

FIRST
QUARTER

newsletter

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The file system on Windows PCs and Macs is full of folders: Pictures, Documents, Music, and, of course, Downloads. Despite our best efforts, the Downloads folder is often the catch-all, and yours is probably overdue for a cleaning.

The Hoarding Folder

Of all the folders on your PC, there's a good chance the Downloads folder is the messiest. Typically, anything you download or save from the internet is automatically dumped in the Downloads folder—unless you manually change it. So the folder becomes full of ZIP, EXE, PDF, PNG, JPG, MP4, and tons of other types of files.

IT'S TIME TO SPRING CLEAN



YOUR DOWNLOADS FOLDER

It's Time to Spring Clean Your Downloads Folder

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Therein lies one of the problems with the Downloads folder—it's not specific. Pictures and Documents folders have clear labels, and the Desktop is nice for temporary things, but the Downloads folder is very open-ended. Unless you specifically move something out of it, stuff just sits there forever. It's almost like a second Recycle Bin.

These things add up. Without really noticing it, the Downloads folder can become the biggest storage space hog on your computer.

Tip: How much space is your Downloads folder using? In File Explorer on Windows, just right-click it and select "Properties" to find out. In Finder on a Mac, right-click or Ctrl-click the folder and select "Get Info."

Unlike the Desktop—which can also get cluttered quickly—the Downloads folder isn't in your face as often. You may download an executable file, launch it once to install the application, and then never see it again. Slowly but surely, the Download folder gets bigger and bigger.

So, what can you do about it? Well, there are two options. For starters, you can simply take some time to regularly purge the Downloads folder. Do this semi-frequently and it won't be too much of a chore. If you're feeling extra courageous, press Ctrl+A on Windows (Command+A on a Mac) to select everything and then delete it all in one swift action.

The second option is to let your PC handle it. Windows 10 and Windows 11 have a tool called "Storage Sense." One of the features of Storage Sense is called "Automatic User Content Cleanup." Essentially, it can automatically delete certain things when they get old.

With Windows 10, you can set it to automatically delete "Temporary Files" and delete files that have been in the Recycle Bin for over 30 days. Windows 11 gives you some extra fine-tune controls over these settings, letting you choose different lengths of time. You can find it at Settings > System > Storage > Storage Sense.

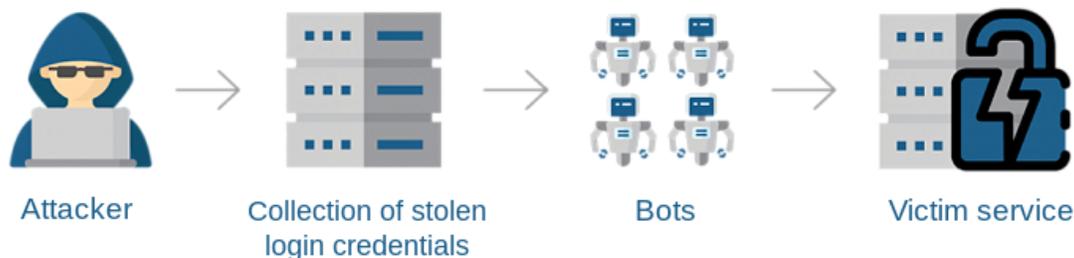
Chances are your Downloads folder doesn't contain anything super important. If it did, you probably would have already moved it to a different folder. Take some time to clear out all those files using up space, or let your computer handle it for you. And while you're at it, take care of that email inbox, too.

What is credential stuffing?

With so many online accounts and services requiring a password to access, the average user has ended up in something of a password overload situation. By way of example, you could have almost 300 individual accounts protected by a login password.

If you use a password manager, not only does this mean you don't have to remember all those passwords, but you also don't have to know what they are. And what they are is long, random, and complex—and protected by both the security measures of the password manager and, where possible, a second authentication factor such as a one-time code or hardware key. Although there have been reports of security issues affecting some password managers, as long as you use a strong and unique master password they remain a safe way to deal with login security across multiple accounts.

For many, however, the solution to password fatigue is a lot simpler and a lot less secure: password reuse. When passwords are shared between accounts, the opportunity for credential stuffing occurs. An automated process of trying lots of logins from previous breaches to access other high-value accounts. This is a prevailing issue where users are using the same id/password combinations for multiple sites and applications. Credential stuffing is successful because many of those combinations are on the dark web from previous breaches.



Credential stuffing is an automated process where a threat actor uses reused log-on credentials stolen from subsequent password breaches on another account. It remains one of the easiest of attack vectors for cybercriminals, but users can easily fight back and protect their accounts in just a few steps.

Everyone by now should be using unique, strong passwords for all of their online accounts, particularly those connected to finances. Entry should also be bolstered by enabling multi-factor authentication. At best, this should be connected via a security key or authenticator app rather than with SMS. Multi-factor authentication at login as default would protect accounts more fully and virtually stop credential stuffing attacks altogether.

Try Using a Smart Plug to Restart Your Router

Power—cycling your router and modem to fix connection issues is a hassle. But with an inexpensive smart plug, it doesn't have to be.

Why Do I Want to Restart My Router?

Any time you call your ISP to complain about a problem with your connection, they will inevitably tell you to unplug your router and modem for thirty seconds and plug them back in. As annoying as it is to get the same advice every time you call, they ask you to unplug your router because doing so fully discharges the capacitors, clears out the memory cache, and usually solves the problem.

If your router is right next to your desk, and it's easy-peasy just to lean over and wiggle the power cord out of the back, you might not find the argument here particularly compelling.

But if your router is located in some far-flung area of your home, perched on a high shelf, or otherwise a hassle to access, then automating the power cycle action with a smart plug is a really useful hack. Rather than fuss with the plug, you can simply tap in an app on your smartphone to cut the power to the router.

And even if your router isn't too difficult to get access to, perhaps you've noticed that there is a pattern to issues with your router. If you find yourself manually rebooting the router via power cycling semi-regularly, why not automate it? With a smart plug, it's absolutely trivial to set up a schedule to do it for you automatically.

What You Need to Automate Rebooting Your Router

You only need one thing to automate power cycling your router and modem: a high-quality smart plug. The high-quality part is emphasized here, not because the electrical demands of home network gear are high but because cheap smart plugs often lack a crucial component: an internal memory cache to retain schedules and timer settings. After all, you don't want a smart plug that turns the router off (and turns the Wi-Fi off with it), but then can't turn it back on.

If you have a separate modem and router (instead of a combination unit), there's no need to use one smart plug for each if you wish to power cycle both your router and modem together. You

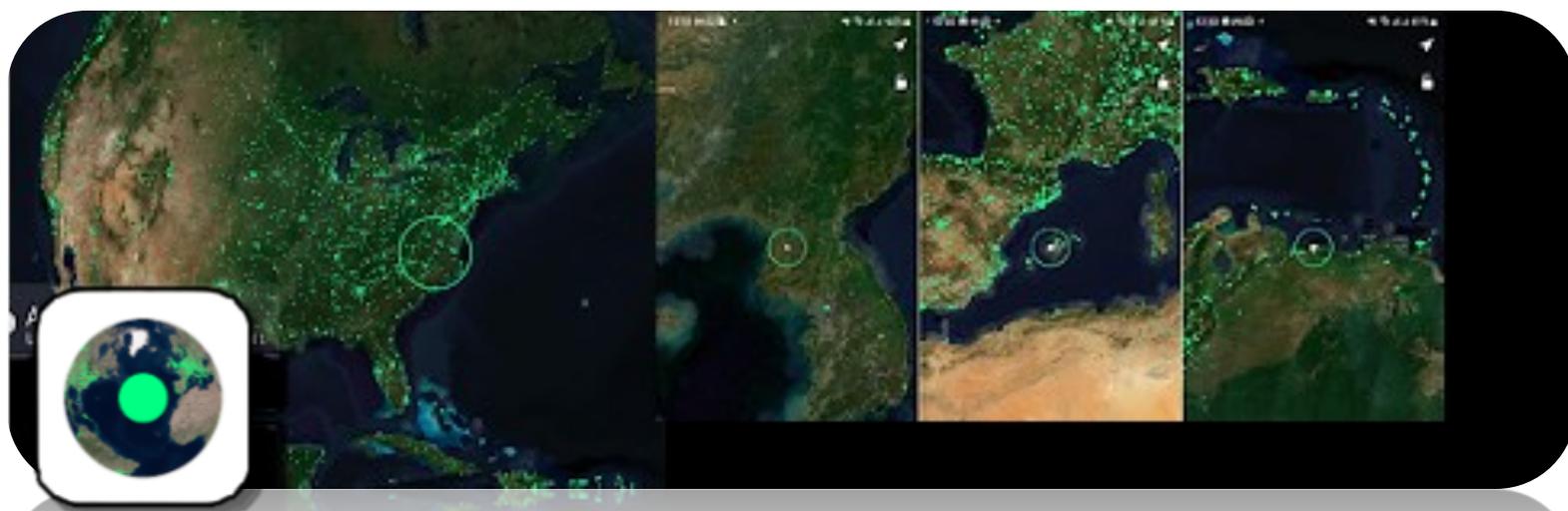


can use a power cord splitter to fit more plugs on a power strip, and they are just as useful to share a single smart plug with multiple devices.

As for setting up your smart plug, once it arrives, it's just a simple matter of setting it up with the particular brand's app. Then you can either restart your router manually by turning the smart plug on and off in the app or automate the whole process. Or, better yet, you can set a schedule.

While something like automating your lights to increase security while you're on vacation requires multiple schedules or randomization features, for power cycling your router, you just need a simple on/off schedule. Pick a time when nobody is home or using the internet, such as the middle of a work day or the middle of the night. You may also want to automate holiday lights or save money on your electric bill by eliminating phantom loads.

This once-a-week power cycle won't disrupt anything, and you'll likely never have to manually power cycle your router again.



“Radio Garden” Lets You Explore the World’s Radio Stations

While radio isn't particularly hard to access — after all, you just need a device capable of tuning into radio frequencies — listening to radio outside of your area can be difficult. This app, however, lets you listen to any radio station in any country around the world, complete with a fun interface.

Radio Garden is available as a web version, and it also has mobile apps for Android and iOS. Its whole premise is that you can listen to a number of radio stations in many different countries and cities — you'll see a bunch of small green dots all across the globe, and those are radio stations that you can tune into immediately. You don't even need a login or any kind of subscription. All you need is a device that can access the internet, like a computer or smartphone.

With this app for example, you can tune into stations from all across the United States, as well as to stations in the South American and European countries. As a true test of its global capabilities, it's even possible to tune into a station located in the isolated city of Pyongyang, North Korea!

It's definitely something you should give a shot, even if it's to have fun for a bit.



Why You Should Be Using a Mousepad

Mousepads have been a staple on desks for decades, but as mice have gotten better, they've become less necessary. You may not technically need one anymore, but you should still use a mouse pad.

When Mousepads Were Needed

The public debut of the mousepad occurred in 1968 during what has become known as "The Mother of All Demos." It was used by Douglas Engelbart as he showed off some revolutionary computer hardware and software.

Of course, mousepads were created in response to computer mice. The first mouse used two wheels to track movement, but they quickly evolved to use trackballs instead. Mousepads were created to increase the friction of the ball in the mouse.

Without a rubberized mousepad, the trackballs could easily slip and not register movement as accurately. If you've ever used one of these ball-based mice without a mousepad, you probably know what we're talking about. A mousepad was very much needed.

Over time, trackballs were replaced by LEDs and photodiodes to detect movement. Those early light-based mice needed special mousepads with patterns to detect movement, but eventually that wasn't necessary either. Which brings us to today, where almost any mouse can be used perfectly fine on any surface.

The Case for Using a Mousepad

Since mousepads are no longer needed to ensure precision of moving your mouse, some people have decided to go without. However, there are still **plenty of benefits to using one.**

First of all, a mousepad is just plain comfortable. Using a mouse—even a fancy ergonomic model—on a hard surface without a mousepad doesn't feel great on the bottom of your palm and wrist. Sure, every once in a while, it's fine, but doing that every day would build up some calluses.

A mousepad not only protects your hand, it also protects your desk. Almost any type of desk surface—especially wood—will start to show wear if you don't have a mousepad. That wear can be anything from oil and grime from your hand to permanent scratches. It's easier to clean or replace a mousepad than get a new desk.

Speaking of wear, **your precious mouse** can also show signs of use much quicker without a mousepad. The little pads that help it glide smoothly will get worn down and scratched, making the mouse more difficult to use. Again, it's easier to use a mousepad than find replacement pads or buy a new mouse altogether.

In general, a mousepad enables a more enjoyable computer experience, and it will contribute to the longevity of your hand, desk, and the mouse itself. That's a win/win/win.

Get Yourself a Nice Mousepad

You may be surprised to learn mousepads have changed a lot recently if you haven't used one in a while. More and more people are using large “desk mats” instead of the classic circle or square mousepad.

A desk mat has all the same benefits of a traditional mousepad, but it goes under your keyboard as well. This means it can double as a wrist pad for typing and act as a coaster for cups and mugs. if you sit at a desk a lot, we highly recommend a desk mat.

Of course, there's still **plenty of traditional mousepads** in all shapes, colors, and patterns to choose from. A mousepad may not be the most exciting computer accessory, but it's one you should have in your arsenal.

