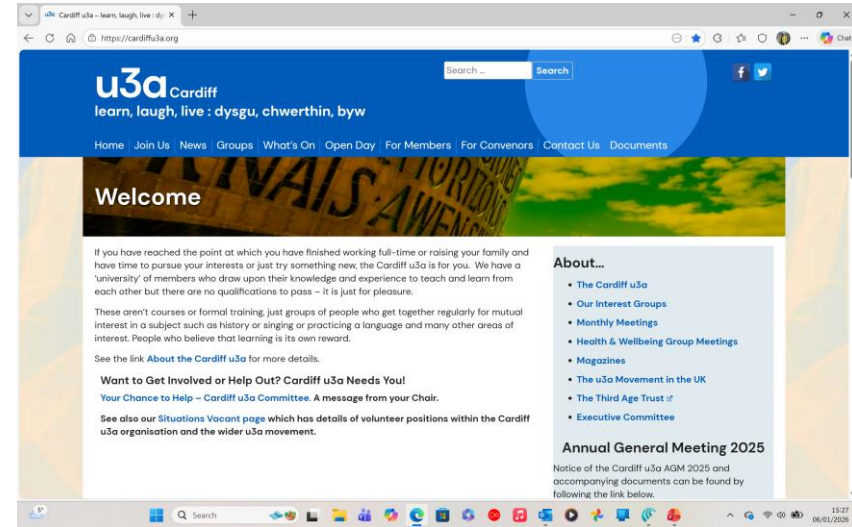


Agenda: 26th March 2026

- News in brief: U3A News
- Buzzword: Phil on Operating Systems
- Presentation: David on An A-Z of Messaging
- News at length: from the Signal Groups

U3A News in brief

- U3A TAT AI Subject Advisor:
 - Barry Claydon
 - Wants feedback on how Wales U3A is using AI
- SciTech Café: Friday



Phil's Buzzword 26/03/2026

Philip Edwards Cardiff U3A.

Operating Systems

Philip Edwards, Cardiff U3A.





An unlikely analogy.

È-BERLINGO ELECTRIC

BERLINGO PETROL

OR DIESEL



b2 [1.002x]

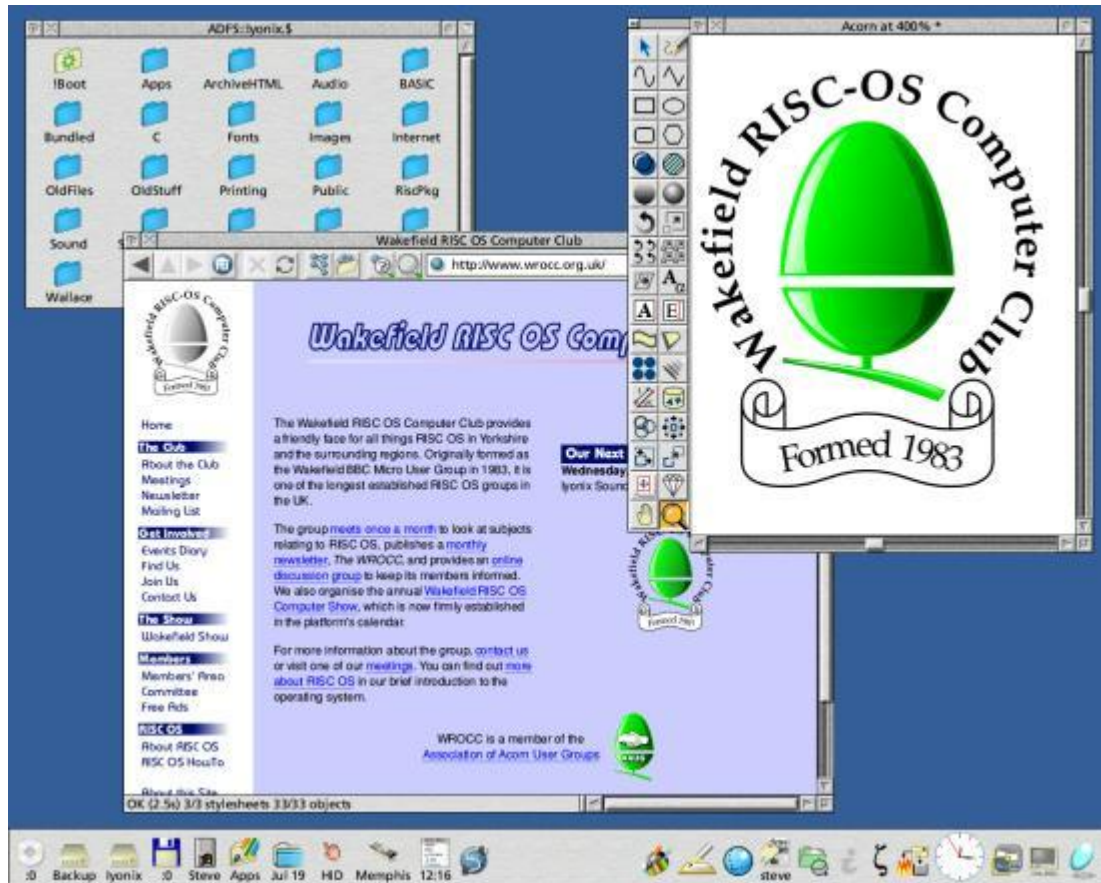
File Edit Tools Debug Window

BBC Computer 32K

Acorn 1770 DFS

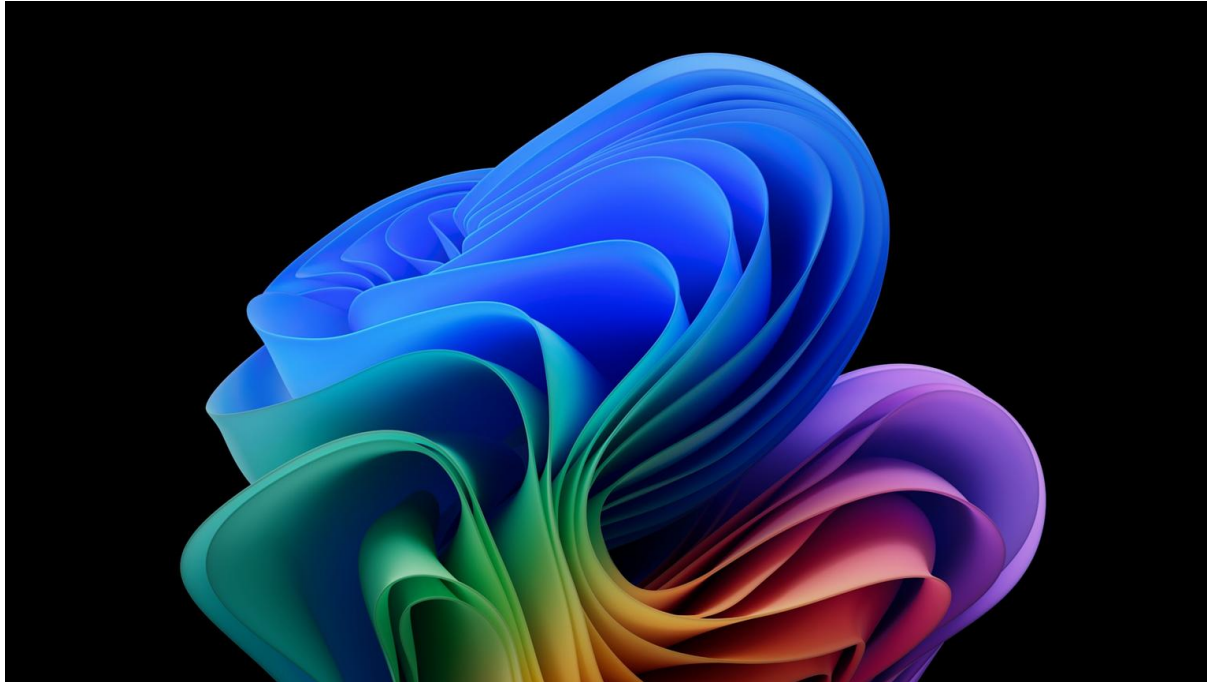
BASIC

>





Microsoft Windows





Apple





Linux



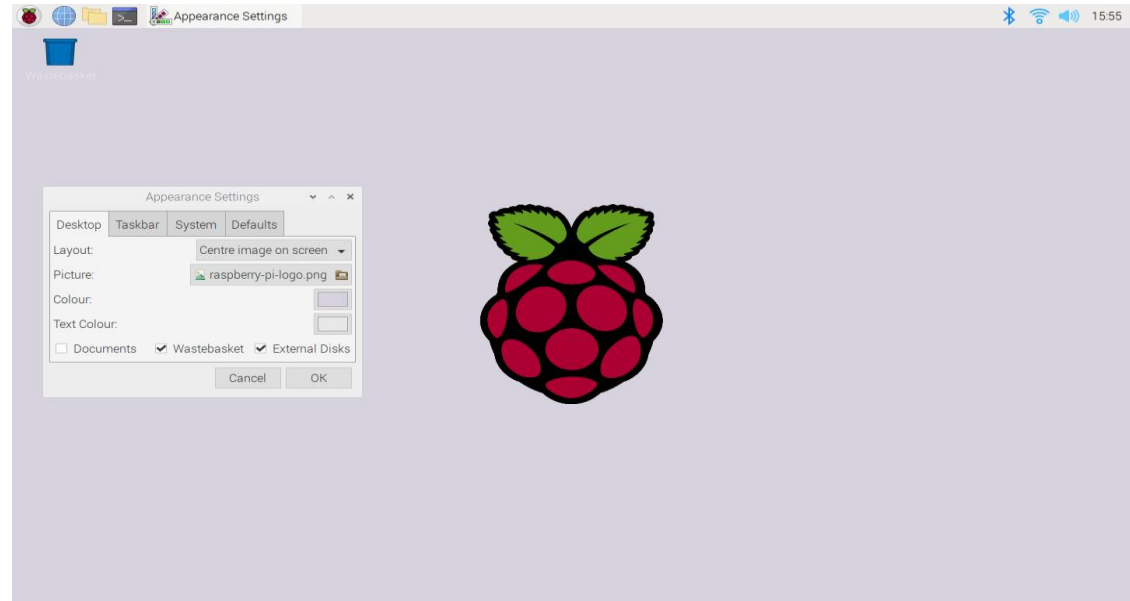


Chrome OS



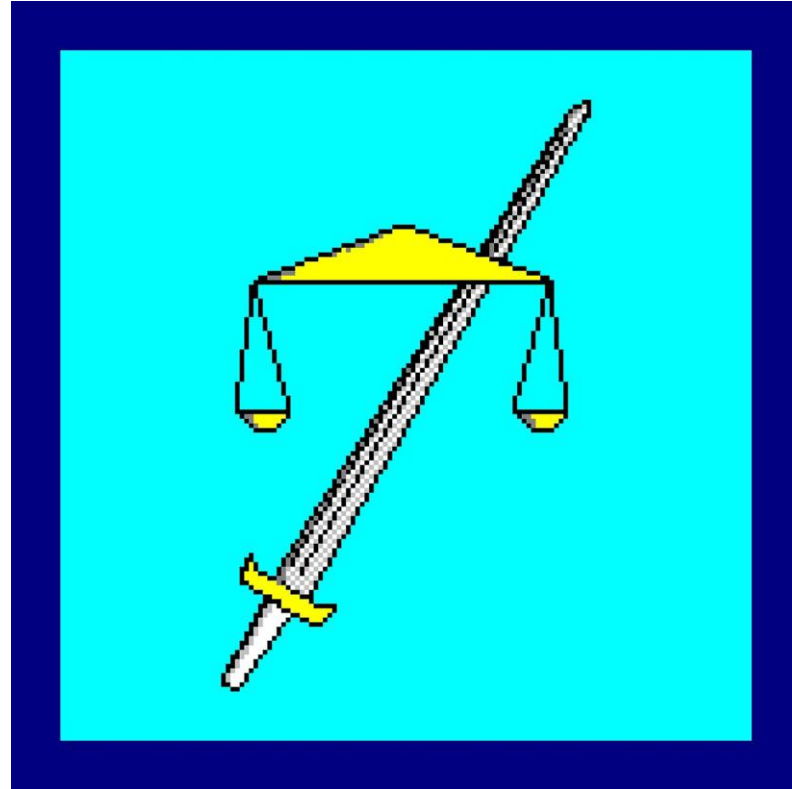


Raspberry Pi OS





Temple OS





Simple comparison.

Users as %

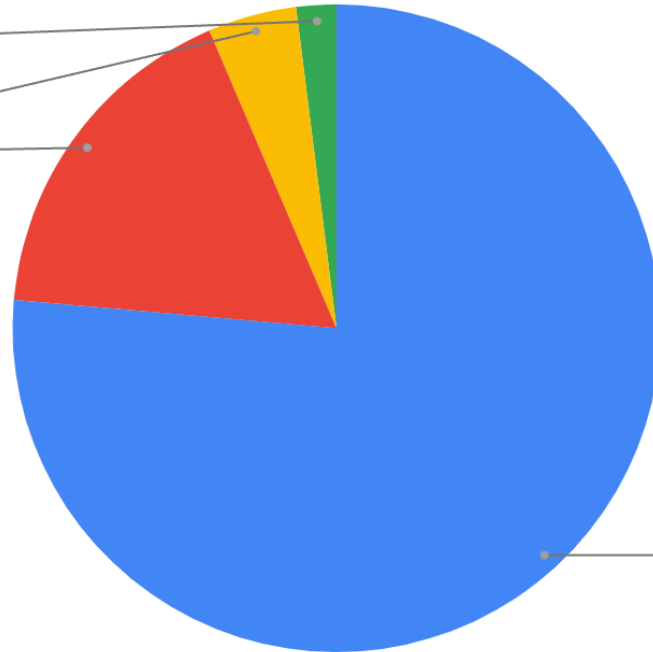
Chrome

2.0%

Linux, all distributions

4.4%

17.2%



Windows

76.4%

System Name	The Personality	Best For...
Windows	The Familiar Professional	People who want a traditional computer that works with every printer and program.
macOS	The Polished Artist	Those who want a simple, beautiful interface and already use an iPhone.
Linux	The Independent Tinkerer	Tech-savvy folks who want a free, private system or want to speed up an old PC.
ChromeOS	The Minimalist	Beginners who strictly want to browse the web, email, and stay safe from viruses.

Raspberry Pi OS



The Hobbyist

Grandparents who enjoy "DIY" projects, electronics, or learning how to code.

TempleOS

The Digital Curiosity

A fascinating "work of art" and a piece of history; not for everyday use

David's presentation

- With a little help from his new best friend

An A to Z of

Messaging in the Digital World

A u3a Presentation



About This Talk

- We communicate constantly — yet rarely stop to consider the tools we use to do so.
- This talk takes a structured journey through digital messaging: from the humble telephone call to encrypted applications used by millions worldwide.
- We will cover email, SMS, Signal, WhatsApp, and the telephone — placing each in its proper context.
- We will also consider the practical, the personal, and the prudent: privacy, etiquette, fraud, and knowing when not to press Send.

A — E

Foundations: Origins, Infrastructure & the Basics

A

Analogue to Digital: Where It All Began

- Messaging is not a modern invention — letters, telegrams and telephone calls predate the internet by over a century.
- The shift from analogue to digital changed the speed, scale and cost of communication, not its fundamental purpose.
- Understanding this journey helps us appreciate both what has been gained and what, arguably, has been lost.
- Key milestone: the first email was sent in 1971; the first SMS in December 1992. Both are older than many imagine.

B

Broadband and the Infrastructure Behind It

- All digital messaging depends on physical infrastructure: fibre-optic cables, mobile masts, and data centres.
- Broadband speeds determine what is possible — fast broadband enables video calls; slower connections struggle with large attachments.
- Mobile data (3G, 4G, 5G) extends messaging beyond the home and office.
- When messaging fails, the cause is almost always infrastructure: a lost signal, a server outage, or a congested network.

C

Context is Everything

- Every message carries context: who sent it, from which platform, and under what circumstances.
- A text message from your GP means something entirely different to one from an unknown number claiming to be your GP.
- Platform choice itself carries meaning — a formal email signals something different to a WhatsApp voice note.
- Throughout this talk, we will return to context repeatedly. It is the single most important factor in interpreting any message.

D

Data: What You Give Away

- Every digital message generates data — not just the content, but the metadata: who you contacted, when, for how long.
- Metadata can be as revealing as the message itself. A pattern of calls to a cancer helpline says something, even if the calls are never heard.
- This data is retained by platforms, subject to legal requests, and in some cases used commercially.
- Understanding data does not require paranoia — but it does require awareness.

E

Email: The Workhorse of Digital Communication

- Email has been the dominant form of digital written communication since the early 1990s and remains so today.
- Structure: sender, recipient, subject line, body, attachments — a format now so familiar we rarely question it.
- Key concerns: spam, phishing, retention, and the question of formality (is an email a letter or a memo?).
- Despite being declared 'dead' repeatedly, email handles an estimated 350 billion messages per day worldwide (2024 figure).

F – J

Risks, Realities & the New Language of Messaging

F

Fraud, Phishing and Fakes

- Fraudulent messaging is one of the most significant consumer harms in the UK today.
- Phishing (email fraud) and smishing (SMS fraud) mimic trusted senders — banks, HMRC, Royal Mail, NHS — to steal credentials or money.
- Warning signs: unexpected contact, urgency, requests for personal information, links to unfamiliar websites.
- The golden rule: if in doubt, do not click. Contact the organisation directly using a number or address you know to be genuine.

G

Groups and Group Dynamics

- Group messaging — WhatsApp family groups, email distribution lists, Signal group chats — creates new social dynamics.
- Challenges include: messages being read out of context, difficulty leaving a group without causing offence, and volume overload.
- The etiquette of group messaging is still evolving and varies considerably by generation and relationship.
- Muting notifications is a legitimate and widely used coping strategy, not rudeness.

H

History and the Permanent Record

- Unlike a spoken conversation, digital messages persist — on servers, in backups, in screenshots.
- What is said in a private message may appear in legal proceedings, disciplinary hearings, or newspaper headlines.
- The concept of a 'right to be forgotten' exists in UK data protection law, but is limited in scope.
- Practical advice: assume any written message could one day be read by anyone. Write accordingly.

I

Instant Messaging: The Shift to Real Time

- Instant messaging created an expectation of near-immediate response that email had never carried.
- Read receipts and 'last seen' timestamps further increased social pressure around response times.
- The blue tick on WhatsApp — indicating a message has been read — is a small piece of technology with large social consequences.
- There is no obligation to be perpetually available. Managing expectations around response times is a legitimate choice.

J

Jargon and the New Language of Messaging

- Digital messaging has generated its own vocabulary: abbreviations (LOL, FYI, IIRC), emoji, and GIFs as a form of punctuation.
- Generational divides in interpretation are real and sometimes significant. A full stop at the end of a text can now imply coldness or passive aggression to younger readers.
- Emoji carry cultural connotations that vary widely — the 'thumbs up' is encouraging in the UK; in other cultures it is offensive.
- None of this is mandatory: clear, plain English remains universally understood and entirely appropriate.

K – O

Safety, Phones, Platforms & Notification Culture

K

Keeping Safe: Passwords and Account Security

- Messaging accounts are valuable targets — access to your WhatsApp or email enables impersonation and fraud against your contacts.
- Two-factor authentication (2FA) adds a second layer of security: even if a password is stolen, access is blocked without a second code.
- Strong passwords are long, random, and unique to each service. A password manager removes the need to remember them.
- Never share a one-time passcode (OTP) with anyone — no legitimate organisation will ever ask for one.

L

Landline to Mobile: The Platform Shift

- The landline telephone was, for decades, the primary form of real-time personal communication in the UK.
- The mobile phone absorbed the landline's role in the 1990s and 2000s, then expanded into a messaging computer.
- BT's plans to retire the traditional copper telephone network by 2027 mark the end of an era.
- For many older adults, the transition from landline to mobile represents the most significant communication change of their lifetime.

M

Mobile and SMS: The Text Message

- The first SMS (Short Message Service) text was sent on 3 December 1992, reading simply: 'Merry Christmas'.
- The 160-character limit was an engineering constraint of the original GSM standard — it shaped an entire communication culture.
- SMS remains ubiquitous for authentication codes, appointment reminders and alerts precisely because it requires no app or data connection.
- Unlike WhatsApp or Signal, SMS is not encrypted — messages pass through your mobile operator in plain form.

N

Notifications and the Attention Economy

- Every message platform competes for your attention. Notification design — the badge, the buzz, the chime — is deliberately engineered to create compulsion.
- The average smartphone user checks their device over 80 times a day; notifications are a primary driver.
- Turning off non-essential notifications is not antisocial — it is a rational response to a system designed to exploit psychological tendencies.
- Consider: which notifications genuinely require immediate attention, and which can wait for a deliberate check?

P

Phone Calls: Still the Most Human Channel

- Despite everything, the voice call remains unmatched for conveying tone, empathy, nuance and genuine connection.
- Text-based messaging strips out the 38% of communication carried by tone of voice — irony, warmth and concern are easily lost.
- There are conversations that should be held by phone or in person: bad news, complex disagreements, anything emotionally significant.
- The decline of the unsolicited phone call is real — many people now expect a text before calling. This is a cultural shift worth questioning.

Q – U

Etiquette, Privacy, Trust & Unintended Consequences

Q

Questions of Etiquette

- The unwritten rules of digital messaging are evolving rapidly and vary considerably by age, relationship, and platform.
- Is it appropriate to send a voice note to someone who has not indicated they welcome them? Is leaving a voicemail now considered impolite by some?
- The etiquette of response times, read receipts, and unsolicited phone calls is genuinely contested.
- There is no universal answer — but being aware that others may hold different expectations helps avoid misunderstanding.

R

Read Receipts and the Question of Acknowledgement

- Read receipts — confirming that a message has been seen — are a feature of WhatsApp, iMessage and many other platforms.
- They create a social contract that is not always welcome: the sender knows you have read the message but chosen not to reply.
- Most platforms allow read receipts to be disabled; doing so is a reasonable privacy choice.
- The receipt also raises the question of acknowledgement: when does 'liking' a message substitute for a reply, and when does it fall short?

S

Signal: Encrypted Messaging Explained

- Signal is a free, open-source messaging application that provides end-to-end encryption by default for all messages and calls.
- End-to-end encryption means that only the sender and recipient can read a message — not Signal, not the government, not a hacker intercepting the connection.
- It is used by journalists, lawyers, activists, and increasingly ordinary citizens who value privacy.
- In 2025, Signal came to wider public attention in the UK and US following high-profile uses by politicians and officials.

T

Trust and Verification

- A fundamental challenge of digital messaging is that senders can be impersonated — caller ID, email addresses and SMS sender names can all be faked.
- Legitimate banks, government departments and businesses never ask for passwords, PINs or one-time codes via message.
- When a message requests urgent action or personal information, the appropriate response is scepticism and independent verification.
- If you receive an unexpected message purportedly from someone you know asking for money or access, call them on a known number to confirm.

U

Unintended Audiences

- Digital messages frequently reach audiences their authors never intended: forwarded without permission, screenshotted and shared, or accidentally sent to the wrong person.
- Autocorrect errors, Reply All disasters, and messages sent to a group rather than an individual are all familiar hazards.
- The absence of a 'recall' mechanism on most platforms means that once sent, a message is beyond your control.
- A useful habit: before sending, ask yourself whether you would be comfortable if this message were read by anyone.

V - Z

Voice, WhatsApp, Cross-Platform & Your Digital Footprint

V

Voice Messages: The Hybrid Format

- Voice messages — audio recordings sent within WhatsApp, iMessage or Telegram — have grown substantially in popularity.
- They offer the nuance of spoken communication with the asynchronous convenience of text.
- However, they cannot be scanned for content, are difficult to search, and are considered by many recipients as an imposition.
- As with all messaging choices, the etiquette is contested: some find them natural and warm; others find them inconsiderate.



WhatsApp: The Global Dominant Platform

- WhatsApp was founded in 2009 and acquired by Facebook (now Meta) in 2014 for approximately \$19 billion.
- It has over two billion active users worldwide, making it the most widely used messaging platform in the world.
- WhatsApp uses end-to-end encryption by default for messages — though metadata (who contacts whom, and when) is shared with Meta.
- The tension between convenience, scale, and privacy is the central question for any WhatsApp user.

X

Cross-Platform Challenges

- Messaging platforms do not routinely communicate with one another — a WhatsApp user cannot message directly to a Signal user.
- The European Union's Digital Markets Act (2022) has begun to require larger platforms to offer interoperability, though progress has been slow.
- In the UK, the divide between iPhone (iMessage/FaceTime) and Android (standard SMS/Google Messages) creates practical differences in message quality and features.
- Fragmentation benefits the large platforms — it creates 'lock-in' and reduces the incentive to switch.

Y

Your Digital Footprint

- Every platform you use, every message you send, contributes to a digital profile that exists independently of your intentions.
- This footprint includes: what you have said, to whom, when, from which device, and from which location.
- Reviewing privacy settings on your messaging applications is a practical and worthwhile exercise — most people have never done so.
- The Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR give you rights over your data — including the right to access what organisations hold about you.

Z

Zero Obligation: Reclaiming Your Own Communications

- You are under no obligation to be contactable at all times, to join every group, or to respond immediately to any message.
- The right to manage your own communications — to set boundaries, to mute, to step back — is worth asserting.
- Technology should serve you. The moment it creates more anxiety than connection, something has gone wrong.
- The best message is often the one you choose not to send; the best response is sometimes a telephone call.

Key Takeaways

- Context is everything — platform, sender, and timing all shape meaning.
- No message is ever truly private — write as though anyone might read it.
- Fraud and impersonation are serious risks — scepticism is a virtue.
- Voice calls retain unique value for emotionally significant conversations.
- You are not obliged to be perpetually available — manage your tools, not the other way around.

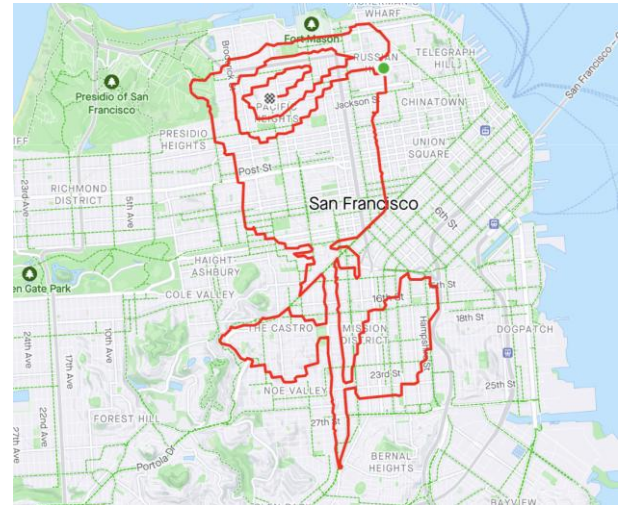
Questions and Discussion

Digital News

- From the Signal Groups – please find on your phone:
 - Digital Matters / News & Updates
 - DM - Scams
 - DM- Apple Pie
 - DM – Easy PC
 - DM – Artificial Intelligence

Digital Matters: News & Updates

- Strava:
 - French aircraft carrier
 - (Peaceful picture)
- Victorian Influencer on Sky News (Jim)



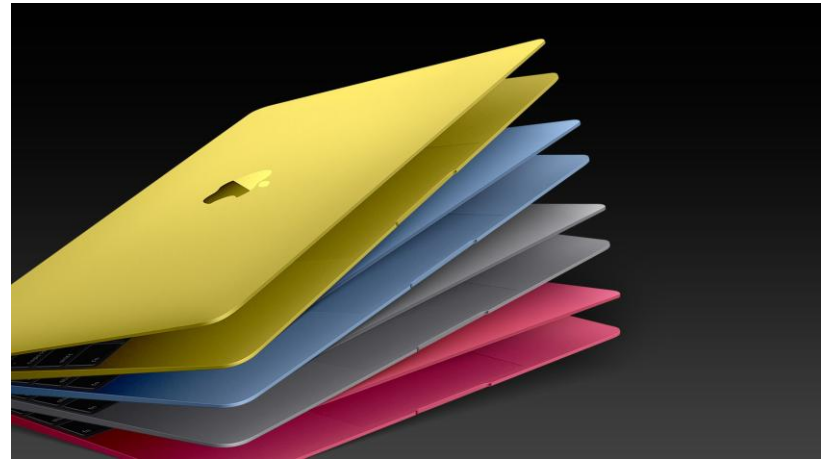
DM: Scams

- Cambodia – scams generate the equivalent of half the national GDP
- Gone Phishing
- UN Global Fraud Summit



DM: Apple Pie 1/2

- iOS updates for older devices
- MacBook Neo launched
- Google testing a Gemini app just for iOS



DM: Apple Pie 2/2

- Spyware alert
- iOS 26.3.1 (a) released
- (a) indicates a Rapid Security Response
- Discussion next time ?



DM: Easy PC

- Windows 11:
- Microsoft is removing Copilot from some Windows apps
- (Less is more 😊)



DM: AI News 1/2

- Perplexity's AI assistant (unhelpfully called Personal Computer) can run on a Mac Mini
- Mac Mini sales have peaked as a result



DM: AI News 2/3

- Free version of Claude now includes:
 - Memory
 - Import history from rival tools
- Google Gemini might allow imports too



DM: AI News 3/3

- Martin Bennell has used an AI coaching tool and broke three British records



Next meeting: 9th April

- Discussion meeting