



Welcome to our forum - we hope that you will find the following information helpful. Any organised gathering must have rules and conventions if it is to operate efficiently, and the PC Advisor forums are no exception. On the whole the forum is a relaxed and amiable environment. We try to function with a minimum of red tape, and we want our visitors to feel welcome and able to express themselves in their own way. Ours is a family-friendly forum however, and there are inevitably some do's and don'ts that must be observed if we are to get along together. This guide is intended to help you to feel at home in the forum, and to get the best from the facilities we've made available to you.

Regular forum users will be familiar with much of what follows. Newcomers who may be unfamiliar with web-forum procedures should find it useful. It's your forum, and we hope you'll enjoy your time with us. The guide is divided into sections, starting with the terms and conditions of use.

### Conditions of registration and use

- 1) **Liability** - The forum is populated by fellow computer users who give freely of their own time, and provide advice based on their personal experiences. If you act upon any advice you are given in the forum threads you do so entirely at your own risk. The opinions expressed by registered forum users and by the Forum Editor are not necessarily those of PCAdvisor magazine and/or IDG Communications Ltd., and neither the magazine's staff or IDG Ltd will be liable for the consequences of following advice given by other registered users. You are advised to back up critical data files before making any changes to software or hardware configurations, and to consider seeking professional advice before taking legal action in respect of recommendations made by forum users in the Consumerwatch forum. Opening your computer's case and adding or removing hardware components might invalidate the manufacturer's guarantee or other warranty, and you are advised to check before proceeding. Remember that electronic components are delicate and easily damaged – you should proceed with great care when working inside your computer.
- 2) **Copyright** - By registering for access to our web forum you agree that the copyright in any content you may post to the site passes to PC Advisor upon publication, and that we may reproduce any contribution in whole or in part in PC Advisor magazine or in other IDG Group publications, websites or advertisements without further reference to you. We will not use your real name in any such publication without obtaining your prior consent, implied or explicit.
- 3) **Registration details** - When registering you must provide us with your name, full address (including postal or ZIP code) and email address. Provision of your telephone number is optional. The provision of incorrect or fictitious information may result in your access to the forum being denied without further reference to you. We reserve the right to use other sources to verify that what you have told us is correct and to exclude you from the forum, should any part of the information prove to be false. We may use the personal information you provide to notify you about changes to the site or to contact you for marketing purposes. Please note that certain forum usernames may be unacceptable to us, and we reserve the right to prevent their use.
- 4) **Acceptable content** - We reserve the right to remove your forum contributions without prior reference to you if, in our opinion, the content is inappropriate, may be libellous, or is not in accord with our policies from time to time in force. Any such deletions will be made at our discretion and our decision in such matters is final. The use of obscene or offensive language, sexual references, and expressions of racial, religious or cultural intolerance or personal abuse directed towards another forum user is unacceptable and may result in your further access to the forum being denied without warning.
- 5) **Commercial use** – You may not use our forums to solicit for trade, to offer goods or services for sale, or to advertise your own business in any way. It is permissible to post links to commercial websites in our WebDesign forum, but only in the context of a request for appraisal of the site from a design point of view, or to ask for technical help

and/or advice. Any posts or links which appear to us to have been posted purely for advertising purposes will be deleted without further reference to you.

- 6) **Spam** – the use of our forum for sending spam to other members, or for publishing spam messages in threads is forbidden, and may result in termination of your forum membership without prior warning.

### Forum terminology

The Internet has a language of its own, and although we want plain English to rule the day when it comes to our forum content there are some words which you'll encounter on a regular basis:-

- **Thread** - used to describe a separate forum topic. A thread may be started by any forum member to explain a problem and ask for help - just click on the words 'Start new subject ' that you'll see in the small blue panel towards the top left of the forum sections. It's very important to give your thread a title that reflects the precise nature of your problem – threads called “Please help me” or “Aaaaaargh!!! My computer's gone mad” are not acceptable. Please try to remember to include enough information to enable other members to help. Details of your operating system version, plus a brief description of your hardware/software configuration (if known) are all helpful, and avoid the need for other members to request more information. Threads are archived in our database, and are available for search by other forum members. Searches are based on keywords, so you can see how non-descriptive titles – like the examples given above- will be totally useless.
- **Post** - a message that is 'posted' to a thread by anyone who wishes to contribute. When you click on a thread title it will open to reveal all the messages that have been posted by other forum members. To add your own comments, use the box that you'll see at the end of each thread. You can also post replies to advice offered by other forum members in your own thread.
- **Moderator** - someone who watches the forum for inappropriate thread content. We constantly monitor forum activity and the Forum Editor\* will sometimes remove threads or posts if he believes them to be inappropriate in nature. If you are unhappy about a particular post or thread, or if you want to contact us privately on some other matter you can do so at any time by clicking on the words 'Contact Forum Editor' which you will see in the forum pages. Type your message and click the 'Send message' button; we'll contact you as soon as possible. **Please don't use this facility to ask for help with computing problems** - we can't provide this on a one-to-one basis by email. **Do not post personal messages to the Forum Editor in the forum threads** – use the contact button to send him an email.
- **Refresh** (bump) - if your problem isn't receiving any responses it will gradually slip down page 1 and onto page 2 or 3 - it depends on the number of threads being posted at any one time. You can bring your subject back to the top of the list by posting the word 'refresh' or 'bump' in it. Please don't do this more than once - it can irritate other users, and if you get no response the second time around it's possible that nobody in the forum can help on this occasion. It's rare for that to occur however, and if it should happen it may be worth leaving the thread for a day or so before making the final refresh.
- **Green tick** - this is used to indicate that a subject has been satisfactorily resolved, and can only be placed on a thread by the person who starts it. You'll find the button that does this at the end of your thread. Once there the tick can't be removed, but others may still post comments to it. Before you tick your thread it will help if you can post a message to it, giving details of the solution that was successful. This will ensure that when other forum members use the search facility they'll be able to see what worked, rather than just an inconclusive ticked thread.
- **\*FE** – the usual forum users' abbreviation for Forum Editor.
- **'Click here' links** – the words '[click here](#)' will automatically appear whenever you type a website address in a post. This forms a hyperlink that enables other members to visit the page to which you have referred in your text. You won't see that happen until your post appears in the forum however.

## Forum etiquette

The forum has its own commonly-accepted code of conduct – essential if we are to avoid misunderstandings and conflict. The accepted protocols are for the most part based on commonsense, and we urge you to respect them at all times.

- **Thanks** – It isn't essential to thank someone who has helped you solve a problem, but it helps to remember that forum helpers give freely of their own time – often for hours every day – to help their fellow computer users. A short post in your own thread, confirming that some advice or a solution has worked, together with a word of thanks when appropriate, goes a long way. It also helps future searchers of the database to know which of several possible options has resolved a particular problem.
- **Private messages** – Each post will be headed with the username of the member involved, plus a small envelope icon. The icon enables you to contact an individual forum member by email – although the person's email address will not be revealed to you at the time. Please remember that this facility is only to be used when absolutely necessary – when privacy is important, or when the person asks you to make contact in this way. Unsolicited emails can be considered an invasion of privacy, and unless it's really necessary you shouldn't contact another member in this way. If you receive a message from a forum user you should remember that although that person doesn't see your address at the time, it will be revealed if you reply to the email, so don't do that if you want to remain anonymous. Generally it's better to conduct all correspondence regarding a problem in the forum itself, for all to see. Please contact us immediately should you ever receive an abusive email from another forum member. Fortunately such instances are rare, but we take them very seriously.
- **Thread hijacking** – this is the term applied to the practice of posting an unrelated message in someone else's thread. You should remember that unless he/she has used the tick box to opt out, a person posting a thread will by default receive an automatic email notification every time someone posts to the thread. If people post on matters unrelated to the subject being discussed, the originator of the thread may be inundated with emails. This can be very irritating, and leads to confusion in the thread, as various people respond to the different subjects that have appeared. **Do not ask for help in someone else's thread, even if your problem is similar – post your own thread in the appropriate forum section.**
- **Parked threads** – this term applies to threads that are posted and apparently abandoned. Sometimes people post threads and then go out to work, or to bed, and don't log into the forum for many hours. In the meantime other forum users may be trying to offer help or advice, and may feel they are being ignored if no response is forthcoming. This can lead to the posting of irritated "where are you?" messages. If you intend to leave your thread for a day or so (or even a few hours) it helps to say so when you first post it; that way helpers will understand that they may not get any feedback from you for some time.
- **Personal email addresses** - please do not include your email address when posting a thread or a message in a thread. Personal privacy is something that once compromised is difficult to regain, and posting an address in a web forum is akin to publishing it in a newspaper - it can be read (and used or abused) by thousands of strangers.
- **Upper case text & good grammar** – The use of upper cased text is the Internet equivalent of shouting, and other forum members may find it irritating. Post your text as if you were writing a letter - using capitals only when appropriate, and try to make sure that you don't post a single block of unpunctuated text. Press your 'Enter' key twice to start a new paragraph occasionally – it improves readability. Don't worry about writing perfect prose – few people write perfect English, and there are no prizes for doing so in our forums. As long as you get your point across in a way that can be understood by others you'll be fine. The Forum Editor will delete any posts which criticise another forum user's writing style – we're not here to conduct English writing lessons.
- **Multiple threads** – Don't post more than one thread on the same subject. If, after a while you feel that your thread isn't attracting any attention, add a 'refresh' post to it (see 'Refresh' in 'forum terminology' above), rather than starting a new thread, and keep all feedback in the original thread – even if several days has elapsed since you first posted it. Several threads posted on the same subject by the same person will confuse and irritate other forum users who may be trying to help.
- **Multiple posts** – When you post a message to a thread there will be a short delay before you see your message appear in the forum. This is so that the server can update the database and refresh the page, so please wait while this happens, don't be tempted to click the 'Post response' button more than once; if you do so you may see several copies of your post appear in the thread. If this should inadvertently happen please contact the forum editor and ask for the duplicate(s) to be removed.

- **Search the archive** - it's on the cards that your problem has cropped up before, so we maintain a forum archive of previously posted threads. You can search the archive by using the facility at the top of each forum section, and we hope that you'll do so before posting a new thread. Doing so may accelerate the resolution process for you, and make things easier for those forum members who might otherwise spend time resolving a problem that has been dealt with before.
- **Read the reviews** - many threads in Consumerwatch ask for advice about new hardware and software. We have an excellent review section in the forum, and we suggest that you refer to it before you post your thread. The link is towards the top left of the forum pages – underneath our logo.
- **Post in the correct forum section** – Try to ensure that your new thread has the best chance of success by posting it in the appropriate forum section: - **Helproom** for all hardware and software related problems, **Consumerwatch** for advice on consumer rights and legislation, problems with manufacturers and suppliers, and for advice on hardware and software purchasing decisions. **WebDesign** is for anything related to web site design and publication, server technology, domain name purchase etc. **Digital world** for all matters relating to digital photography, multi-media devices, video, etc. Our **Network forum** is there to answer all your questions related to any kind of network – be it wired or wireless. The **Absolute beginners'** forum is self-explanatory – nobody should feel inhibited about posting requests for the most elementary of help or advice in this forum. The forum called **Speakers Corner** is there for threads that are not necessarily computer-related, although normal standards of forum conduct still apply. Please don't post the same thread in more than one forum section at the same time – it confuses other forum members, and leads to the duplication of advice. The forum editor may move threads which are posted in the wrong forum area, and will usually post a message in the thread to that effect.
- **Personally addressed threads** – from time to time you'll realise that certain individuals are rather more experienced in some fields than other people. There may be an expert in matters relating to Microsoft Word for instance. If you have a problem that relates to a particular person's speciality please do NOT deliberately post a thread with a title that contains that person's username – "For the attention of XXXX". Other forum users may well be able to resolve your problem, but might be deterred if they think you're only interested in one person's input. Devise a title for your thread that clearly indicates the nature of the problem – "How do I use mail merge in Microsoft Word?" – and leave the rest up to the forum.

### Forbidden territory

Some behaviour is unacceptable in our forum, and in the interests of harmony we will insist on the following rules being observed at all times.

- **Bad language** - it isn't necessary to use bad language to make a point, and although modern usage has seen many previously unacceptable terms become a part of everyday conversation there are certain words which are universally acknowledged as being inappropriate. We will exercise our right to remove any posts that (in our opinion) contain such language, and the Forum Editor's decision in such matters is final.
- **Offensive comment** - forum discussions can occasionally become heated. They often take place more or less in real time, and some people find it tempting to respond offensively in the heat of the moment. Personal abuse directed at another forum member will not be tolerated, and such posts will be removed without warning. Repeated incidents may result in a forum member's registration being invalidated permanently. If you find yourself becoming angry at something another forum member has said, take a moment to reflect, and to allow your temper to cool. A retaliatory comment, made in haste, is often regretted later.
- **Adult content** – pornographic references or links to sites of an adult nature are not permitted - posts or threads that contain links to 'adult' sites, text, or images (or to sites which themselves contain such links) will be deleted without warning. Repeated instances may result in a forum member's registration being permanently invalidated.
- **Advertising items for sale** – For legal reasons we do not, under any circumstances, permit forum members to use the forum to advertise goods or services for sale or exchange. There can be no exceptions to this rule.

- **Charitable appeals** – we generally discourage the use of the forum for making charitable appeals, or for linking to external websites that contain such appeals. We believe that our forum members have the right to make up their own minds about donations to charitable causes, without any sense of pressure from other forum users. Charity-related threads are only permitted in rare and exceptional circumstances, and the decision as to what is an exceptional circumstance rests with the forum editor. We will routinely delete any threads or posts that refer to appeals of this nature.
- **'Cracks' or copyright infringement** - we do not permit the posting of information that will enable other people to use pirated software or to evade the copyright laws. Please do not post serial numbers or CD keys, or links to sites that contain illegal material of any nature, or links to other sites that offer such information. Do not ask other forum members to provide you with help or information that will enable you to illegally obtain copyright-protected material, or to circumvent product registration or activation requirements, or to bypass a computer's password protection.
- **Racist or sexist comment** - we will not tolerate racist or sexist comments or references in any form.
- **Jokes** – We sometimes see threads containing jokes, or links to so-called humorous sites, posted under the title "A little light relief", or something similar. Tastes in humour vary widely, and what one person finds hilarious another may consider to be in bad taste, or even offensive. For that reason we tend to discourage such threads. There's nothing wrong with posting links to items of general interest to computer users, or to similarly interesting news items, but please exercise discretion, and don't take it too personally if we delete it. Our forum community is made up of people of both sexes and all ages, and we tend to err on the side of caution in such matters.
- **Libellous or defamatory comment** - **please do not exhort others to boycott a company that provided you with bad service or products.** Your own bad experience does not necessarily mean that all forum members should be encouraged to avoid buying from a particular company, and we will routinely delete any threads or posts which contain that kind of comment. By all means post details of bad customer service or products, but do not make statements that you cannot substantiate, or state as fact something which is in reality your personal opinion. "XYZ Computers Ltd deliberately took my money and ran" may well be your opinion, but unless you can produce evidence to show that the company intended to take your money and run an action for libel would almost certainly succeed. As publishers of the magazine and the website we may be jointly liable with you in such an action, and we aren't prepared to take such risks. We will delete any comment that is, in our opinion, potentially libellous or defamatory. The Forum Editor's decision in such cases is final, and we will not enter into online discussions about deleted comments or threads.
- **Political comment** – politics is a subject that is almost guaranteed to provoke people into an argument, and for that reason we ask you to refrain from making comments or statements of a political nature.
- **Religious intolerance** – we do not permit posts or threads that seek to express or incite religious intolerance or to promote religious beliefs.
- **Contacting us via forum threads** – If we need to contact a forum member for any reason (perhaps to explain the deletion of a thread or post) we will do so in confidence, via email. We ask that you use the same method should you need to contact us – please don't use a forum thread to contact us, and please do not publish the content of any email you might receive from us.

### **Our editorial policy**

Our membership is representative of all levels of computing, from beginner to expert, and no matter what your problem, there will almost certainly be someone who can help. We intend to maintain this 'mutual-help' atmosphere, because we think computer users like it that way, and we will do our best to see that everyone is welcomed. No member should hesitate to ask for help or feel that a problem is too elementary for the forum – especially in 'Absolute beginners' - we were all beginners once.

If at any time you are uncertain about how to get help, or if there is anything about forum conduct that you find confusing, please don't hesitate to let us know. Click the 'Contact the Forum Editor' button or send an email to: [moderator@idg.co.uk](mailto:moderator@idg.co.uk). We'll do our best to respond quickly, but we do receive a lot of email, so bear with us. We also want to hear from you if you have an idea for an improvement, or some extra site content. We can't promise to translate your ideas into action, but we'll look carefully into every proposal or suggestion.

### **Your privacy**

You can read about our privacy policy, and the way we protect your personal information by clicking the 'privacy policy' link at the bottom of the online forum pages. Please don't compromise your own privacy by publishing personal details in the forum, and be very cautious about arranging a face-to-face meeting with another forum user. In real life people are often very different from their online persona, so remember that no matter how well you think you know a person via the forum you would in effect be meeting a total stranger. Please don't contact the Forum Editor to ask about another forum user's real identity, email address, and/or location – we will not disclose such information under any circumstances.

### **And finally**

We hope you enjoy using our forum. Over the past five and a half years our members have helped us to become one of the magazine world's leading online help forums; we are the envy of others in our industry, and we aim to maintain the high standards that have contributed to that success. We are very fortunate in having a large number of regular users whose combined experience is capable of solving pretty well any computer-related problem. The good natured, patient provision of advice, and the sheer depth of knowledge exhibited by these people has helped thousands of computer beginners and experts alike. This guide is designed to help you, whatever your level of expertise, to understand how the forum works, but if you need any further help or information please don't hesitate to contact me. I look forward to meeting you online.

**Peter Thomas**  
**Forum Editor**

[moderator@idg.co.uk](mailto:moderator@idg.co.uk)

<http://www.pcadvisor.co.uk>

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