



Newsletter No 36

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Introduction

Again, a thank you to my customers. I enjoy what I do and it is a hobby as much as it is a business to me. I have always been fascinated by technology. I do my best to help other people with their issues and I have gotten very expert at what I do over the years. I started Ashton Technology back in 2008 so that is 18 years. I was previously a Software Engineer doing banking software then branched into Windows programming. In 2026 the software, hardware and internet are to a much higher standard than back then. It needed to be although by 2008 we were already well on our way to what we have today.

Windows 11 is a solid product, and I would encourage anyone still on Windows 10 to upgrade. You can enrol in a critical upgrades program which gives updates until October 2026 if you really want to remain on Windows 10. I recommend upgrading soon while RAM (memory) prices haven't filtered through to retail stores. I have already been hit and so I now only offer 16G RAM in my custom-built systems rather than 32G. The price of RAM went up 400% over

a few months in 2025 and the price has stayed elevated.

My website www.perthpc.com.au gets quite a bit of traffic and the link to this newsletter is hosted on that website as a PDF that is uploaded. The website is hosted by Thryv and is totally safe and secure. The PDF of my newsletter can be downloaded onto your computer, or you can print it out.

CoPilot AI is essentially free and is available as an app on Windows or via the Edge browser. The equivalent on Google is Gemini which Apple is going to use for Siri later in 2026. I find CoPilot extremely useful, even indispensable and I use it on customer calls as well to quickly find answers and information I need. It helps provide better service to customers as there are so many weird and wonderful things that happen and also what Microsoft tell me yesterday may have changed today.

I update this newsletter, only as needed, and most sections will not change at all. Please just browse what is of interest to you.

Chit-Chat

First off, if you have a paper shredder, it does require lubrication. Invest in the proper oil and when you empty the bin, put some oil across a piece of paper and run it through. A good shredder can last a very long time if it's treated properly.

Another option is to get Officeworks to shred paper for you. I had about 20 kg shredded recently for \$20, which I consider very good value — and it saved me a lot of time.

Treat yourself and get some Google Speakers, even if it's just one. You can talk to them, use them for radio and music, and control smart devices. You do need a music subscription if you want music, but even without one you can stream radio — my dog Ringo (my chug) likes 96FM.

There are similar systems from Amazon and Apple, but I find Google works best in practice. I use the Google Home app on my phone to turn lights and appliances on and off, even when I'm not at home. I use this on my iPhone, so Google works across platforms.

For phone and laptop charging, I suggest getting a multi-port charging adapter from places like Harvey Norman or JB Hi-Fi. This is much neater than having multiple individual chargers.

My personal suggestion for an office chair is simple — try a kitchen chair. It works well provided your desk is a standard height.

If you're with Telstra, make sure you use your Telstra Rewards Store points. There are some genuinely useful items available just for points.

I love my iPhone, but Siri still needs improvement. Google Assistant is more useful in practice.

And finally, AI is here, and I'm sold on it as it stands today — and it will continue to improve. AI tools work well on both Android and Apple devices, and used sensibly they can be genuinely helpful.

The Funny Bone

I changed my password to *incorrect*. Now when I forget it, the computer reminds me.

The problem with computers is that they do exactly what you tell them to do.

There are two types of people: those who back up their data, and those who will.

If computers get too quiet, I start to worry.

I used to think cloud storage meant my files floated away if it rained.

A computer once beat me at chess, but it was no match for me at kickboxing.

I don't need anger management — I need faster internet.

The cloud is just someone else's computer.

Experience is knowing what *not* to touch.

Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Some people worry that AI is close to human-level intelligence, often referred to as *Artificial General Intelligence (AGI)*. The short answer is **it isn't** — not remotely close.

What we have today are very capable, practical tools: fast, pattern-matching systems that can save time and increase productivity but **still require human oversight**.

I use Microsoft Copilot regularly, but there are other tools such as ChatGPT and Google Gemini.

What Copilot is good at

- Drafting emails, documents, and summaries
- Turning messy notes into something readable
- Helping brainstorm ideas
- Explaining technical concepts in plain English
- Speeding up repetitive or routine tasks

For everyday work, it's like having a very fast assistant who never gets tired.

What Copilot is not

- It is **not** self-aware
- It does **not** have goals or intentions

- It is **not** infallible — it can be wrong, vague, or overly confident
- It is **not** a replacement for human judgement

Think of AI as a **power tool**, not a person. A nail gun doesn't build a house on its own — but it makes a builder faster.

Why people worry about AI

A lot of concern comes from:

- Sensational headlines
- Movies that blur fiction and reality
- Tech companies competing for attention
- A natural human instinct to be wary of new technology

The reality is that today's AI systems are specialised and limited. They don't understand the world the way humans do, and they don't have emotions or intentions. They are excellent at recognising patterns, not at consciousness.

AI today is extremely useful, but it isn't magic. It's a tool — and like any tool, it works best in skilled hands.

For home users, AI works well as a general-purpose helper.

For work use, **always review AI-generated information before relying on it** — especially if accuracy matters or your job depends on it.

Copilot vs ChatGPT vs Gemini

Microsoft Copilot

An AI layer built into Windows, Microsoft 365, and Edge. Well integrated with Microsoft products and workflows.

ChatGPT

OpenAI's standalone conversational AI. Known for creativity, reasoning, and general knowledge.

Google Gemini

Google's AI model integrated into Search, Android, and Google Workspace, with strengths in real-time information and Google ecosystem tasks.

Phone and Tablet Setup

I set up phones, tablets and TVs as well as computers.

I recommend customers add their email to their phones as this can be helpful if you do have a computer problem that stops you getting emails.

Phones and tablets rely on you logging in with your Google or Apple account. The newer and better phones automate a lot of the setup required and transfer your photos, contacts and messages from either the cloud or by direct transfer between the phones.

If you are struggling with this then I can help. It sounds easy and it often is but with multiple accounts and forgotten passwords and security issues, it can get more complicated than you might think.

Windows 10 End of Support

Microsoft originally were going to end support October 2025 but changed their approach several times.

Microsoft have settled on offering critical updates only through to October 2026 for free if you enrol for them in Windows Updates. This requires that you have a Microsoft Account so if you use a Local Account you don't have access to this.

Windows 11

Windows 11 is a free upgrade for all Windows 10 computers.

Microsoft have requirements for a feature called TPM and the CPU must be recent. If you have bought a computer in the past 5 years, then it most likely will be upgradeable to Windows 11.

A downloadable app called PC Health Checker can check this for you. A BIOS upgrade may be required for you to access TPM. If you are unsure, then please contact me. This is probably out of the comfort zone of most of my customers in my experience so far.

I haven't had any issues so far upgrading customers to Windows 11. I mean zero failures during the upgrade process. The only issues will

be it will look different, and a few controls are maybe not where you expect to find them.

Scams

I should start by reassuring customers that YOU let people into your computer and that is when the damage happens. It is relatively rare to have someone who's computer is infected and compromised by stealth. The scams work by tricking you into giving them access. If you don't then generally not much can go wrong. Modern computers with Windows 10 or Windows 11, even with the included Microsoft Security, are reasonably secure. If you want even better security, then I sell ESET which I have sold for several years and I am the intermediary so you will never get bothered directly by ESET.

Scams are big business of course and I think getting worse each year. These scams operate by phone, text and email. Anyone phoning you and wanting uninvited access to your computer or any personal details should be suspect. The key thing is people are scammed rather than computers although they can put things on your computer once they get access.

A common scam is a false web page with alarms and WARNINGS that you have been infected and to call a phone number for help. These are scams and most of the time you can clear the web page and reset the browser. These people are mostly not very talented and mostly just con you for credit card details once you phone them. I get called out often just to make sure that they haven't done anything else. They can use a program such as Any Desk or similar remote-access tools to access your computer. These people once contacted, often masquerade as technical help people who then charge you high prices using your credit card. These people are both the fireman and the arsonist, so what they are doing is criminal fraud. They are criminals and should be treated as such. They can also perpetrate much worse damage and losses once you let them into your system.

I got a customer today who said he got an email trying to extort money out of him and saying that they had pictures of him doing things and that they would expose him. I reassured him that this can be ignored but it upsets people.

I remember a 1960s comic, Tom Lehrer, made a joke about a message being received in the

mail...it said "Darling marry me or I will kill myself". He was naturally concerned until he realised it was addressed to "The Occupant". Some things never change.

Passwords are important and you should either keep them safe in a notebook, secure document or use a Password Manager such as LastPass (I use this). The problem with re-using the same password is that if you do get compromised then you may not know which site was compromised, causing you to change many passwords and likewise they may do some guessing and get access to more than one site. Often criminals will give you a compromised password as evidence that they have hacked you. This is where using the same password for years on many sites now puts you at risk as many websites are not that secure (say hobby websites and so on). It pays therefore to protect valuable sites with different passwords, reducing your exposure and giving you the location of the site where your password may have been compromised.

Phishing is where a fraudulent email pretending to be from your Bank, PayPal, Telstra, FedEx, Australia Post and others gets you to login into a fraudulent web page, giving the criminals your username and password. Caution is required in replying to any email. If you have any doubts you can always initiate a contact yourself rather than using the email link.

I have listed some ways to recognise scam emails:

1. The sender address may look similar to a real one but isn't valid i.e. `service@paypall.com.au`
2. The greeting will not contain your name
3. It may contain an attachment which is rare for legitimate emails
4. It may contain click on links (although legitimate emails sometimes have these too)

Remember scams are just that...you get lured into giving away your personal and financial details or passwords. Just be careful. People often get themselves into trouble by going for free offers and the like. If it is too good to be true, then it probably is.

Texts that can steal information or even download malware/viruses onto your phone are also a threat so likewise delete any texts that are suspicious. A

common ploy is you have a parcel waiting. You should just delete these.

If you remember nothing else about scams, remember these few rules. They will prevent the vast majority of problems I see.

- 1. No legitimate company will contact you out of the blue and ask for access to your computer.**
If someone phones you claiming to be from Microsoft, Telstra, your bank, or a “security department”, it is almost certainly a scam.
- 2. Never act on fear or urgency.**
Scammers rely on panic — warnings about viruses, locked accounts, missed parcels, or money at risk. Real companies do not pressure you to act immediately.
- 3. Never click links or call phone numbers provided in unexpected emails, texts, or pop-ups.**
If you’re unsure, initiate contact yourself using a phone number or website you know is legitimate.
- 4. Do not install remote access software at someone else’s request.**
Programs such as AnyDesk and similar tools are legitimate, but once access is granted, scammers can do anything you can do — and more.
- 5. If you didn’t start the conversation, be suspicious.**
This applies to phone calls, texts, emails, and browser warnings.
- 6. If something feels wrong, stop.**
Take a breath. Close the browser. Hang up the phone. Scams fail the moment you stop engaging.
- 7. Ask for help early.**
If you are unsure, call me **before** taking action. It is always easier to prevent a problem than clean one up afterward.

Following these rules will protect you from most scams in circulation today.

Viruses and Security

Viruses and malware (a generic term for invaders that aren’t viruses) are a significant issue for Windows and Mac users. I think Mac users are generally much safer and MacOS has built-in security as does Microsoft even if you do not pay for additional security. The Mac is more locked

down and compartmentalised than Windows computers and are also targeted less as the numbers of Macs are far less. Windows Security is very good though and you get very few viruses these days that can take over your computer or spread viruses to another computer.

I would recommend using CCleaner for cleaning and Malwarebytes for checking for malware web browsers. These tools work on both Mac and Windows. Please download these ONLY from legitimate websites such as these:

<https://www.piriform.com/ccleaner/download>.

<http://www.malwarebytes.org/mwb-download/confirm/>.

[AdwCleaner from Toolslib](#)

I am a reseller for ESET security products, and it has been excellent for my customers, and I get very positive feedback. It is a solid product that I was lucky to get to resell.



The most common product I sell is ESET Internet Security for \$179.90 for 3 years for one licence. It is a good product and a good price.

ESET is not only an excellent security product, but I keep your subscription details safe and can email you the complete information you need, download links, passwords and activation codes by a single click from the portal.

I really have to say that other security products have become more aggressive in their approach to customers, upgrading them to products that they don’t need then charging more when they ‘auto renew’. I think Norton is an offender here, a great product but customers consistently complain about aggressive marketing.

My advice on ‘auto renew’ is not to. You need to log into your online account and cancel this. I often do this for customers otherwise they end up paying double what they should.

I find customers, occasionally, with multiple subscriptions running concurrently and this is a

very expensive mistake, and it happens a number of times each year in my visits. You should always check or be aware of when your subscription does expire.

Computer Monitors

In my opinion, **the monitor is the most important part of a computer**. It's what you spend all day looking at, and a good monitor makes a bigger difference to comfort and usability than most people expect.

This is also why I'm not a big fan of laptop screens for everyday use. They're portable — and that's their main advantage — but they are physically small and rarely ideal for longer sessions.

Larger screens make everything easier

A larger monitor gives you:

- more working space
- less eye strain
- easier reading of text
- room to keep multiple windows open

If you use a laptop, connecting it to an external monitor can completely change the experience. You still have portability when you need it, but a proper screen when you're at a desk.

Screen size and resolution

For normal office and home use:

- **24"** works well at Full HD (1920 × 1080)
- **27"** is much better suited to QHD (2560 × 1440)
- **32"** works best with 4K (3840 × 2160)

Larger screens need higher resolution so that text and icons remain sharp and comfortable to read. Modern operating systems handle scaling well, so higher resolution doesn't make things harder to use.

You can't go "too big"

Many people worry that a 27" or 32" monitor will be excessive. In practice, most people adapt very quickly and then wouldn't want to go back to something smaller.

I generally recommend the **largest monitor you can comfortably fit and afford**, up to around 32". It's one upgrade that tends to be appreciated every single day.

The important takeaway

A good monitor improves comfort, productivity, and enjoyment of your computer far more than most internal upgrades.

If you're finding your computer uncomfortable or cramped to use, upgrading the monitor is often the simplest and most effective improvement you can make.



Setting up New Computers or Devices

A significant part of my work involves setting up new computers and devices so they work properly from day one.

This typically includes:

- transferring data from an old computer
- setting up email and accounts
- installing printers and other devices
- configuring security and backups
- making sure everything works the way you expect

In my experience, a properly set-up system saves a lot of frustration later.

Preparation makes a big difference

Setting up a new computer is much easier and faster when some basic information is available beforehand.

If possible, it helps to have:

- Microsoft, Google, or Apple account details and passwords
- Email addresses and email passwords
- Information for any paid software you use
- Details for security software subscriptions
- An idea of what data is important and needs to be transferred

Missing passwords or forgotten account details are very common, and while they can usually be recovered, it adds time to the job.

Phones, tablets, and TVs

I also set up phones, tablets, and smart TVs.

Modern devices can transfer contacts, photos, and settings automatically, but multiple accounts, security prompts, and forgotten passwords can make this more complicated than it appears.

If you're struggling with device setup, it's often quicker and less stressful to have it done properly rather than trying to untangle issues later.

Time expectations

For new desktop systems I supply, I include **around three hours of setup time**, which is usually sufficient for the average home or small business user.

Typical setups generally take **two to three hours**, depending on the complexity of the environment.

If additional time is required due to missing information or unusual requirements, this can always be discussed.

The important takeaway

A new computer should feel ready to use, not half-finished.

Getting things set up properly at the start avoids problems later and makes it much easier to maintain, secure, and back up your system going forward.

Custom Built Desktop Systems

I supply custom built desktop systems for both home and business use. I've been building systems for many years, and the approach hasn't changed much — **get the fundamentals right, and everything else follows.**

Custom systems are not about chasing specifications. They are about reliability, longevity, quiet operation, and easy repair when something eventually goes wrong.

Why desktops still make sense

A desktop computer has inherent advantages over laptops and all-in-ones:

- better cooling and airflow
- quieter operation
- longer usable life
- easier and cheaper repairs
- parts can be replaced or upgraded individually

This is why businesses still overwhelmingly use desktop systems, and why many home users also prefer them once portability is no longer the priority.

Built to last, not to look cheap

Retail systems are often built to hit a price point. This can mean:

- older-generation components
- minimal cooling
- non-standard parts
- limited upgrade paths

My systems use standard, high-quality components chosen for:

- stability
- low noise
- power efficiency
- long-term availability

The focus is on systems that quietly do their job year after year.

Quiet, cool, and efficient

Heat is the enemy of electronics.

Desktop systems allow:

- larger, slower-spinning fans
- proper heatsinks
- better airflow

The result is a system that runs cooler, quieter, and more reliably than compact designs forced to operate at their limits.

Sensible performance choices

For most users, real-world performance comes from:

- fast storage
 - adequate memory
 - responsive systems
- not from chasing extreme specifications.

I currently build systems with **16 GB of RAM**, which is more than sufficient for general home and business use. Higher memory configurations are used where there is a genuine need, such as advanced photo or video processing.

Repairability and upgrades matter

One of the biggest advantages of a custom desktop is that it can be serviced.

If something fails:

- the faulty part can usually be replaced
- the rest of the system remains usable
- downtime and cost are reduced

This is very different to many sealed or proprietary systems that become uneconomical to repair once out of warranty.

Setup and support

My standard desktop systems include **three hours of setup time**, which is usually plenty to configure the system properly and answer questions.

I also support the systems I build. If there is a warranty issue, I come out and fix it — you're not sent back to a retailer or call centre.

The important takeaway

A custom built system isn't about having something exotic or complicated. It's about owning a computer that is **quiet, reliable, repairable, and suited to how you actually use it.**

For many users, this approach provides better value and fewer problems over time than off-the-shelf alternatives.

Servicing

Customers sometimes ask me if a regular annual service is a good idea. The answer is it is a good idea. I find it isn't just the computer that needs servicing, but people also need advice on changes in technology. I often help people setup email better, backups, security, phones and tablets in addition to issues on their computer.

Customers also accumulate annoying issues over time. I suggest just writing them down and when they annoy you enough, give me a call!

I always do security scans to double check that nothing is running on the computer that could be harmful as well as checking security software, windows updates and programs that are running that may be slowing down your computer (and that you don't need).

I also check that important programs are up to date, that your security is up to date and working and that all windows updates have been done.

I check all backups are working. This might mean manual backups to an external drive or automated backups using file history or cloud backup such as OneDrive. It is getting more common now to use OneDrive cloud backup but you usually need to purchase space as the 5G free space is often not enough. You get 1000G of OneDrive storage with

Microsoft 365 subscriptions (Outlook, Word, Excel etc.).

Dust build-up in desktops can cause the CPU to overheat. The critical area is the heat sink, which sits on top of the CPU. It may take some years for this to happen or maybe not at all, it just depends on the environment. It is worth checking yourself and can be cleaned using a compressor. I don't recommend a brush or a vacuum cleaner, a compressor is safer as no contact is made with components.

A laptop can also retain dirt and dust but lack the large heatsinks found in Desktops. Cleaning a laptop might help if there is enough dust in it but access is an issue in a laptop and each laptop has a different design. It may simply not be practical or economic to strip and clean a laptop although compressed air can be used safely enough to unblock vents. Thermal paste typically lasts many years and rarely needs replacing unless there is a thermal issue or the cooler has been removed.

The most common cause of fans running overtime in desktops and laptops is just software related, some program using the CPU which then requires cooling. Obvious vent blockages in a laptop or a blocked Desktop Heat Sink fan (look inside the case), means cleaning must be done. Earlier models of Intel laptops though often ran very hot and even my Lenovo i7 from 2019 often runs hot even when apparently not doing much.

Thermal paste replacement on laptops is not usually the cause of overheating issues.

In most cases, heat problems are caused by dust, airflow restrictions, background software load, or simply the thermal design limitations of modern laptops.

Replacing thermal paste requires almost complete disassembly of the laptop, carries a risk of damage, and does not guarantee improvement. For this reason, I don't generally recommend thermal paste replacement unless there is strong evidence it will help or the laptop is already being dismantled for another repair.

My priority is to fix problems reliably, not gamble on procedures with uncertain outcomes.

Printers – Choosing the Right One

Printers are an area where buying the wrong type can cause ongoing frustration.

Inkjet printers, including EcoTank models, are popular because they are compact and relatively inexpensive to buy. However, inkjet printers need to be used regularly. If they sit unused for weeks, the print heads can block, sometimes permanently. EcoTank printers only make sense if you print **reasonably often**, otherwise they may not be economical.

Laser printers are generally more reliable and better suited to low or irregular use. They start quickly, don't suffer from ink drying out, and can sit unused for months and still work perfectly. For most home users wanting reliability, a monochrome laser printer is often the easiest and least troublesome option.

Printers are also rated for how much they are designed to print. While manufacturers publish technical “duty cycle” figures, the practical takeaway is simple:

- Light, occasional printing → laser printer
- Regular everyday printing → inkjet or EcoTank
- Office or business use → higher-capacity printer or multifunction device

If you scan documents, consider **duplex scanning**. Many documents are double-sided, and without duplex scanning it becomes slow and frustrating to work with paperwork.

If you use Apple devices, make sure the printer supports **AirPrint** before purchasing. This isn't available on all models and causes a lot of disappointment after purchase.

If you're unsure which printer suits your needs, I'm happy to advise before you buy — it can save a lot of frustration later.

Laptops

When it comes to laptops, I generally recommend choosing based on **price range, build quality, and what you actually need**, rather than chasing specifications.

A reasonable quality laptop typically starts around **\$800**.

The next step up with better performance and screens is around **\$1200**, and premium designs can range from **\$1600 to \$3000 or more**. Spending more does not automatically mean you'll get a machine that suits you better — it depends on how you use it.

Please don't buy the cheapest laptop you can find. Very low-cost laptops often feel slow, have mediocre screens and keyboards, and don't age well. What looks like a bargain at purchase time often becomes frustrating within a year or two.

Both Intel- and AMD-based laptops can be very good today, and most major brands offer a range of quality levels. A \$2500 laptop is a very different machine to a \$400 special, even if they share a brand name.

Apple laptops are also excellent machines, but switching from Windows involves a learning curve. After many years of using both, I still find Windows easier for most customers, and I generally recommend staying with what you're comfortable using unless you have a good reason to change.

One important consideration with laptops is **repairability**. Modern laptops are very compact, run hotter than desktops, and are often not economical to repair once out of warranty. For this reason, I strongly recommend purchasing an **extended warranty** if it is available — especially for higher-priced models. Vendor on-site warranties, such as those offered by Dell and Lenovo, can be particularly worthwhile.

Thermal issues on laptops are common, but they are not always easy to fix. Heat problems are usually caused by airflow restrictions, dust, software load, or the limitations of thin designs. More invasive repairs, such as full disassembly, carry risk and don't guarantee improvement. My goal is always to provide reliable solutions rather than gamble on uncertain outcomes.

If you are unsure which laptop to buy, I'm happy to help you choose one that suits your needs before you purchase — it can save a lot of frustration later.

Choosing Between a Desktop, Laptop, or All-in-One (AIO)

There is no “best” type of computer — only the one that best suits how you use it. Most problems I see come from choosing the wrong *form factor*, not from the brand itself.

Desktop Computers

Desktops are the most reliable and flexible option for most people.

They:

- run cooler and quieter
- last longer due to better airflow
- are easier and cheaper to repair
- can be upgraded (memory, storage, graphics)
- support one or multiple large monitors

If portability isn't important and you want a computer that will age well and be repairable, a desktop is usually the best choice. This is why businesses still overwhelmingly use desktop systems.

Laptops

Laptops are chosen primarily for **portability**, and that comes with unavoidable compromises.

They are:

- compact and convenient
- thermally constrained (they run hotter)
- harder and more expensive to repair
- generally not upgradeable beyond storage

Modern laptops are very capable, but thin designs mean heat, noise, and performance limits are a fact of life. For people who genuinely need mobility, laptops are essential — but they shouldn't be seen as a superior replacement for desktops.

Extended warranties are strongly recommended for laptops, as out-of-warranty repairs are often not economical.

All-in-One (AIO) Computers

All-in-Ones sit somewhere between desktops and laptops.

They:

- reduce desk clutter
- combine screen and computer into one unit
- are simple to set up
- look neat in home environments

However, they share many of the drawbacks of laptops:

- limited repairability
- limited upgrade options
- reliance on screens that cannot be reused if the computer fails

An AIO can be a good choice where space, appearance, and simplicity matter — as long as expectations around longevity and repair are realistic.

A simple way to choose

- **Maximum longevity, performance, and repairability** → Desktop
- **Portability required** → Laptop
- **Clean setup, minimal cables** → All-in-One

If you're unsure, I'm happy to help you decide before purchasing. Choosing the right type of computer upfront avoids frustration and unnecessary expense later.

Wi-Fi Issues

Wi-Fi problems are common, and they're not always easy to solve. The issue is often not speed, but **coverage**.

In an average-sized home, good Wi-Fi coverage is usually achievable with a decent router placed in a sensible location. In larger homes, multi-storey houses, or homes with brick, concrete, or metal structures, Wi-Fi can become unreliable.

Router location matters

Wi-Fi works best when the router is:

- near the centre of the house
- elevated (not on the floor)
- away from heavy brick walls, metal cabinets, and appliances

In many homes the router location is determined by the NBN connection point, which is often not ideal. Moving the router — or relocating the NBN connection — can dramatically improve coverage.

ISP-supplied routers

Routers supplied by internet providers are generally **adequate**, but rarely excellent. They are designed to be cheap, simple, and quick to deploy rather than optimised for Wi-Fi range or performance.

Upgrading to a **better-quality router** often provides a noticeable improvement in both speed and reliability.

Wi-Fi extenders vs mesh systems

I generally don't recommend simple Wi-Fi extenders. They can work, but results are inconsistent and performance is often disappointing.

A **mesh Wi-Fi system** is a much better solution for larger homes. Mesh systems use multiple access points working together under a single Wi-Fi name, allowing devices to seamlessly move to the strongest signal as you move around the house. When set up properly, they provide far more reliable coverage than extenders.

I've set up several mesh systems and have been impressed with the real-world results.

Wired connections still matter

Where possible, a **wired Ethernet connection** is always more reliable than Wi-Fi.

Ethernet-over-Power adapters can be a useful solution, allowing network connections to travel

through household power wiring. These work best when plugged directly into the wall rather than through surge protectors. They can provide a stable connection for devices such as TVs, streaming boxes, or desktop computers.

The important takeaway

Many Wi-Fi problems are caused by:

- poor router placement
- building construction
- inadequate routers
- unrealistic expectations of Wi-Fi coverage

They are not usually caused by the internet service itself.

If Wi-Fi coverage is unreliable in your home, I can help assess the layout and recommend a practical solution rather than guessing or trial-and-error purchases.

Email for Home and SOHO

For most home and small office users, **online email services** are the simplest and most reliable option.

Services such as **Outlook.com (including Hotmail), Gmail, and Yahoo** are designed to work equally well on computers, phones, tablets, and web browsers. They store your email online, meaning you don't need to worry about losing mail if a computer fails.

These services also support modern security features such as **two-factor authentication**, which makes them very difficult to compromise.

Using webmail directly through a browser is often the easiest option and avoids many configuration issues entirely.

Email Accounts: IMAP versus POP (what actually matters)

There are two main ways email can be delivered to a computer:

IMAP (recommended)

IMAP keeps your email synchronised with the mail server. Messages remain stored online and stay in sync across all devices. This is the best choice if you use a phone, tablet, or more than one computer.

POP (legacy method)

POP downloads email onto one computer only. If that computer fails and there is no backup, the email can be lost. POP accounts also tend to cause problems with modern backup systems such as OneDrive.

POP accounts are largely outdated and are best avoided unless there is a very specific reason to use them.

Outlook – Classic vs New Outlook

There are now **two different Outlook programs**, which has caused a lot of confusion.

Classic Outlook

This is the traditional desktop version that comes with Microsoft Office or Microsoft 365 subscriptions. It is powerful, feature-rich, and still required for many workflows. I continue to use Classic Outlook myself.

New Outlook

New Outlook is a newer, mostly free application that behaves more like webmail. It looks different and currently lacks many features found in Classic Outlook. While it works for basic use, it is not yet a full replacement.

This change has caused several call-outs where Outlook suddenly looks unfamiliar or behaves differently. If Outlook changes unexpectedly, this is usually the reason.

Email for Business Users

If you have a **domain name**, business email is best hosted on **Microsoft 365 with Exchange Online**.

Business email:

- stores mail securely in the cloud
- synchronises across all devices

- includes calendars, contacts, and shared mailboxes
- supports strong security features and recovery options

Microsoft 365 Business Basic is a popular option for businesses and small offices, providing professional-grade email without unnecessary complexity.

Email: Using Multiple Devices

One of the most common problems I see is email that only exists on one device.

Good email setups:

- work on computers, phones, and tablets
- survive a computer replacement
- don't require manual backups

If your email only works on one computer, or if you are worried about losing years of email history, it's worth having the setup reviewed.

Two-Factor Authentication (2FA)

Two-Factor Authentication (2FA) adds an extra layer of security to your accounts by requiring a second step when sign-ing in, usually via your phone.

This means that even if someone knows your password, they still can't access your account without the second factor.

Where 2FA is most important

2FA should be enabled wherever possible on:

- Email accounts
- Microsoft, Google, and Apple accounts
- Banking and financial services
- Social media accounts
- Cloud storage accounts

Email accounts are especially critical, as control of your email often allows password resets on other services.

How 2FA works in practice

Most commonly, 2FA is handled by:

- an authenticator app on your phone (Microsoft Authenticator, Google Authenticator, Apple)
- a confirmation prompt on your phone
- occasionally, a text message

2FA is usually only required:

- the first time you sign in on a new device
- after logging out
- or when something unusual is detected

It is **not** something you are prompted for constantly during normal use.

Why some people find 2FA annoying

2FA can feel inconvenient if it's new, but it dramatically reduces the risk of account compromise.

Almost every serious account-takeover problem I see could have been prevented with 2FA enabled.

Once set up properly, it becomes routine and unobtrusive.

The important takeaway

If your email and main online accounts don't have 2FA enabled, they are far easier to compromise.

If you need help setting up 2FA or changing authentication methods, I can help make it straightforward.

Password Storage

Passwords are still a fact of life, and the biggest mistake people make is **re-using the same password** across multiple websites.

If one site is compromised, attackers often try the same email and password combination elsewhere.

Why writing passwords down isn't the worst option

Using the same password everywhere is more dangerous than writing passwords down and keeping them somewhere discreet.

A simple notebook kept in a safe place is often **more secure** than password reuse across dozens of sites.

The key requirement is knowing:

- what the password is
 - and which account it belongs to
-

Password managers

Password managers store and generate passwords securely and can synchronise them across devices.

A good password manager:

- allows each site to have a unique password
- reduces forgotten password issues
- works across phones, tablets, and computers

I personally use a password manager, and it has saved an enormous amount of time over the years.

What to store

A password manager (or secure record) can store:

- passwords
- PINs
- security questions and answers
- recovery codes

Keeping this information organised greatly reduces stress when accounts need to be recovered.

Passwordless logins

Some services now support **passwordless sign-in**, using devices or authentication prompts instead of traditional passwords.

This is becoming more common, particularly with Microsoft, Apple, and Google accounts, and is generally more secure when available.

The important takeaway

The goal isn't perfect security — it's **reducing risk**.

Unique passwords and 2FA together provide far better protection than complex passwords alone.

If you'd like help setting up a password manager or improving account security, I'm happy to assist.

Spam

Spam is a fact of life and can't be eliminated entirely. The goal isn't to stop it completely, but to **handle it correctly so you don't make it worse or turn it into a security issue**.

Spam vs scams

Most spam is just unwanted advertising and is annoying but harmless.

The real risk is **phishing**, where an email pretends to be from a legitimate organisation and tries to trick you into clicking a link, opening an attachment, or providing details.

Treat unexpected emails asking you to “confirm”, “verify”, or “act urgently” with caution — especially if they involve money, passwords, or account access.

Using “unsubscribe”

Use the **unsubscribe** option only for companies you recognise and have willingly dealt with before.

Do **not** unsubscribe from:

- suspicious emails
- obvious scams
- emails you don't recognise

Unsubscribing from these can confirm your address is active and result in more spam.

Marking messages as junk

Marking spam as junk helps your email provider learn what you don't want to see. This won't stop messages arriving instantly, but over time it improves filtering.

It's also worth occasionally checking your junk folder to make sure legitimate emails haven't been caught by mistake.

Attachments and links

Be cautious with:

- unexpected attachments
- links that ask you to log in
- emails that don't address you by name

If you're unsure, don't use the links in the email. Go to the organisation's website or contact them directly using known contact details.

Text messages and spam

Spam texts are increasingly common, often claiming:

- you have a parcel waiting
- there is a problem with a delivery
- your account needs attention

These should simply be **deleted**. Don't reply and don't click the links.

The important takeaway

Spam is mostly an inconvenience. Phishing is the real danger.

If you're unsure about an email or message, **don't act on it**. Stop, pause, and ask. It's always easier to delete a message than recover from a mistake.

Computer Backup

Backups are essential if you care about your data. If losing documents, photos, or videos would upset you, then you should be backing them up.

Most data loss doesn't happen dramatically. It happens quietly — a failed drive, accidental deletion, theft, fire, or ransomware. Without a backup, the data is usually gone.

What should be backed up

For most home users, the important data is:

- Documents
- Photos and videos
- Email archives
- Accounting or business data

Programs can be reinstalled. Personal data cannot.

The golden rule of backups

A good backup follows the **3-2-1 rule**:

- **3 copies** of your data
- **2 different types** of storage
- **1 copy stored away** from the computer

This doesn't have to be complicated — it just has to exist.

Local backups

Backing up to an **external hard drive** is simple and effective.

Windows includes built-in backup tools such as File History and Windows Backup, which can automatically copy your important folders to an external drive. These work well but don't provide much reporting, so it's important to occasionally check that backups are actually running.

External drive backups protect against drive failure and accidental deletion, but not against theft, fire, or ransomware if the drive is always connected.

Cloud backups

Cloud backup means your data is copied to servers operated by companies such as Microsoft, Apple, or Google.

This works well for many people and removes the need to manually manage backup hardware. Upload speeds on NBN are generally sufficient for documents and photos, although very large collections can take time to upload.

Cloud backups are convenient, but they are not always suitable for everyone — particularly for very large data sets or users who prefer local control.

OneDrive backups

OneDrive is now commonly enabled by default on new Windows computers.

- Free OneDrive storage is limited
- Microsoft 365 subscriptions include **1 TB of storage**, which is usually plenty for documents and photos

OneDrive works well for automatically backing up Desktop, Documents, and Pictures folders, but space can fill quickly if large photo or video collections are included. If storage fills up, OneDrive will become read-only until space is freed or upgraded.

Some customers prefer not to use cloud backups at all, which is fine — as long as a reliable alternative backup exists.

A note on phones and tablets

Most phones already back up automatically:

- Android phones use Google backups
- iPhones use iCloud

This protects photos, contacts, and settings — but it does **not** back up data stored only on your computer.

Business and advanced backups

For businesses or users with critical data, more robust backup systems are appropriate. Paid software such as Acronis or Backup Assist provides better reporting, multiple backup destinations, and automated monitoring.

Any critical business data should always exist in more than one location.

The important takeaway

If you don't have at least one backup, your data exists in only one place — and that's a risk.

Backups don't need to be perfect, expensive, or complicated — they just need to work.

If you're unsure whether your backups are running correctly, I can check and help put something reliable in place.

Android Your Phone Companion

This very useful app runs on the PC downloaded from the Microsoft Store and on your Android phone. It means you can easily share pictures directly from your phone to your computer and also view and type text messages directly from your computer. It is very useful, and I use it myself. It is, dependent on having the latest version of Android or close to it on your phone.

Home Entertainment

Many of my customers have Smart TVs and Media Players. I can help setup and install these devices or provide the advice you need to make decisions.

Wi-Fi connections are fine but if you can use cabled ethernet, it is better. I use Ethernet over Power Adapters together with a five-port switch at home and have connected Foxtel, the DVD player, the Apple TV and the TV itself to this hub.

Network Attached Storage Devices (NAS)

Network Attached Storage (NAS) devices are not suitable for everyone and are **no longer a default solution** for home users.

With the rise of cloud storage such as OneDrive, iCloud, and Google Drive, many people no longer need a device running continuously at home to store files.

Where NAS still makes sense

A NAS can still be a good solution in specific situations, such as:

- small businesses needing shared local file storage
- very large photo or video collections
- environments with slow or unreliable internet uploads
- users who understand the difference between **storage and backups**

In these cases, a NAS can provide fast local access and centralised file storage.

Important limitations

A NAS:

- requires ongoing maintenance and updates
- consumes power and runs continuously
- is still a single point of failure without a backup
- does **not** replace proper off-site backups

RAID protection helps against drive failure, but it is **not a backup** on its own.

For most home users

For most home users, modern cloud storage combined with a local backup is:

- simpler
- more reliable
- easier to manage
- and less likely to be neglected

Buying a NAS without a clear need usually adds complexity without real benefit.

The important takeaway

A NAS is a **specialist tool**, not a general recommendation.

If you think you might need one, it's worth having a conversation first to determine whether it's appropriate and how it should be backed up. In many cases, simpler solutions work better.

Credit Cards and EFTPOS

I now accept credit cards with NO extra charges (thanks to changing my Merchant Services provider) and EFTPOS for payment. This makes life simpler for me, and it is probably more convenient for customers as well, as the handling of cash is reduced.

Hours of Work

I am available 5 Days and normal business times but feel free to contact me anytime and leave a message. I will try to get back to you as soon as I can.

I do charge extra for call out work outside of 9-5 Monday to Friday or on weekends and Public Holidays. Saturday morning, I will do call out jobs at no extra charge by prior arrangement. I do understand most people must work for a living, so I do make allowances. I also have business customers who can't afford to be off-line for very long.

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