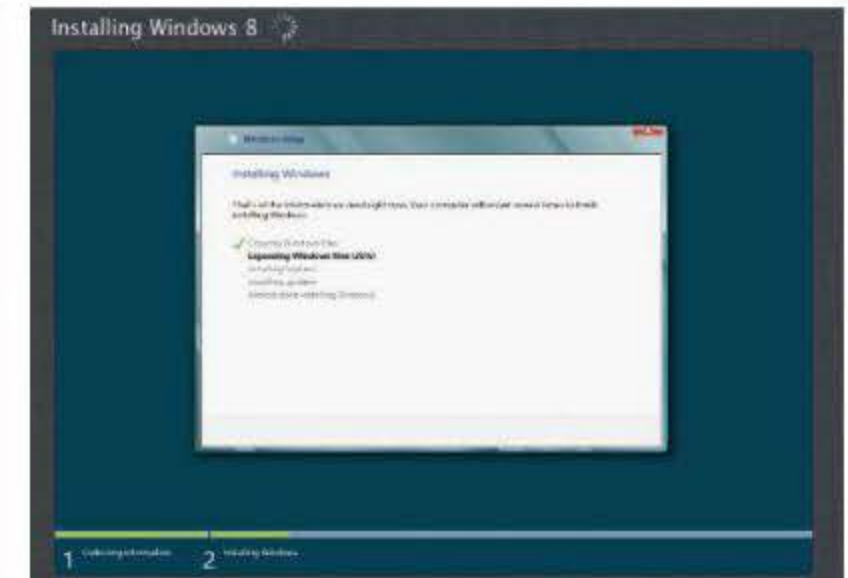
6 Windows 8 automatically creates a user profile for you based on the details it has gleaned from the Mac. You can edit your email and user preferences once the setup is complete. This includes specifying whether or not HomeGroup sharing should be switched on. This local network feature can be used within this virtualised version of Windows on a Mac.
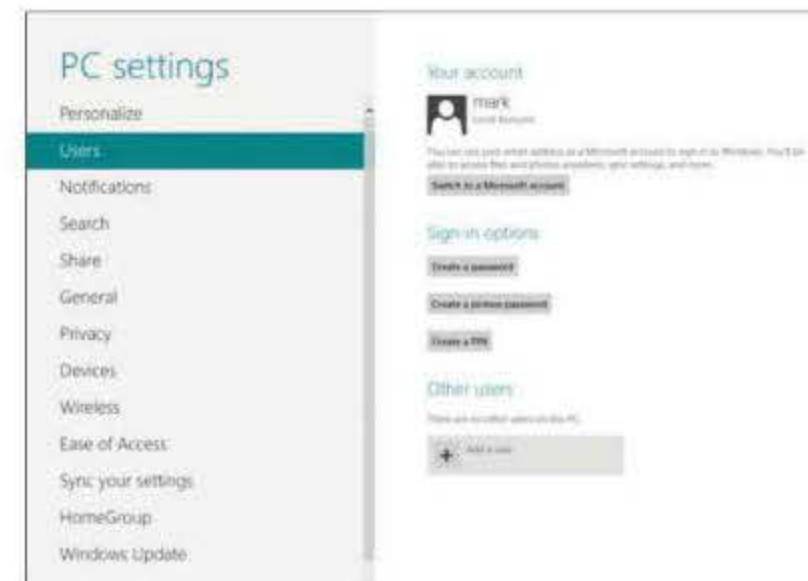
7 Click on your user icon to access PC settings and to add other user accounts. At the bottom you'll see an option to add more users. A Microsoft or other email address is all that's required to set them up on Windows 8 on the Mac.

8 To return to the Windows 8 Metro tile interface, hover your mouse at the bottom left and click the thumbnail that appears. To get back to the Mac OS, hover your mouse over the uppermost part of the screen and, when the menu bar appears, choose View, Exit Full Screen.

Dual-boot Windows 8

By running Windows 8 alongside your existing OS, you can check out its new features without committing to it

We've looked at several upgrade options for Windows 8 in this publication, but perhaps the best choice for PC users is to run it as a secondary OS alongside your current version of Windows.

Doing so has several advantages. You can, for example, preview Windows 8 without fully committing to it, making use of the fun touchscreen-enabled apps in the Metro interface when you want to view photos, create doodles or play casual games. The familiar version of Windows you use everyday will be there after a simple reboot, and you can use the Consumer Preview until early 2013. You don't need to worry about hardware compatibility either – you'll still have your old version of Windows and Microsoft has checked that anything that runs in Windows 7 will do so in 8.

To partition your drive you'll need a fair chunk of available disk space. The new operating system requires at least 2GB to install, not to mention storage space for any documents and folders you create while using it. Work on the assumption that you'll need between 10GB and 20GB to install Windows 8, and have enough room to store and save photos and videos you run on it.

Also note that you'll need either a blank, writable DVD or a USB flash drive you don't mind formatting. Here' we've used a USB drive to install Windows 8 on a Toshiba Ultrabook (which has no optical drive), but the process takes longer than when we dual-booted a Toshiba laptop and installed from DVD.

You can, for example, preview Windows 8 without fully committing to it, making use of the fun touchscreen enabled apps

Run Windows 8 alongside your current OS

1 First, check how much space you can use for your partition. Go to Control Panel, Disk Management and right-click on the drive you want to partition. Windows will determine how much unallocated space is available. You'll use this to create a new, 'Simple' drive.
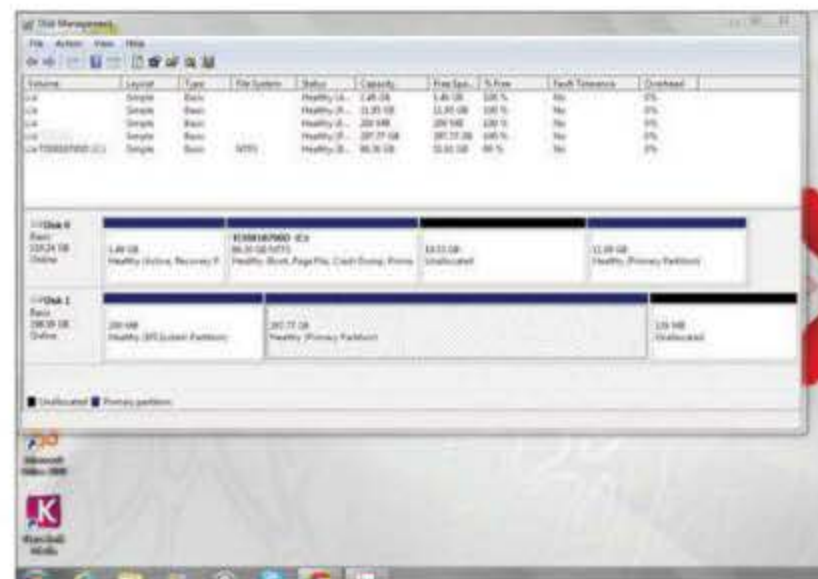
2 If you find there's very little available space, check whether your existing drive allocation can be reduced. Right-click on the pane relating to it to see whether it can squeeze up a little. We also found it helpful to run a Disk Cleanup as this also freed up unallocated space.


3 Right-click within the unallocated disk space pane in the Virtual Disk utility and select 'Create new Simple drive'. You can choose between FAT and NTFS drive types. Stick with the latter and click to proceed. Either accept the default drive name such as E or type in your own. Allow Windows to perform a quick format of the existing content.
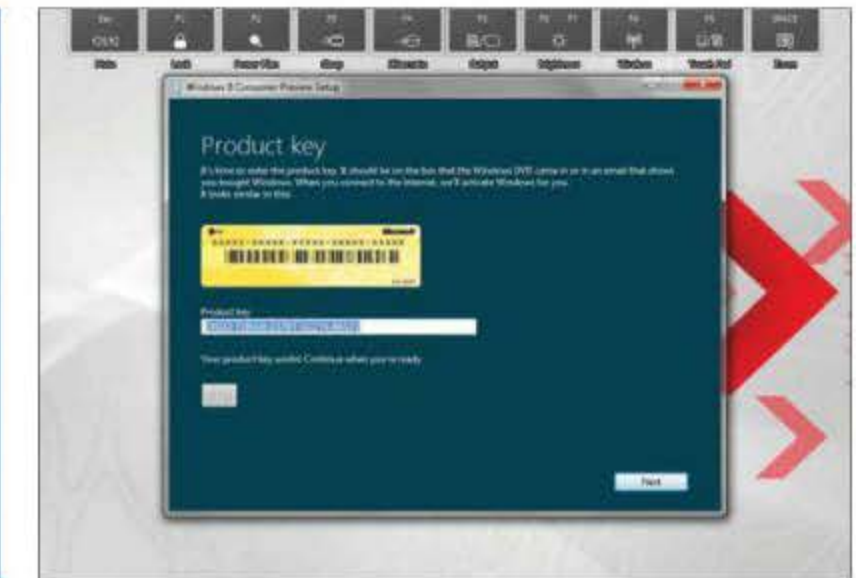

4 Head to Microsoft.com and enter your email address and other details. You'll now be able to download Windows 8 or the Consumer Preview file to your hard drive. Once it's downloaded and gone through its compatibility checks, enter the product key. For the Consumer Preview this is: DNJXJ-7XBW8-2378T-X22TX-BKG7J (this should also appear onscreen).

5 Windows will ask whether you want to install it immediately. Choose the option to install it to another partition. You now need to save the Windows 8 ISO file to an external device. Here, we've used an external hard drive. It needs to be at least 3GB. Since it will be formatted for use, delete anything you need.
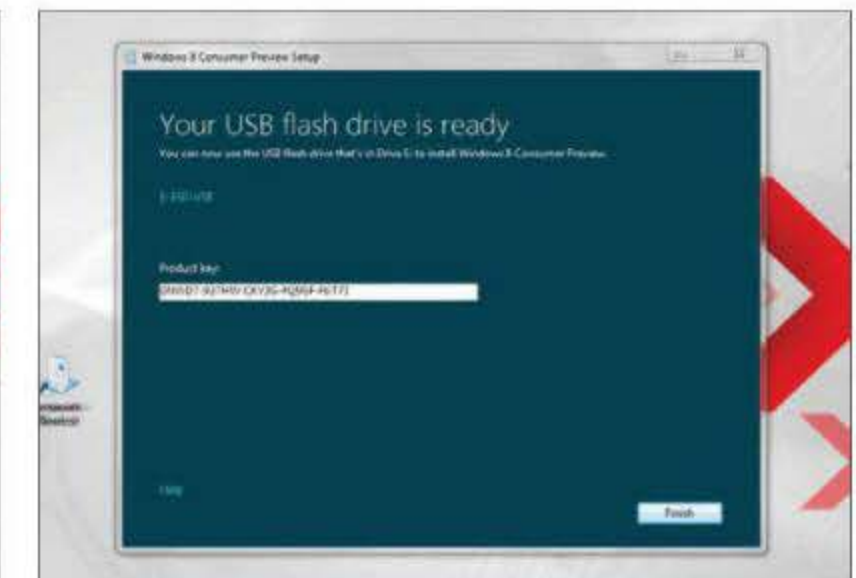
6 A message momentarily appears informing you that Windows 8 can now be installed from the USB drive. You now need to change the boot order that your PC uses. Restart the PC and, as soon as it begins to whirr into life, press F2. In the resulting Bios menu, use the arrow keys to find the current boot order list. Press Enter to accept the settings and exit the BIOS menu.
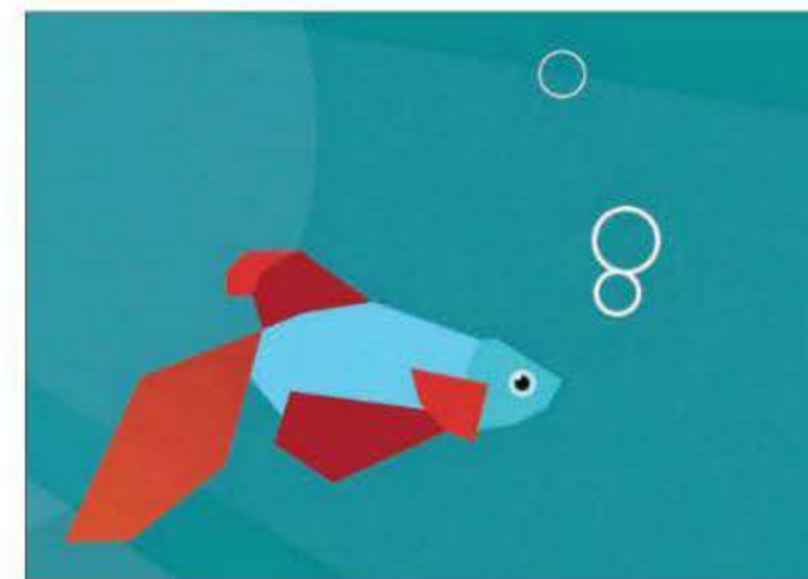
7 Allow Windows to continue to load if the DVD with the new OS is already inserted. Otherwise, insert the disc containing the ISO file and restart. A black BIOS screen telling you to press any key to proceed to boot from the DVD will appear. Windows 8 will announce itself with this screen.

8 Click 'Install now' to proceed. Select 'Custom install' and ensure you choose the new partition (the one labelled E, F, or so on), so you don't overwrite your existing Windows setup.

Custom shortcuts

Creating your own shortcuts may take a little time, but they can ensure you can access your favourite apps quickly and easily

The Metro interface in Windows 8 is likely to be quite popular – after all, it is finger friendly and gives you access to a lot of apps and services. But there are likely to be things you'll want to use in Windows 8 that are not available in the Metro interface.

While you can move shortcuts around within Metro by simple dragging, creating new shortcuts is a little more convoluted. It can be worth the effort, though, so let's take a look at creating shortcuts.

Create a Metro shortcut for an app

1 Find the app you want to create a shortcut for by opening the Search charm, then look for the app you are interested in. In this example we're choosing Paint.
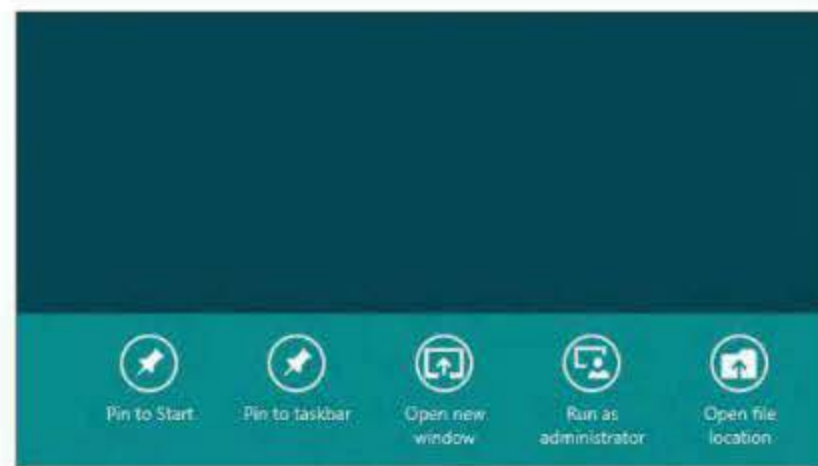
2 Right-click on the app and a set of options will appear along the bottom of the screen. Choose Pin to Start.


3 Now there will be a shortcut to Paint on the Metro Start screen. You can drag it around into a new position if you like. Add more shortcuts if you need them – we've added one to Windows Explorer here.
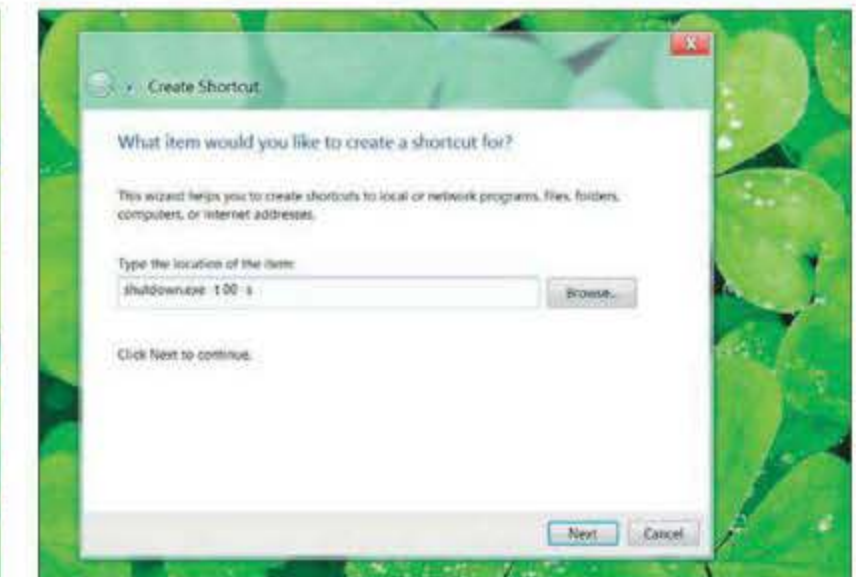

4 If you decide at a later date that you'd rather remove an app you have pinned, just right-click it, and you'll see the option Unpin from Start on the bottom of the screen. Select that and the app shortcut will disappear.

Create a Metro shortcut for a function
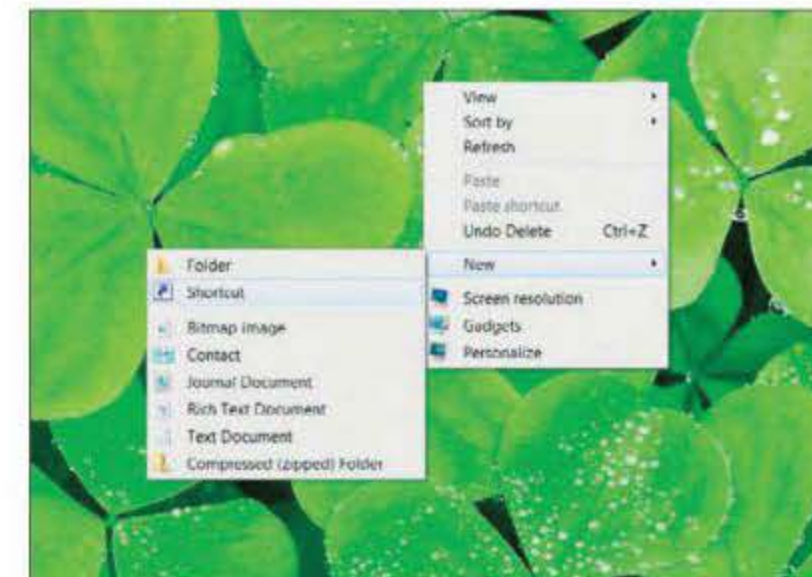
1 On the desktop screen, right-click with the mouse and choose the New menu, then select Shortcut.

2 In the box that appears, type the following: **shutdown.exe –t 00 –s**. This identifies the shortcut as running the shutdown procedure. When you've typed the text, hit Next.

3 Now give your new shortcut a meaningful name, then click Finish.

4 The shortcut is placed on the Windows home screen. To change the default icon, right-click the shortcut and choose Properties.

5 Choose Change Icon and browse the designs that are available. Select the one you want with a click, tap OK, and then click Apply on the Shutdown Properties window. The icon on the desktop shortcut will change to reflect your selection.
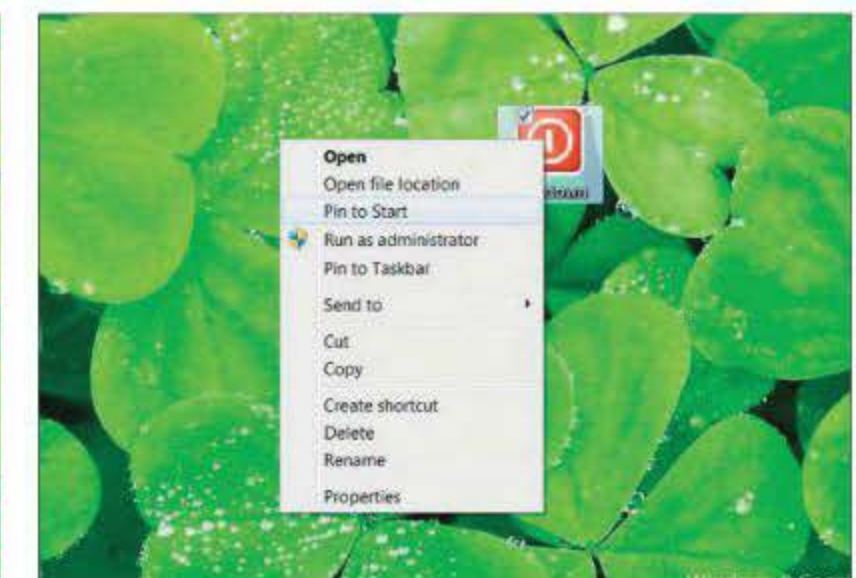
6 Now you can right-click on the icon and choose Pin to Start. From now on it will be on the Metro Start screen.
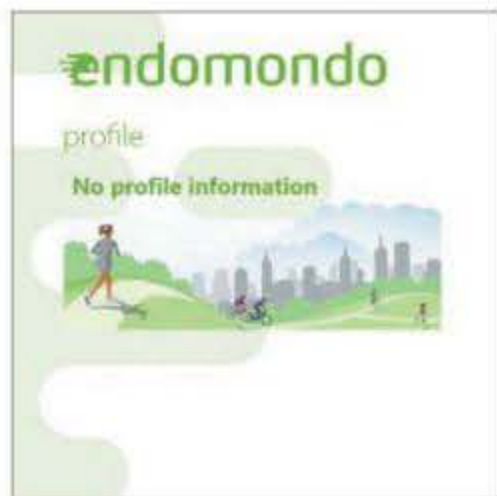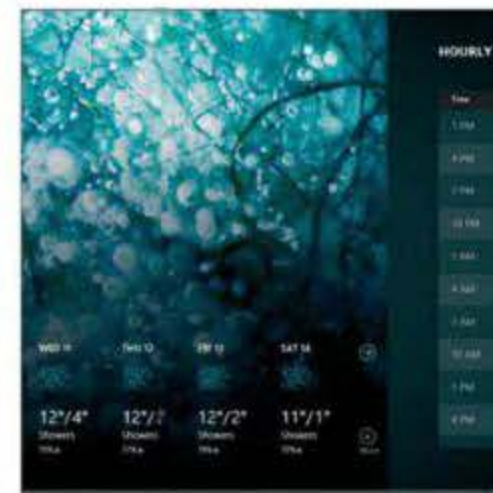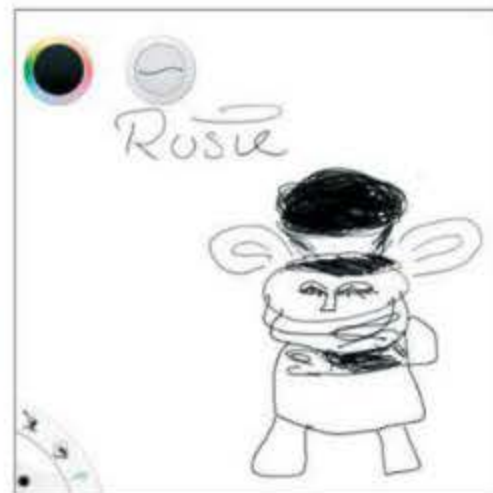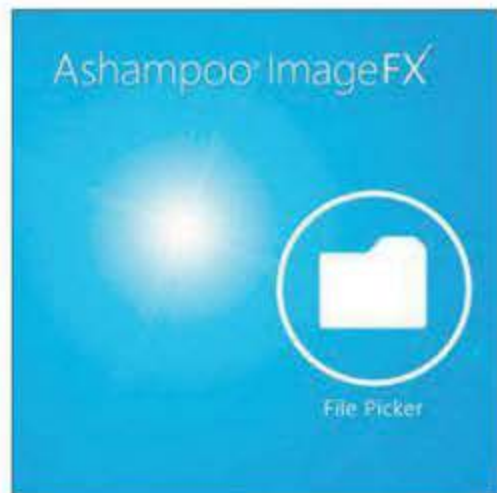
Introducing Windows apps

In order to succeed the Windows Store will need to be stocked with useful, innovative software. We take a look at a selection of Windows apps

One of the most obvious changes in Windows 8 is the introduction of a dedicated app store. Previously, Windows users had to source their software from wherever they could find it, in the unregulated Wild West that is the internet. If you find an app in the Windows Store, it's guaranteed to run on your Windows 8 PC, tablet or laptop. And you'll know that it isn't malware, lurking to trap the unwary customer. But whether the apps are any good is a different matter. As you can still buy software from outside the Store, Windows apps will need to be good to make their mark, so we've reviewed a selection to find out just how good they can be.

All the apps we review are free, too. And, in a way that's bound to increase the popularity of Windows RT, any app in the Store should run on both the X86 versions of Windows 8, as well as those Arm-based portable devices.

It will be interesting to see how the Windows Store develops. Microsoft's operating system has by far the lion's share of the installed userbase in desktop and laptop PCs. Coupled with a predicted rise in tablet and smartphone use, Windows should be the place to be for app developers and buyers alike. But the relative experiences of the Apple App Store, Google Play and the BlackBerry App World has shown that it's never quite so straightforward. Apple's success makes it the number one choice with app developers. They know they can make money because iPhone and iPad users tend to spend money on apps, but also because there's only a small amount of devices for which to build apps. Google Play is less popular, however, due to the staggering diversity of devices app makers have to cater for, and the budget nature of the Android crowd. Of the two Windows is much closer to Android, only an Android that is comfortably the number one in its space. So hopefully software vendors will go out all guns blazing in an attempt to populate the Windows Store. Based on the app reviews that follow, at least, the early portents are good.

You'll know that it isn't malware, lurking to trap the unwary customer

Ashampoo ImageFX

Ashampoo's image-editing app lets you add effects to photos and videos in your gallery, though, you can't share the final result with your friends

■ **PRICE** FREE ■ **COMPANY** ASHAMPOO www.ashampoo.com/uk

PROS
Fun to experiment with settings; reset and undo options; free

CONS
Limited editing options; can't share images; kept crashing

OVERALL SCORE
★★★☆☆

As a starting point, ImageFX simply needs a photo from your archive or to use the webcam on your Windows 8 PC or tablet to snap a shot of you. The app then loads to a light blue screen on which the webcam or file picker options are presented. A third option – the image you chose for your Windows 8 account when setting up the PC – can be selected by clicking the option at the bottom of the screen. The maximum resolution for the webcam is just 640 x 480 pixels. There are options to manually adjust the contrast, focus and exposure. We couldn't get the timer for the webcam to work at all, though.

Most of the edits that can be applied using ImageFX are intended to create something more artistic and eye-catching from otherwise run-of-the-mill photos. It's hard, however, to see how to go about creating them given the limited range of editing options. The Oilpaint option, for example, in the Basic FX blocks out detail to make a pseudo-painted effect, but is really rather crude.

It's fun to experiment with the edits that Ashampoo offers, though, you don't always end up with the result you expect. A so-so photo of Tower Bridge with a mauve twilight glow ended up with an intriguing stippled effect when we asked ImageFX to sharpen the shot. Thankfully, reset and undo buttons ensure you aren't stuck with some ghastly effect.

Sepia, greyscale and variations on RGB (red, green, blue) colour filters can be applied, and any digitally altered photos you like can be saved. There aren't yet any sharing options, though. We also found ImageFX habitually crashed and would often spend too long applying a fairly simple setting.

Verdict
ImageFX is fun to play around with, but we soon found ourselves bored of its limitations and poorly executed effects. Once other freebies such as Picasa come along, its limited feature set will probably leave it forgotten.

It's fun to experiment with the edits that Ashampoo offers, though, you don't always end up with the result you expect
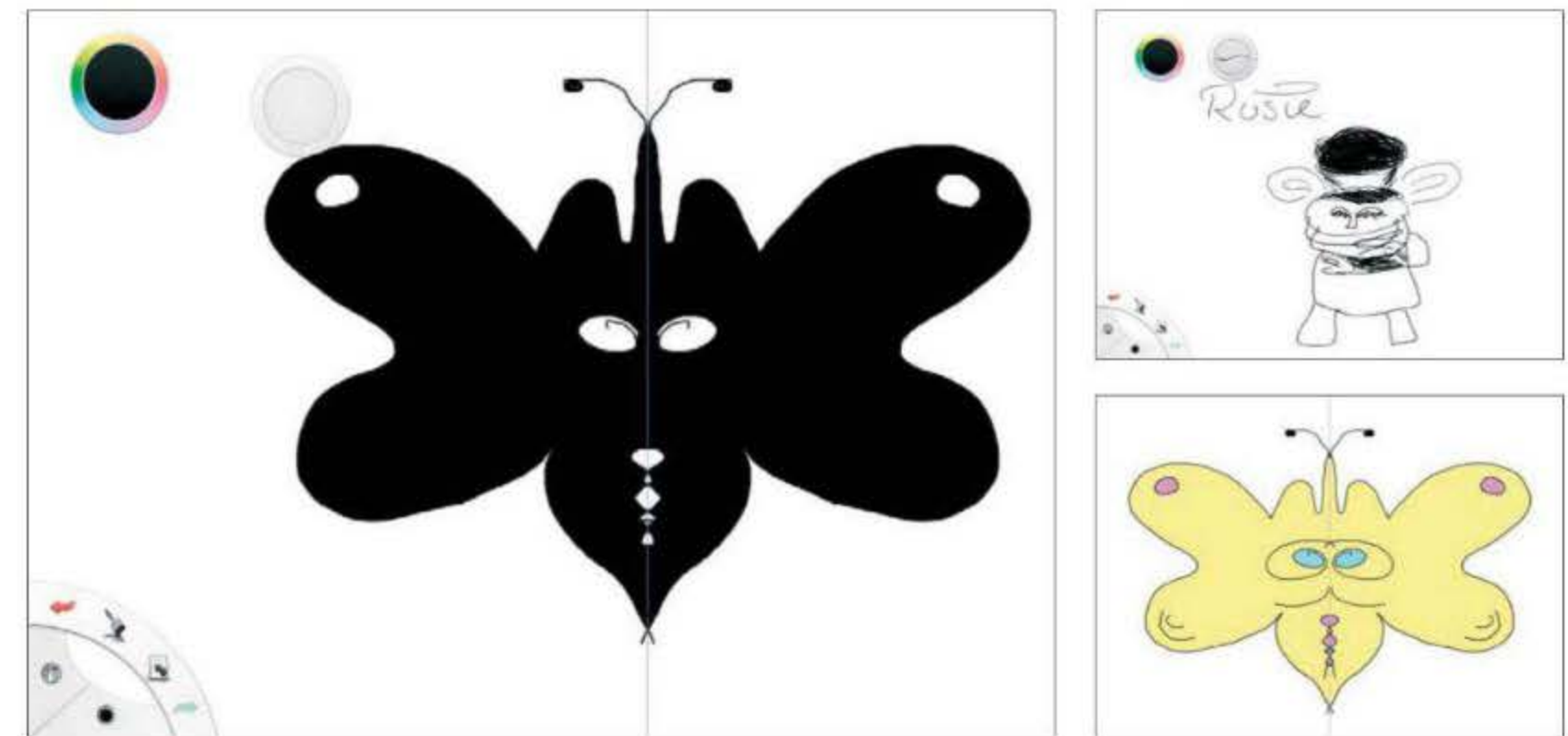
Autodesk SketchBook Express

Touchscreen computing lends itself very well to graphics use and Autodesk's drawing app is one of the simplest to use, having only a limited toolset

■ **PRICE** FREE ■ **COMPANY** AUTODESK www.autodesk.co.uk

PROS
Easy to use; restore deleted drawings;

CONS
No instructions; lacks a zoom feature on non-touchscreen machines

OVERALL SCORE
★★★★☆

SketchBook Express may not come with any instructions, but is simple enough to work out how to use. Autodesk has kept the number of tools to a minimum, allowing you to experiment – start drawing freehand, click on the colour wheel to change to another shade and you're off. Dragging your mouse across a narrower shade selection lets you be more precise about the shade you want, but you can't save your favourites to return to later. Clicking on the red arrow in the tool palette cancels the last stroke, and multiple undos are supported. Helpfully, you can reinstate deleted etchings too.

The standard blank canvas can be changed for vertically or horizontally symmetrical ones. Pens can be swapped by clicking on the paintbrush icon and choosing a pencil, airbrush or eraser. Line weights are adjusted via a circular brush size icon; click and hold the mouse button, then drag to make your brush larger or smaller. You can't create brush strokes of less than five pixels across, though, and there's no zoom if you're using a non-touchscreen computer.

It's rather tricky to draw accurately using a mouse and trackpad alone – we installed a Wacom graphics tablet. Even so, most of our drawings came out looking rather wonky. We would have appreciated functions such as a straight line tool, a grid view and the ability to save an object and then move it elsewhere onscreen while we worked on another area of our drawing.

There are no options to import existing graphics or to use shapes included within the app. Text isn't supported either, so you'll need to save the image and open it in Word or another graphics app if you want to add a caption, for example. Images can be saved as either PNGs or Jpegs.

Verdict
SketchBook Express is fun to use, but lacks a zoom feature. Add a straight-line tool and the option to save favourite colours, and we'd be happy.

Pens can be swapped by clicking on the paintbrush icon and choosing a pencil, airbrush or eraser
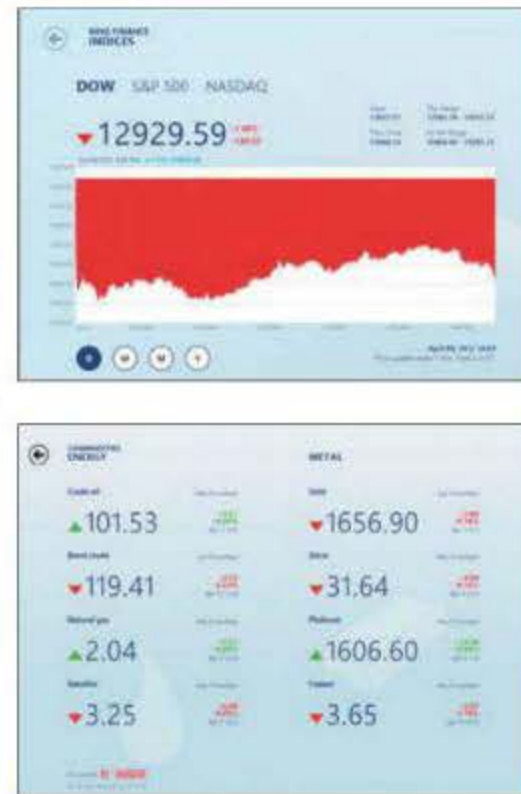
Bing Finance

Microsoft's app provides a clear and attractively designed overview of the movers and shakers on the world markets, as well as the latest economic news

■ PRICE **FREE** ■ COMPANY **MICROSOFT** www.microsoft.com/uk

PROS
Offers clear overview of markets; News section well-designed

CONS
Greater customisation options needed

OVERALL SCORE
★★★★☆

Finance is billed (pardon the pun) as an app to help you manage your money and investments. It provides a useful overview of the trading positions of well-known brands on the London Stock Exchange and Dow Jones Index, along with details of how they have performed over the past week, month, year and in the previous five years.

Companies of interest can be added to a Watchlist though, unlike some of the other Windows 8 apps we've reviewed, there's no means of signing up and properly customising what you can see.

Finance deals in overviews rather than specifics for most subjects, though, investments are its focus. Scroll all the way along the Finance Metro screen and you'll find the information that may be of most interest if you're an investor: the Bing Finance Fund Picks. This shows the best performing companies based on the current investment year, average five-year performance return and both highest rated and conservative bond returns for the current year.

It also offers useful overviews of mortgage and equities markets and the average interest rates currently being charged, plus whether this figure is going up or down. The News section is both attractive and well executed, with pictorial tiles for each of the day's headlines plus a splash screen of the main finance story. These add character to what would otherwise be a plain vanilla chart app – albeit one showing critical changes to the latest share prices. As you'd expect, real-time trading figures are shown with 30-minute delays.

Verdict
More customisation would be our main request for Bing Finance. Simple watchlists that you can only view from within the app don't live up to this attractively designed app's potential. Nonetheless, it offers a clear overview of market trends and useful snapshots of particular sectors.

The News section is both attractive and well executed, with pictorial tiles for each of the day's headlines

Bing Weather

The British weather is notoriously changeable, so if you want to know whether we can expect a sizzling summer or the usual washout this is the app for you

■ PRICE **FREE** ■ COMPANY **MICROSOFT** www.microsoft.com/uk

PROS
Looks great; regular updates; huge amount of data provided

CONS
UK boroughs not recognised

OVERALL SCORE
★★★★☆

When you first launch this app, nothing appears to happen. If you're on a mobile device, this is because your location details are being checked. On the desktop version of Bing Weather, though, the default location is Seattle, Washington, home of Microsoft. This is easily changed. Simply click the arrow at the top of the Weather page and choose Places from the options that appear. Type in your current location and it will appear in the Favorites list. Click this entry to show it full-screen and press the Set as Default radio button at the bottom.

Bing Weather recognises cities and towns in the UK, but not separate boroughs – for example, Greenwich in London was not an option, but Greenwich, Connecticut was.

The weather forecast is provided by AccuWeather and is as true to its word as any forecast. As well as informing you of the current conditions and how any wind or cloud may affect how much colder that makes the temperature feel, there's an hour-by-hour summary of how the weather will develop during the day. In fact, details are provided for three-hourly intervals. The likelihood of the predicted thunderstorm or downpour happening is given as a percentage for each day. The app shows you this visually too – scroll to the right to see the day's weather expressed by temperature, cloud cover, precipitation and as seen from a satellite. Historical data showing temperature and rainfall for the month can also be viewed, while a World Weather map lets you see how much warmer it is elsewhere on the globe.

Verdict
Bing Weather is a likable free app that gets the balance of information, visuals and customisation right. It's also one of the few Windows 8 apps we've tried so far that works just as well on a laptop screen as a touchscreen slate.

There's an hour-by-hour summary of how the weather will develop during the day
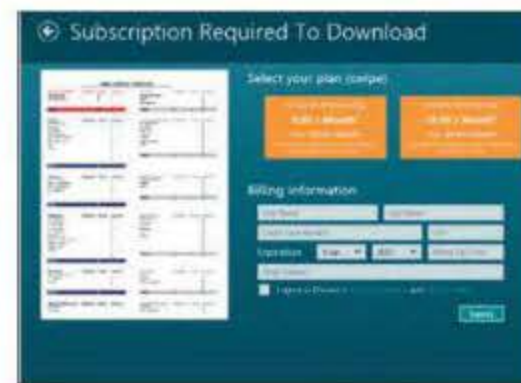
Docstoc

Aimed at small businesses, this useful app provides advice from industry leaders along with handy templates to help companies deal with different scenarios

■ **PRICE** FREE ■ **COMPANY** DOCSTOC www.docstoc.com

PROS
Advice from industry leaders; free account; useful templates

CONS
Not clear that some templates are free to download

OVERALL SCORE
★★★★☆

Docstoc styles itself as a sort of communal advisory service for small businesses either just starting out or branching into new areas. Its bread-and-butter offering is a range of templates that can be customised for use in particular scenarios. Not all of these are applicable only to a business environment – some also have uses for household budgeting, such as saving for a mortgage deposit. There are templates for both highly specific situations – instigating disciplinary proceedings against a staff member, for example – as well as generally applicable ones to help you create a will.

Registering for a free account allows you to download many of these templates. Unfortunately, it's not as clear as it might be that there's a login option that affords this access. When you click on the Save Local option at the bottom of the screen, Docstoc defaults to bringing up a payment option. Registered users, however, need pay only for premium content. Costs for these vary – you can upload your own documents and sell them via Docstoc, so it's down to the user to set their price.

There's actually a fair bit of information to be gleaned from reading the advice offered within the Docstoc app. We found the way it's categorised easy to navigate – PR and marketing advice gets a section, while the nitty-gritty of managing the business, bookkeeping and human resources are each dealt with separately. While there's a fair bit of buzzword speak in some of them, the video section is pretty useful. These tend to give you a digest without expecting you to delve through a whole 'get ahead in business' self-improvement manual.

Verdict
If you run a small business and are looking for genuine advice from people who have experienced many of the issues you're facing or are acknowledged as industry leaders, then Docstoc is well worth a look.

There's actually a fair bit of information to be gleaned from reading the advice offered within the app

Endomondo

If you're planning to get in shape for the summer, Endomondo will help you develop a workout program and let you know how near you are to reaching your target

■ **PRICE** FREE ■ **COMPANY** ENDOMONDO www.endomondo.com

PROS
Looks great; regular updates; huge amount of data provided

CONS
Adding routes difficult; details entered online take day to appear

OVERALL SCORE
★★★☆☆

Endomondo is an app to help you manage your fitness, providing a console overview of how near you are to achieving your goals and whether you are keeping up with your workout program.

When you first launch this app, you're given the choice of creating a new account or logging in via Facebook to an existing one. Most of its features are accessed via the social network, with the Metro interface primarily reflecting any profile updates and workouts you post there – the idea being that friends will encourage each other in their fitness endeavours.

Endomondo identifies any Facebook contacts also using the app and suggests you 'friend' them. Your email contacts can also be invited from within the app, and you can choose to compete or rank yourself against other members. Challenges are offered, with prizes of Endomondo-branded fitness clothing by way of incentive.

You'll need to type in your age, weight and height in order for the app to monitor your progress. Workouts need to include distance, duration, exercise type and, if possible, average heart rate. Statistics provides a bar chart overview of how much exercise you've taken or how many calories you've burned.

If you prefer, you can log details of your own workouts and routes. It's not easy to enter routes, though, as the map scrolls in and out at random rather than keeping to the zoom level you've used and letting you plot your run. It also took more than a day for the details we'd entered online to appear, which dampened our enthusiasm for using it via the desktop.

Verdict
Endomondo offers little more than a summary of the workouts and fitness goals you've already set up via the web or on your smartphone. However, if you want a reminder of how you're doing, it's neatly designed and is free to install.

Challenges are offered, with prizes of Endomondo branded fitness clothing by way of incentive
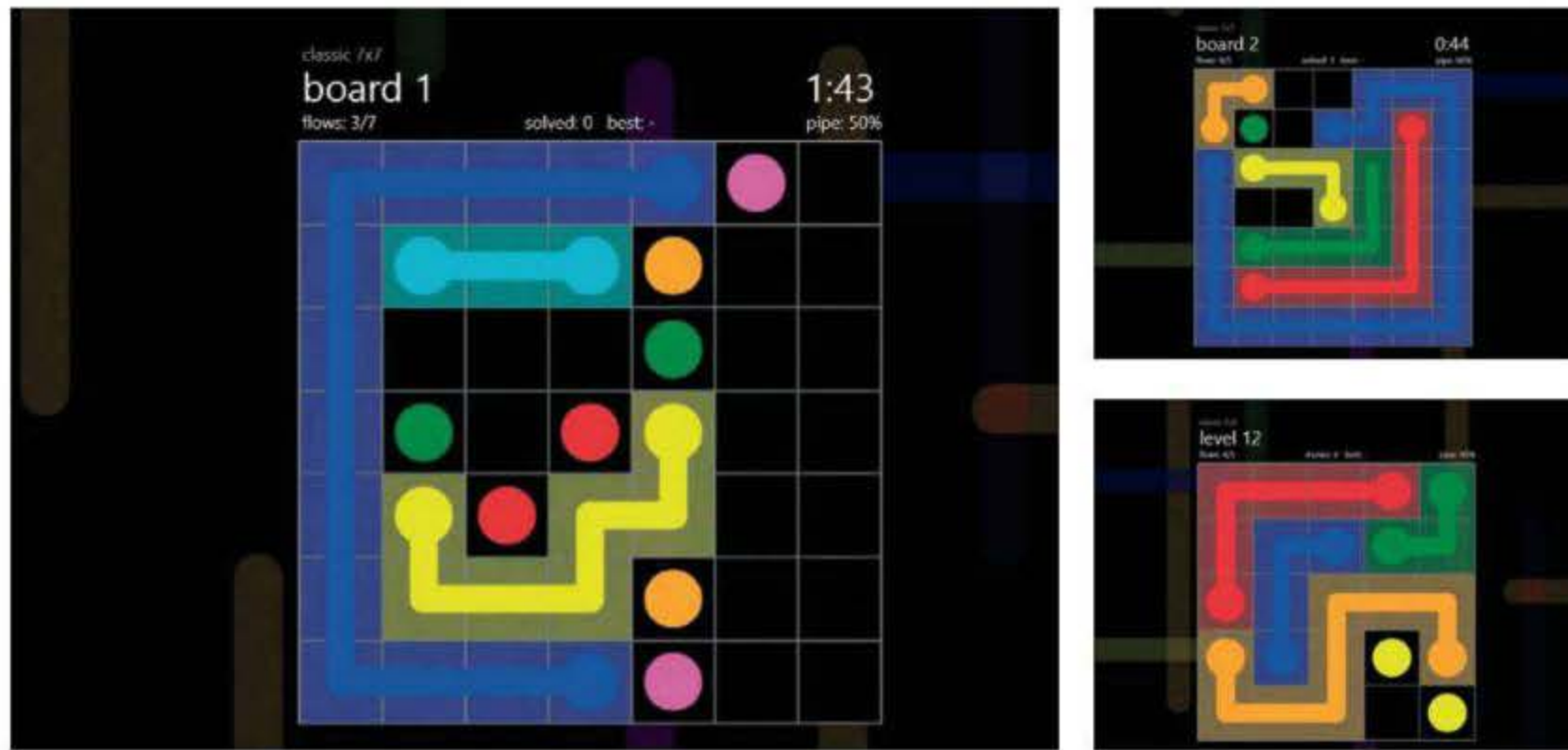
Flow

It may only take a few moments to learn how to play this colourful and attractive looking puzzle game, but before you know it you'll be completely hooked

■ PRICE FREE ■ COMPANY BIG DUCK GAMES bigduckgames.wordpress.com

PROS
Simple to play; 300 levels of increasing difficulty

CONS
Fiendishly addictive

OVERALL SCORE
★★★★☆

Flow is one of those fun games that appeals due to its initial simplicity, then hooks you in before you know it. The game was originally written for Windows Phone and is thus fairly stripped back and lacks frippery. In the best tradition of such games, the simplicity belies how tricky it can be complete levels, making it difficult to resist another quick game or six.

The aim is to join up blobs of the same colour on a grid of between 5 x 5 and 9 x 9 squares. This is easy enough – drag a line between one coloured blob and the corresponding one to link them up. The tricky part of the game is that you must fill the board with these flowlines or pipes and that these can't overlap. Thankfully, if you run into, say, a blue pipe when attempting to hook up the yellow blobs, all that happens is you break the existing connection and have to find a new route to connect them. There's only one right way of successfully connecting matching colours, so it's best to work out the potential bottlenecks and how to avoid them before you start creating the flow lines on your grid.

You can play against the clock in a time trial or attempt to solve the grid in the shortest possible time. This can be anywhere between 30 seconds and three minutes, depending on the complexity of the grid and the level you're on. Free play is an easier starting point than playing yourself against the clock. Be warned: there are 300 levels to the free play game, with a random generator for the time trials adding even more. By level 10 we found ourselves silently berating ourselves for taking more moves than necessary to complete a level – a sure sign that this game had got under our skin.

Verdict
With attractive vibrant colours and a simple concept at its heart, Flow is one of those games that you can learn how to play within moments but will find yourself pitting yourself against hour after hour. An excellent distraction.

There's only one right way of successfully connecting matching colours, so it's best to work out the potential bottlenecks

Grantophone

Have fun creating your own eery-sounding and otherworldly compositions with this virtual instrument; it's just a shame that you can't save your musical masterpiece

■ PRICE FREE ■ COMPANY GRANT KOT www.grantkot.com

PROS
Fun to play around with; produce otherworldly sounds

CONS
No record option on desktop version; no native save option

OVERALL SCORE
★★★☆☆

This virtual instrument is a hybrid of a piano keyboard and a theremin. If you've no idea what that is, it's the instrument used to create the music for classic 1950s science fiction movies such as *The Day The World Stood Still* and *The Thing (From Another World)*. Grantophone thus produces sounds similar to those you get if you partially fill a glass bottle with water and blow across its mouth. It can also produce much breathier sounds by adjusting the levels of vibrato, noise and reverb that are applied.

The instrument conforms to the notes on a conventional scale and covers four octaves. You can switch on and off phonic effects, and use staccato and sinuous waveforms. The results sound variously industrial and otherworldly.

Although the app works on a regular Windows 8 laptop, you really need a device that supports multi-touch input in order to appreciate the app's phonic capabilities. By pressing several buttons at once and adjusting the volume or strength of an effect, a range of interesting effects can be achieved. Even on a non-touchscreen laptop keyboard, the instrument is quite diverting, but it's with complex sounds that it comes alive.

Unfortunately, it seems rather hit-and-miss whether you end up being able to reproduce combinations of sounds that work well together. There's no record option on the desktop version, though there is on the Windows Phone version, and no native save option. You'll need to remember the key combinations you chose on Grantophone's grid if you want to use this app for composition rather than simply freeform experimentation.

Verdict
With its ability to create eery audio effects, you could use Grantophone to soundtrack a disturbing documentary. A record option and rudimentary pointers on how to make more than mere noise would be welcome.

By pressing several buttons at once and adjusting the volume or strength of an effect, a range of interesting effects can be achieved

Salads

55 recipes

Black & White Mexican Bean Soup

Spiced Pumpkin Fudge

iCookbook

Featuring just under 1,500 recipes, iCookbook is bound to include something that will tempt you into putting on your chef's hat and start cooking up a storm

■ **PRICE** FREE ■ **COMPANY** PUBLICATIONS INTERNATIONAL www.icookbook.com

PROS
Automatically updated with new recipes; difficulty ratings

CONS
Ingredients in US measurements; side-scrolling design flawed

OVERALL SCORE
★★★★☆

Although iCookbook is free, it is listed as a trial version. As we went to press the app offered just under 1,500 recipes. It is, however, automatically updated with new recipes every month, so there's often something new to tempt you into breaking out the weighing scales.

Each recipe has a large photo, a difficulty rating and an indication of how many portions it makes. As we write, the ingredients are, however, given in US measurements, and while there's a unit-conversion tool you can't customise iCookbook so that it displays measurements in your chosen format.

The other aspect that doesn't work well is the side-scrolling design. It will be ideal on a Windows 8 tablet or a touchscreen laptop or PC, but on a standard laptop running Windows 8 Consumer Preview, navigation is not intuitive. Holding down the right arrow key on a laptop keyboard is currently the only option, and this works very slowly and only in some sections of the app.

Better is the fact you can leave iCookbook and have it return to the recipe page you left. Recently viewed recipes and any you mark as favourites appear in panes on the opening screen. The search option is not fully implemented, but you can view by dish and then by ingredient, theme, occasion and cuisine type.

There are, however, no 'lighter choices' such as healthy eating, diabetic, vegetarian or wheat-free either. There is a salad section, but the 55 recipes here are anything but dainty.

Verdict
iCookbook has a great deal of potential and the navigation issues will be sorted out once touchscreen Windows computing is the norm, while the huge photo visuals and large type are ideal for at-a-glance consultation in the kitchen. A search option, healthier foodstuffs and measurements in the user's preferred units will vastly improve this app.

Each recipe has a photo, a difficulty rating and an indication of how many portions it makes

kobo

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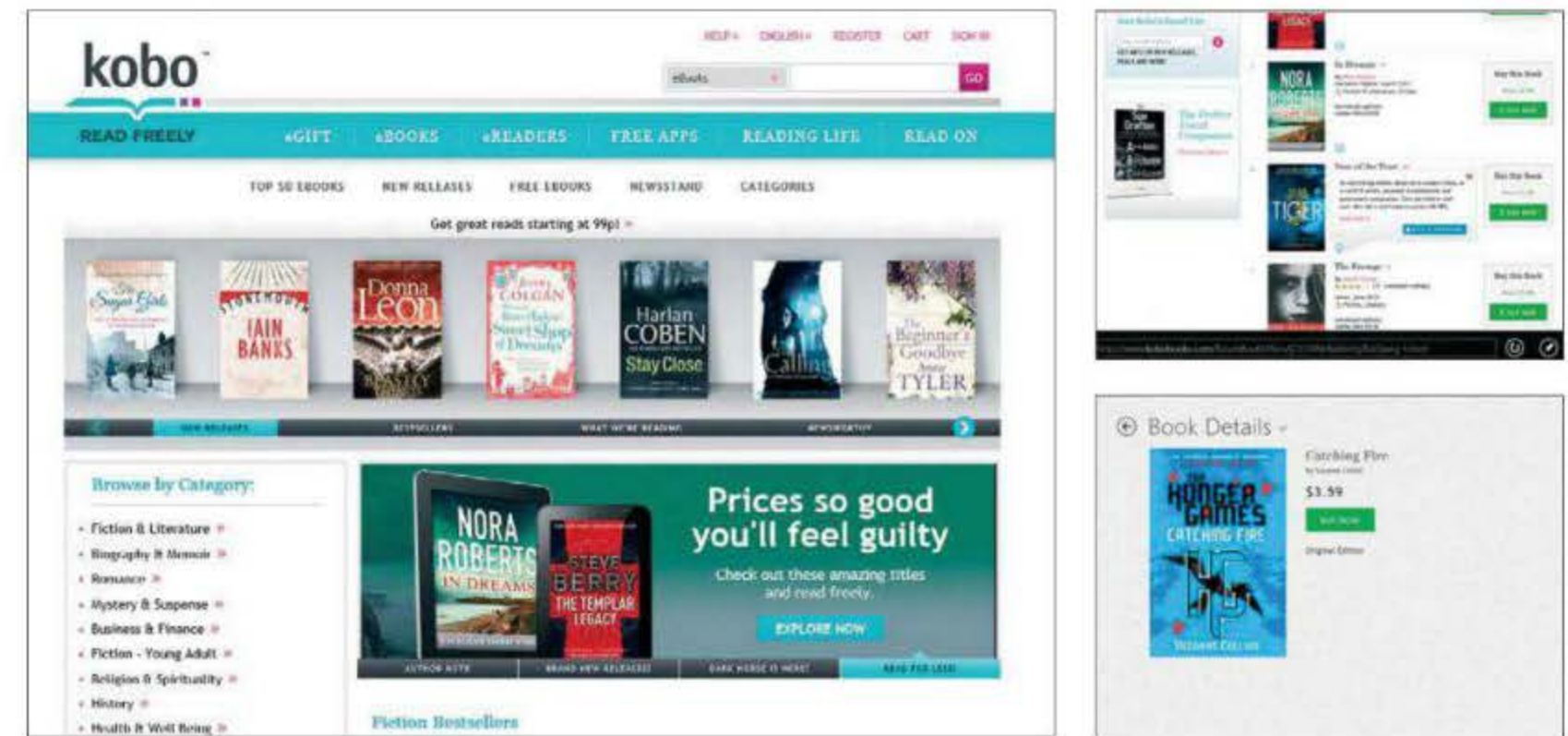
Kobo eReader

Providing a portal to the Kobo store as well as access to around one million free titles, this app will ensure that you'll never be stuck for something to read again

■ **PRICE** FREE ■ **COMPANY** KOBO www.kobobooks.com/uk

PROS
Buy titles from within the app; a million free books to choose from

CONS
Books priced in dollars; titles can take a couple of hours to download

OVERALL SCORE
★★★★☆

Kobo is both an eBook reader brand and a portal for buying eBooks. Its setup involves creating an account via a link within the Kobo app. Once logged in, you can browse the store for new releases, bestsellers or classics that are offered for free. Around a million titles are available without buying, and to Kobo's credit there's a great selection of classics, ranging from Mark Twain and Oscar Wilde to James Joyce and Aesop. You can add items to your Kobo library or download the ePub books directly to the current device.

For more up-to-date publications it's worth looking through the 'from 99p' section. Titles such as Nick Hornby's *Juliet, Naked* and Alexander McCall Smith's *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* appear here. Descriptions of many eBooks can be viewed by hovering over the 'I'. Not all of this works as well as it should with the Windows 8 app itself, though. Having logged in with your Kobo account details, you're presented with a choice of bestsellers, featured and new titles – free and cheap books are not present. Instead, you can choose only from among non-discounted titles.

While the website lists books in sterling, within the app itself everything is priced in dollars, at press time. Before you can use the Kobo service, you'll have to register a credit card with the it. You also need to be patient about accessing books you've bought and downloaded. The free books that we expected to find in our library initially failed to appear in our Kobo account, but were available for download and local reading a couple of hours later.

Verdict
Kobo looks great and will be an excellent option for tablet users of Windows 8 in particular. Right now, there are glitches to be addressed, but we're sure that these will soon be ironed out. Just remember that the best value books seem to be restricted to Kobo's web portal.

Around a million titles are available for free, and to Kobo's credit there's a great selection of classics

MusiXmatch

If you're a karaoke fan and want to sing along to the latest chart hits, then this app allows you to download both the tracks themselves and their lyrics

■ PRICE FREE ■ COMPANY MUSIXMATCH www.musixmatch.com

MusiXmatch is the sort of app that's likely to appeal to karaoke fans. It provides the lyrics to the latest chart toppers, so you can sing along with them. It has three basic screens – a UK one and a US one, plus a 'Top World' screen. Currently, there's little variation between the three pop charts listings – Katy Perry, One Direction and Justin Bieber appear in all three.

The bestselling songs are shown on each of these main screens – click on a location to view more bestsellers for which MusiXmatch has lyric listings. Lyrics are shown in large type and fit on a single laptop or tablet screen.

We like the fact that there's no distracting frippery on the lyric page. Usefully, you can buy any songs that aren't in your library by right-clicking and bringing up the listing on the 7digital music download site. A 10-second preview is given for each track – we used this as a handy reminder of each song should sound before launching into our own take using the MusiXmatch lyric sheet.

In theory, you should also be able to queue up songs to play from a music-streaming service. Unfortunately, the 7digital Player didn't want to work with our Consumer Preview, though we were able to access our previously purchased music and download and play that.

It would also be more useful if MusiXmatch could browse the tracks in your Windows Media Player library then go online and hunt down lyrics for them. However, at present the app works only in the other direction. Should a listed song you want to sing along to also be in your Windows Music Library, you can tell the app as much and it will play it while you sing.

Verdict
MusiXmatch is very promising, but limited in its present form. Once search and the ability to call up songs from your own music library are added, we'll be limbering up our vocal chords and joining the cats' chorus.

We like the fact that there's no distracting frippery on the lyric page

News Republic

If you're a news junkie but have no interest in celebrity gossip, then this news aggregator, which lets you customise the type of story that appears, is for you

■ PRICE FREE ■ COMPANY MOBILES REPUBLIC www.mobilesrepublic.com

News is a quite particular thing. It's only news if it's about places, people and happenings that are pertinent to you. That sounds rather narrow-minded, but it's largely true to say that what's news to you is likely to be irrelevant to someone else. This is what makes this app so good. It doesn't just shovel in the latest celebrity tidbits and headlines from CNN – it tailors the news. Specifically, it provides news stories from your own country by default.

Another of the app's strengths is that it doesn't just deliver headlines. It provides a content too by serving up links to associated articles. Headlines relating to the extradition of Abu Hamza offered links to the European Court of Human Rights, other stories about the suspected terrorist, but also ones about the role of the home secretary and about Theresa May in particular.

We also liked the stripped back interface that News Republic offers. If a story looks interesting, you can read it and then browse related stories by clicking a thumbnail to the left when you're ready. For a quick digest, you can limit the stories to just 'Top news', while 'Videos' lets you give your eyes a rest and view mainly more light-hearted pieces.

We're surprised to find no native story-sharing options within News Republic for Windows 8, but if you just have to tweet something each entry has a link to view it on the web. Refreshingly, this app is so well written that you can then head back the desktop (though not News Republic itself) after your online diversion. Most browsers just leave you hanging.

Verdict
With a good cross-section of news sources, the ability to customise stories that appear and automatic delivery of stories from your own country, News Republic is the best news aggregator we've seen in a long time. It also works better on Windows 8 than almost any other Metro app we've tried to date.

If a story looks interesting, you can read it and then browse related stories by clicking a thumbnail
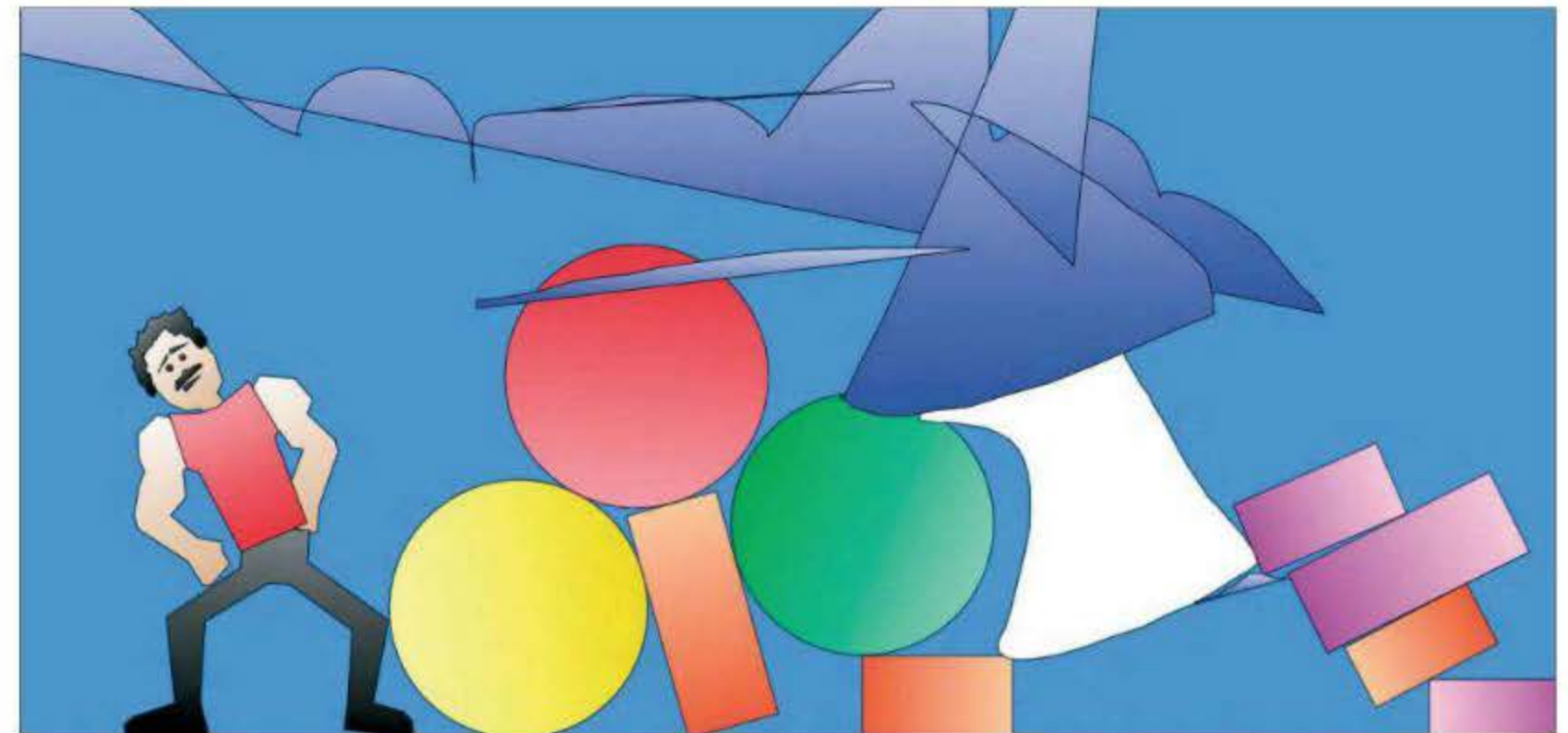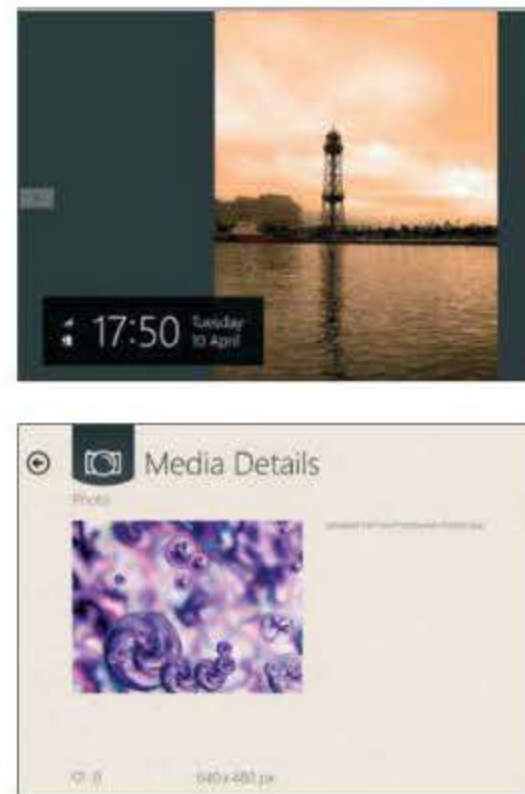
Photobucket

Photobucket is a curious hybrid of a photo viewer and semi-social site, and allows you to upload your favourite images and then share them with others

■ PRICE **FREE** ■ COMPANY **PHOTOBUCKET** www.photobucket.com

PROS

Upload your own photos; share favourite images with others

CONS

No editing or effects tools; can't move photos around at will

OVERALL SCORE
★★★☆☆

Photobucket is a curious app, and is from the same tradition as the better-known Flickr. You can view your own photo collection as well as images that others have posted. On Windows 8, it works well as a viewer, but there are also tools to tag and comment on photos. If you've got a Photobucket account you can also upload you own photos to the site, though, tagging needs to be done from outside the app.

We were also surprised to find no editing options within Photobucket in Window 8. It merely lets you rename files. The web-based version has plenty of editing and effects tools, but they haven't been ported to this version. With a touchscreen at its disposal, we'd have hoped the app would at least let us treat our screen like a pinboard and move photos around at will. Unfortunately, Photobucket doesn't do any of this – it just shows us the photos we can already view through Windows 8's Photos app, plus a collection of images on the web.

Each day, there's a new showcase of subjects to peruse, so one day there were Bubbles and Backgrounds, and the next black and white photos. These can be saved to your PC and you can also upload your own.

Photobucket has some good photos, but there's also a lot of zany shots and so-called funnies. The tagging is down to the individual user, so what's a funny photo to one person may be less so to another. Any images that particularly appeal can be Favorited or shared using the integrated Mail function. In fact, rating others' work is part of the point of Photobucket. The more detailed web version covers both photo and videos, and has a more cohesive feel to it.

Verdict

We found Photobucket an odd hybrid of photo viewer and a semi-social site. There's too little interaction to make the latter successful within Windows 8, but it's great for discovering new photos for backgrounds.

Any photos that particular appeal can be Favorited or shared using the integrated Mail function

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Physamajig

This fantastic drawing app allows you to design madcap scenes featuring realistic physics effects and then share your creations with all your friends

■ PRICE **FREE** ■ COMPANY **SPRITEHAND** www.spritehand.com

PROS

Easy to control; create your own scenes and then share them

CONS

None

OVERALL SCORE
★★★★★

The argument for touchscreen interfaces on computers is that you can directly control what happens onscreen. With many of the Windows 8 apps we've tried so far, the number of features have been stripped back to allow for less precise input, but the interactivity has not been commensurately increased. Physamajig is the big exception.

The idea is that you draw something and the action is then played out within the app. Four such examples are provided including 'Man tries to balance', which sees a cartoon man wobble about atop a ball before collapsing into a stack of assorted shapes. You have to help him get up again but, of course, the objects bash into each other with comedic effect. As well as pushing and pulling the pre-built objects, you can create your own – draw a wedge to stop a ball rolling or a seesaw to bounce the man upright.

Other scenes involve a truck careering off a cliff and an overbalancing rabbit with rollers instead of front paws. Once you've got the idea of how drawing extra objects or moving existing ones can make you important to the action, you can create your own scenes and have madcap things happen in those, too.

You can adjust how items behave and, most importantly, save and share your handiwork. Upload your Physamajig scene to the app's portal and see what other people have been inspired to create.

The real success of Physamajig is that it's about imagination and getting involved, rather than being clever in a problem-solving sort of way or artistic enough to draw a convincing shape. We particularly like the fact that there's no undo option, but you can have another bash at a scene, save and replay it.

Verdict

If you dislike prissy drawing apps or want a fun way to show how physics works, then Physamajig is a brilliant starting point.

You can create your own scenes and have madcap things happen in those, too

SlapDash Podcasts

Podcasts remain hugely popular and this app proves that there's still a wide range of audio and video programmes out there, including comedy, sports and politics

■ PRICE FREE ■ COMPANY FROSTY NIXON www.frostynixon.com

PROS
Offers both audio and video podcasts; 12 categories on offer

CONS
No option to pause playback or stop podcasts completely

OVERALL SCORE
★★★★☆

Podcasts have largely dropped off the radar – catch-up TV and radio shows seem to have replaced them. However, there are still plenty of shows out there, reflecting the fact it's still a useful medium for sharing your enthusiasm for a topic. Podcasts are also ideal if you have limited bandwidth to enjoy streamed content, and shows can be packaged up as relatively small downloadable files for offline listening.

These aspects are also useful from a broadcaster's point of view, while the fact that you can record and upload an audio file using just a microphone and laptop is also appealing. SlapDash Podcasts acts as a useful portal for discovering such broadcasts. It serves up programmes organised into a 12 different categories, ranging from health, business, sports, technology and politics to comedy and movies. A lot of the content takes the form of video podcasts. The library lets you browse by all content, or either just audio or video. There are some big names here, but not everything is worth tuning in to.

The fact that SlapDash offers no option to stop or pause playback once the video had started irked us. However, this isn't the case with all the programmes offered: *The Guardian's* Tech Weekly audio podcast has playback controls including the option to skip 30 seconds ahead or back. There are other quirks, though, such as a podcast continues to play after clicking away from it, with no option to turn it off; returning to its menu pauses it. Global playback settings for everything that appears in the SlapDash library would work better, though, we understand this a free app that merely assimilates interesting content.

Verdict
SlapDash Podcasts presents a neglected broadcast medium as an attractive package that we found ourselves wanting to explore. We'd like to be able to discover and subscribe to our own feeds, but there's plenty to get stuck into.

The library lets you browse by all content, or either just audio or video
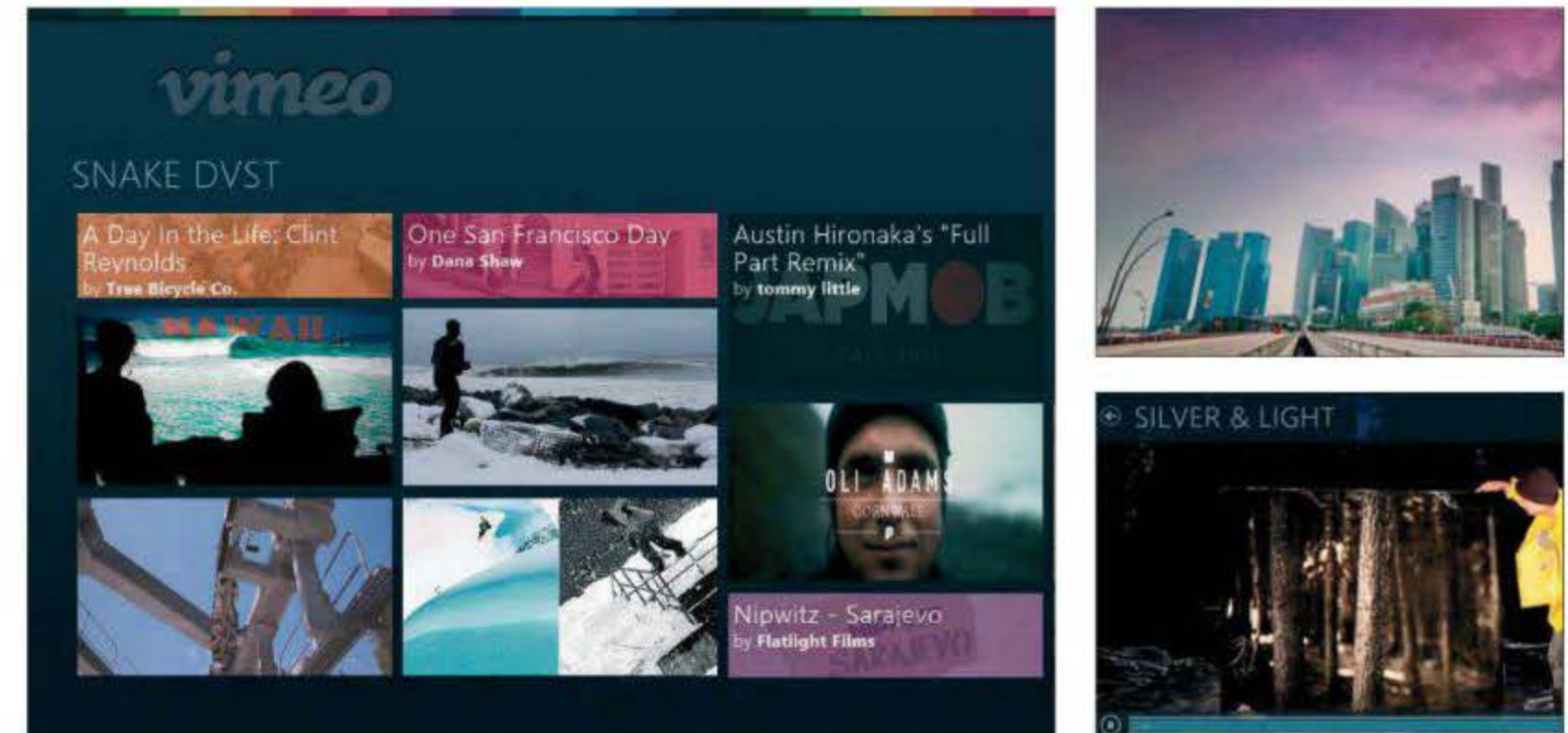
Vimeo

If you want to watch some clever, insightful and inspirational films without the commercial programming of YouTube, then Vimeo should be your port of call

■ PRICE FREE ■ COMPANY VIMEO www.vimeo.com

PROS
Wide range of films on offer; beautifully realised platform

CONS
Can't upload video from the app; limited search options

OVERALL SCORE
★★★☆☆

Vimeo is a video-sharing and -discovery service. It's used by people wanting to create and share their own work, and to view others' handiwork without the commercial programming of YouTube.

The service lends itself well to use with Windows 8, whether on a standard laptop screen or a tablet, since navigation largely consists of scrolling sideways through large thumbnails to see what looks interesting. Unfortunately, for search options, you'll need the web-based version as the app is purely a viewing platform. There's also no facility for uploading footage from the app. Again, this is all administered via your web-based Vimeo account, where you can add film-making notes, add credits, locations, links and tags.

Videos can be star rated, shared and saved for later viewing, while those from channels and groups to which you subscribe can be viewed from within your inbox. While you can also create channels of your own and get email notifications of relevant Vimeo clips, this part is managed via the web.

Viewing choices are limited to Staff picks, Everything Animation, Independent Filmmakers and Music Videos and other such channels. The dozen or more videos we watched were clever, insightful and incredibly well edited. In practice, not everything we played in Vimeo for Windows 8 played flawlessly. There were a number of instances of the video stuttering, simply because of the high-resolution at which it had been recorded causing bandwidth bottlenecks on our usually rock-solid home Wi-Fi connection.

Verdict
Vimeo is a beautifully realised platform for viewing and sharing beautifully crafted videos. The Windows 8 app doesn't offer much in the way of customisation, but as an introduction to a world of stop-motion video and gorgeous cinematography, it comes highly recommended.

The dozen or more videos we watched were clever, insightful and incredibly well edited

Windows 8:
no touch, no fun

Jim Martin, Features Editor, *PC Advisor*
Email: jim_martin@idg.co.uk

> Yes, it's possible to use Windows 8 with a keyboard and mouse, but it takes more effort and more clicks than it does in Windows 7

It's no secret that Microsoft has developed Windows 8 primarily for tablets with touchscreens. Yet, for all the repeated assurances that the new operating system will scale to work on any device with any screen size, there's little evidence that it will.

The main problem centres around the fact that the new Metro user interface, which is geared for fingertip control, is mated to the old Windows desktop, which isn't. It's a bit like having OS X and iOS rolled into one. Microsoft argues that Metro isn't limited to a small screen; it works just as well on a 27in widescreen display as on a 10in tablet. But the real issue is that most people use programs such as Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Adobe Photoshop.

Not one of these programs is Metro-compatible, which hardly comes as a surprise: touchscreens are excellent for consuming content, but not as good for creating it. Few people would choose to use a software- over a hardware keyboard for typing an essay, but most would rather use their fingers than a mouse to swipe through thumbnails of photos or music to find the image or track they're after.

Another problem with Windows 8 for the desktop is that vertical touchscreens don't work. Indeed, Steve Jobs went on record in late 2010 on the subject: "Touch surfaces don't want to be vertical… after a short period of time you start to fatigue, and after an extended period of time your arm wants to fall off. It doesn't work; it's ergonomically terrible."

Laptops are particularly tricky, since their screens are hinged and tend to move backwards when prodded. A touchscreen needs to be rock-solid. The same is true for touchscreen PC monitors: they shouldn't wobble around when touched, and should ideally tilt near horizontal to provide a more comfortable angle. Try propping up your keyboard vertically on the desk and you'll immediately see the problem.

Windows has had the same basic interface for almost 20 years. We're not against change if it improves things, and we're not afraid to embrace new ways of working. The phenomenal growth of tablet sales is testament to this. But to attempt to force this way of working on PCs may be short-sighted, not least because virtually none are equipped with a touchscreen.

Yes, it's possible to use Windows 8 with a keyboard and mouse, but it takes more effort and more clicks than it does in Windows 7. It takes four clicks just to shut down or restart, and that's just one example.

Microsoft will listen to consumer feedback and iron out many of the flaws in the Consumer Preview, but PC manufacturers will also need to sit up and listen. They need to produce touchscreens that tilt back much further than existing designs and remain planted when poked. Finally, software developers need to release Metro versions of their applications so that the old desktop becomes a thing of the past. Until this happens, Steve Jobs' verdict on touchscreen computers will remain true. ■