

NEW YEAR 2018 NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our first newsletter of 2018.

The year started with headline news about security flaws in the processors which power PCs, tablets and smartphones. These flaws are potentially serious but we worry the problems have been over hyped by the media. They are not the sort of flaws which will affect most users. In any case, most of the software vendors, such as Microsoft and Apple, have already patched their products to protect against them. If your systems are up to date, therefore, you are unlikely to be affected.

As with everything related to security, the most important thing is make sure that all your software is up to date and that you have a quality anti-virus product installed. We continue to recommend Bullguard Internet Security, available via our website <http://www.gryphoncs.com>.

Most hacks succeed because usernames and passwords are easily guessed. Always remember to choose complex passwords, a mix of uppercase, lower case, numbers and special characters (e.g. \$,%,# etc.), and change them regularly and keep them secret.

As we all know, the pace of technological change slows for no man. Every day brings new developments. That said, the technology behind PCs and tablets has matured and the main changes are now on the margins, mainly faster processors and memory etc.

The biggest hardware change has been the introduction of Solid State Hard Drives. Whilst they have been around for several years, they are now cheap enough to become mainstream and are set to replace mechanical drives in most new PCs, and certainly in new professional grade laptops. They don't have the capacity of mechanical drives, 512gb being the largest practical size currently available, but are far faster and more reliable. They are typically fitted as the main drive in Desktop PCs, with a larger mechanical drive fitted for file storage. This gives the optimum balance of speed and storage.

Prices generally seem to have stabilised a bit after the increase caused by the Brexit vote, and the subsequent fall in the value of the pound. The typical price of a budget laptop is between £299 and £399. Business or professional grade laptops start at £499. Lightweight touch screen laptops, including designs where the keyboard folds around so you can use the laptop as a tablet, cost anything between £700 and £1250.

If you want a power laptop for photo or video editing then the Dell XPS range is probably the best with prices starting at around £1,650. Their excellent colour reproduction and 4k quality screens are probably the most accurate of any laptop. Apple laptops and PCs are very close in terms of screen quality, with similar prices, and are extremely well built. Apple's top of the range desktops are excellent for complex video editing. The Apple operating system is different to Windows so if you replace a Windows PC with a Mac then you will also have to buy the Mac versions of any software you use.

To combat piracy and to simplify distribution the big software providers, such as Microsoft, now 'rent' out their software on a monthly or annual basis. Microsoft Office 365, for example, starts at £5.99 per month for home users and £7.90 per month for business users. You get free updates when they become available and can generally install the software on up to five PCs legally (depending on

package you subscribe to). You also get a up to 1TB of 'on-line' cloud storage with OneDrive, depending on the package.

Adobe Creative Cloud gives you access to the full range of Adobe products, including Photoshop, Lightroom, Premier Pro, After Effects, Dreamweaver and InDesign. Prices start at £9.99 per month for the Photography package, rising to £49.99 per month for the full range of products. As with Microsoft, Adobe also provide a large amount of 'on-line' storage, as a part of the deal.

If you don't need the all the features of Photoshop there are a couple of excellent free photo editing programs that you can download from the net. IrfanView is an absolute must for any photographer, enabling batch renaming and resizing etc of photos. The Gimp is also well regarded. The Windows Store also has several alternatives which offer more basic features.

Aside from Microsoft and Adobe, DropBox is probably the best-known cloud storage service. Whilst it's aimed at businesses, it's does offer free accounts with 2gb free storage which anyone can subscribe to. Google offer Google Drive, with up to 15gb of free storage.

Apple also offers free cloud storage, which also has the additional benefit of enabling you to back-up your iPhone or iPad (if you have one). When I got my new iPhone X it only took a few minutes to install all the Apps etc. I had on my old iPhone and configure it with the same settings and accounts etc. You can also subscribe to their 50gb service for as little as £0.79 per month, 200gb for £2.49 or 2TB for £6.99 per month.

The advantage of 'cloud' storage is accessibility, reliability and backup. Your data can also be accessed from any other PC, tablet or mobile phone simply by logging on to your account (or installing the relevant app). Your data is automatically backed up so is safe from hardware failure. All providers claim your data is securely encrypted so only you have access to it. The downside of cloud storage is that you must have a fast and reliable Internet connection to get access to documents.

We are often asked which Tablet is best. Generally, you get what you pay for in life and that is certainly true of tablets. Apple iPads are undoubtedly the best. However, like Apple products generally, they are not cheap.

The alternative to an Apple iPad is an Android based tablet, which tend to be cheaper, some under £100. They are manufactured by scores of different companies. Some of the well-known brands, such as Samsung, are fine but I would avoid the cheaper, obscure, brands as service and software updates can be a problem. Build quality will also be inferior and mean they won't survive day to day knocks. iPad screens can be replaced if they are broken, whereas Android screens are more difficult to repair.

Our recommendation is to buy an iPad if you can afford one.

Finally, I just wanted to give a quick review of the latest iPhone x. At over £1000 to buy outright it's the most expensive phone of the market, although the various pay monthly deals make it more affordable. It is certainly the best iPhone yet. I love the face recognition feature which means not having to type access codes or passwords etc. to log in. The camera is superb, with a wide range of features and 'in phone' editing. The screen is excellent. Battery life is good, better than previous models. All in all, a great product.