

# Workshops & Tips

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## HOW TO...

# Transfer your files to a new computer

by Nik Rawlinson

**What you need:** Laplink PCmover Home **Time required:** 30 minutes setup; transfer time depends on amount of data

**W**hether you were lucky enough to get a new computer this

Christmas, or you inherited a hand-me-down after a friend or relative upgraded, you need a strategy for moving your files from your old machine to your new one. The alternative – running the two side by side – not only creates a space-hog, it's also confusing and time consuming, because you'll either forget which one has the files you need to work on, or you'll waste time switching between them.

There are several ways to transfer large amounts of data from one computer to another, not all of which are necessarily expensive. One of the simplest solutions is to use a USB stick. These are getting cheaper all the time, even for very large capacities. We've had good experiences using a SanDisk Ultra Fit 256GB drive (pictured above), which is so small that only around 5mm protrudes from the USB socket when it's plugged in. You could, conceivably, leave it plugged in full time as an additional or backup drive. At the time of writing, it's selling for just under £30 at Amazon ([www.snipca.com/40372](http://www.snipca.com/40372)).

Alternatively, you could use online storage. While most free online services



The SanDisk Ultra Fit 256GB stick protrudes just 5mm from the socket

are capped at less than 20GB (and some as low as 2GB) – which may not be enough for all your data – you could drag and drop transfers in sequence to move your data bit by bit. If you're worried you'll lose track of what you have and haven't copied, consider upgrading to a paid-for account. Google One (<https://one.google.com>) lets you upgrade a Google Account from the free 15GB to 100GB for £15.99 a year (£1.33 a month), or £1.59 a month if you prefer not to commit to a year up front.

Alternatively, if you can run both computers at the same time, and connect them to the same home network, you could use the excellent software Laplink PCmover Home 11, which is compatible with Windows 7 and later (including Windows 11). It normally costs £14.95 on our Software Store, down from the full price of £32.95, but we've negotiated a special discount for *Computeractive* readers that cuts the price even further. See the box below for details.

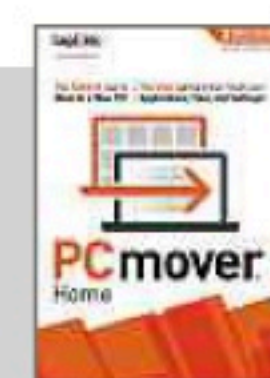
Where possible we recommend free software, but there are some tasks that are so important they're worth paying for. Keeping your data safe is a prime

### BUY PCMOVER HOME 11 FOR JUST £9.99

Visit [www.snipca.com/40387](http://www.snipca.com/40387), then click the red BUY NOW button on the right. Next, type the exclusive discount code **pcmoveroffer** in the 'Coupon Code' box, then click Apply. You'll see the price change from £14.95 to £9.99 (offer lasts until end of January). Next, enter your email address at the top right, tick the terms and policy box, and select your payment method. Enter your details, then click the orange 'Pay £9.99' button.

You'll now receive an email with an activation code, containing letters, numbers and dashes, in this format: XXXXXXX-XXXXXX-XXX. Click the link in the email to automatically download PCmover, following the instructions.

When you first run it on either computer you'll be asked for the code that was emailed to you. Copy and paste it into the box and you'll then be able to use it to transfer your files.





example. After all, if you lose several years' worth of family photos in a corrupted transfer, you'll almost certainly find yourself wishing you'd spent what might be as little as a round of coffees on keeping your precious memories safe.

## 1 Organise your drives

The Home version of PCmover has a few limitations. For example, it will move only one user account from your old to your new computer, and only touches files on the drive from which your old PC boots. If you don't know which this is, and which files it contains, open a new File Explorer window and click This PC in the sidebar, followed by Local Disk (C:) in the main part of the window.

If the Home version is too limited for you, consider the Professional edition, which lets you move unlimited accounts. We sell it for £24.95 (down from £49.95) from [www.snipca.com/40392](http://www.snipca.com/40392).

The contents of any other drives will be left where they are on your old PC, but you can copy them yourself using a USB stick or via an online service (as described in our intro). Alternatively, if you have sufficient space on your C: drive, make a copy of any files and folders currently stored on external drives or **partitions** with their own drive letter there. If you take this latter route, we'd recommend creating a folder for them inside your Documents folder so that if you want to separate them again once they've been copied across, you'll more easily be able to identify them among the rest of your files.

## 2 Don't forget Windows libraries

Most of your files will be stored in what Windows calls 'libraries'. These

## How I transfer my data

I store most of my data on external drives, either online or on my home network. That way, whichever computer I'm using, whether it's running Windows, macOS or Linux, I have access to the same files. Introducing a new computer, therefore, rarely involves migrating much data, although if that were to change, I would certainly



consider using Laplink PCmover. Setting up the two computers so they can see each other across my network was simple, and the process of selecting which files I wanted to transfer was easy, and didn't require any other devices to use as an intermediate staging post.

Nik Rawlinson

How do you transfer your data?  
Please let us know: [letters@computeractive.co.uk](mailto:letters@computeractive.co.uk)

are the special folders that appear in the Libraries section of the File Explorer sidebar, and include Documents, Pictures, Music and Videos. They also frequently appear in the Quick Access section.

Open a File Explorer window and, if you can't see the Libraries section, it's probably set to be hidden. To reveal it in Windows 10, switch to the View tab, then click 'Navigation pane', followed by 'Show libraries'. In Windows 11, click the three dots at the end of the list of entries on the menu bar, followed by Options. Switch to the View tab, then scroll to the very bottom of the 'Advanced settings' box and tick the box beside 'Show libraries'.

Although libraries are usually set up to be hosted on the C: drive, it's possible to move them elsewhere, not just by copying their contents, but by instructing Windows itself to relocate any existing files in any of the libraries and thereafter save additional files to the new location.

If you've inherited your computer from someone else and therefore aren't

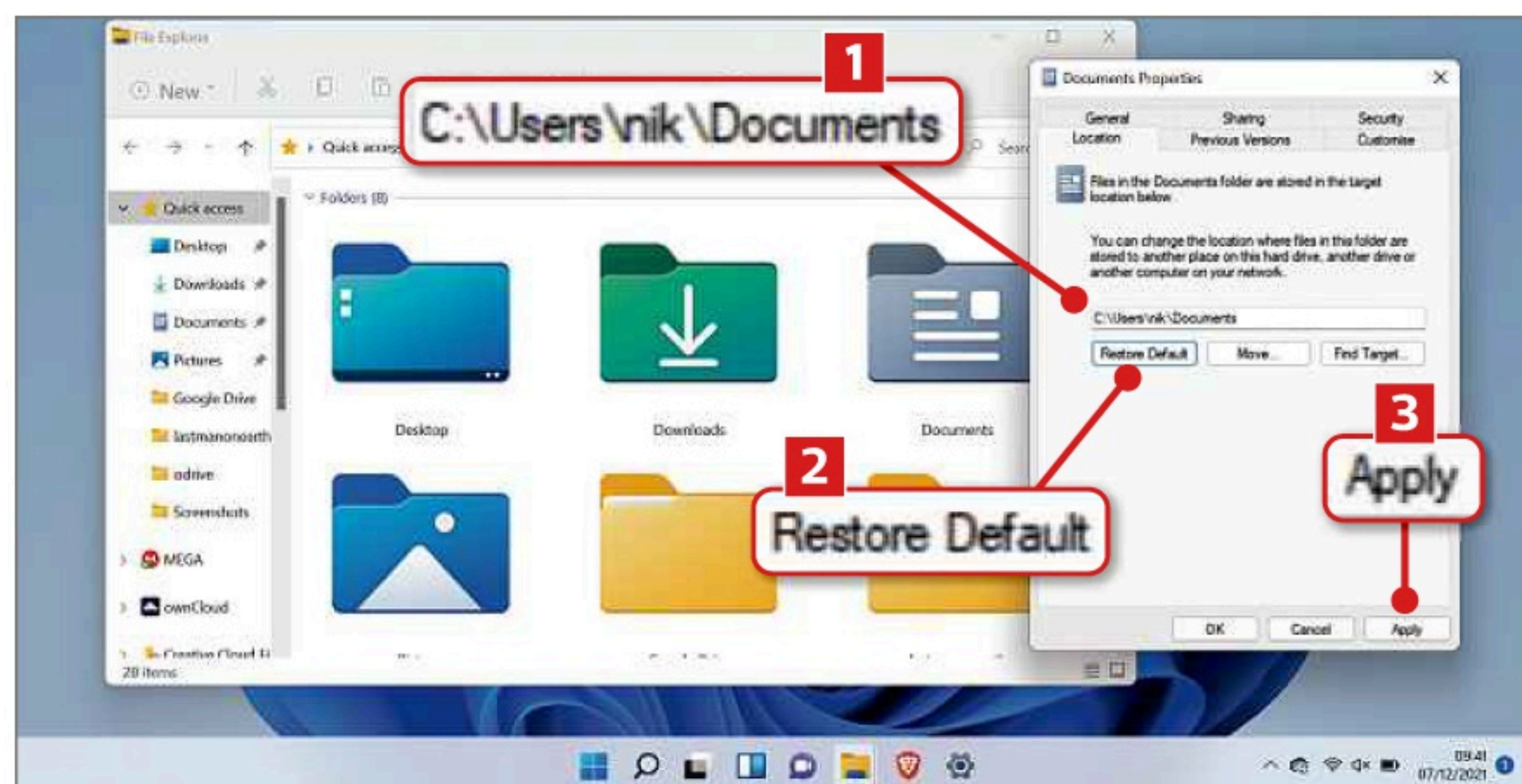
sure where your libraries are located, it's worth checking the setting. Likewise, if you've moved your libraries to a different drive or partition, and you have sufficient space on the C: drive to move them back, you might want to do that now to save effort later on.

To do so, open a File Explorer window and click This PC in the sidebar. Next, right-click the Documents folder in the main part of the window (not the sidebar). Click 'Properties' in the context menu and, when the Documents Properties panel appears, click the Location tab and check the address shown in the box. If it's anything other than **C:\Users\[your name]\Documents** (1 in our screenshot below left), click **Restore Default** (2), followed by **Apply** (3).

If your Documents folder was moved at some earlier date, it will no longer exist, so Windows will ask if you want to create it. Click 'Yes' and, when asked if you want to move all the files from the old location to the new location, click Yes again. The time taken to complete the transfer will depend on the number of files involved, their size, the speed of your drives, and the speed of your connection. If you're moving a lot of files between an external and your internal drive, it may take several minutes, but wait for it to complete so you don't risk losing any important data. You can repeat the process with your Pictures, Videos, Music and even Desktop folders.

## 3 Install Laplink PCmover

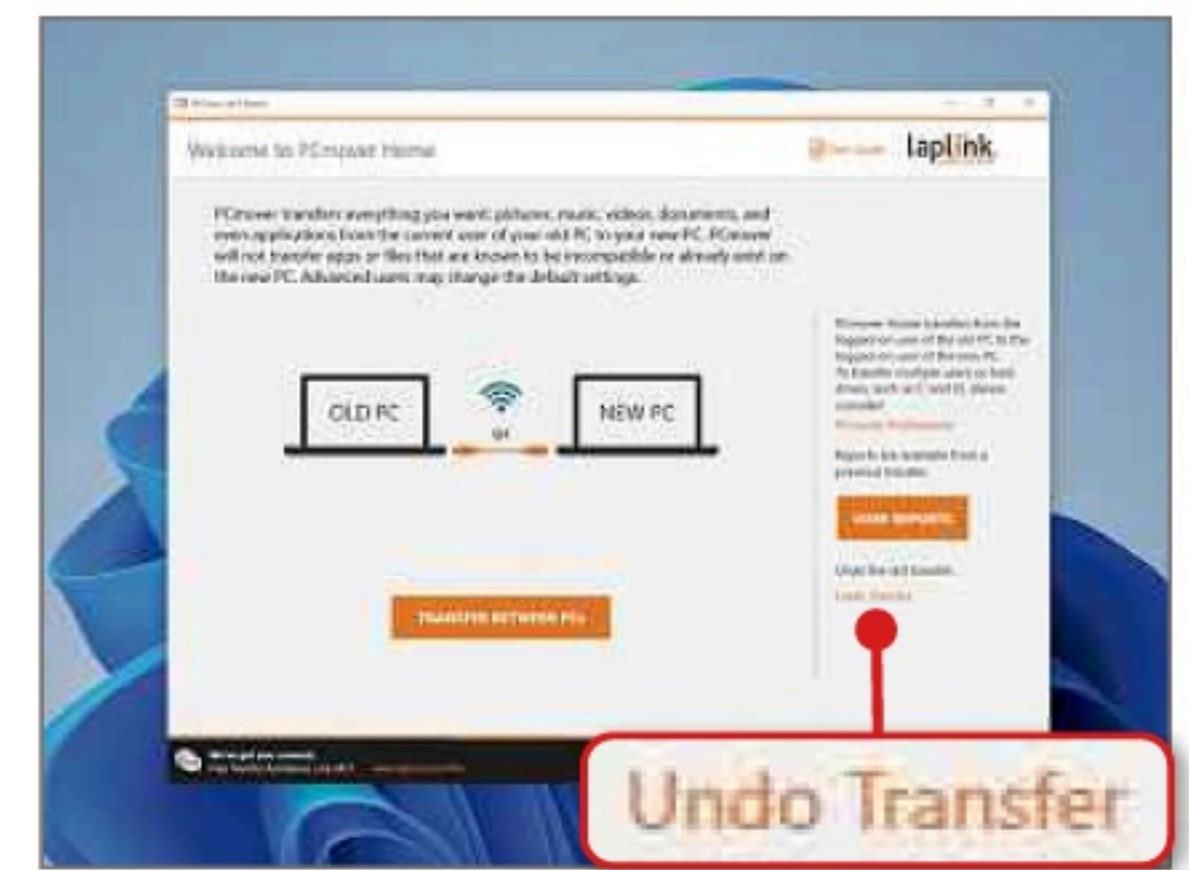
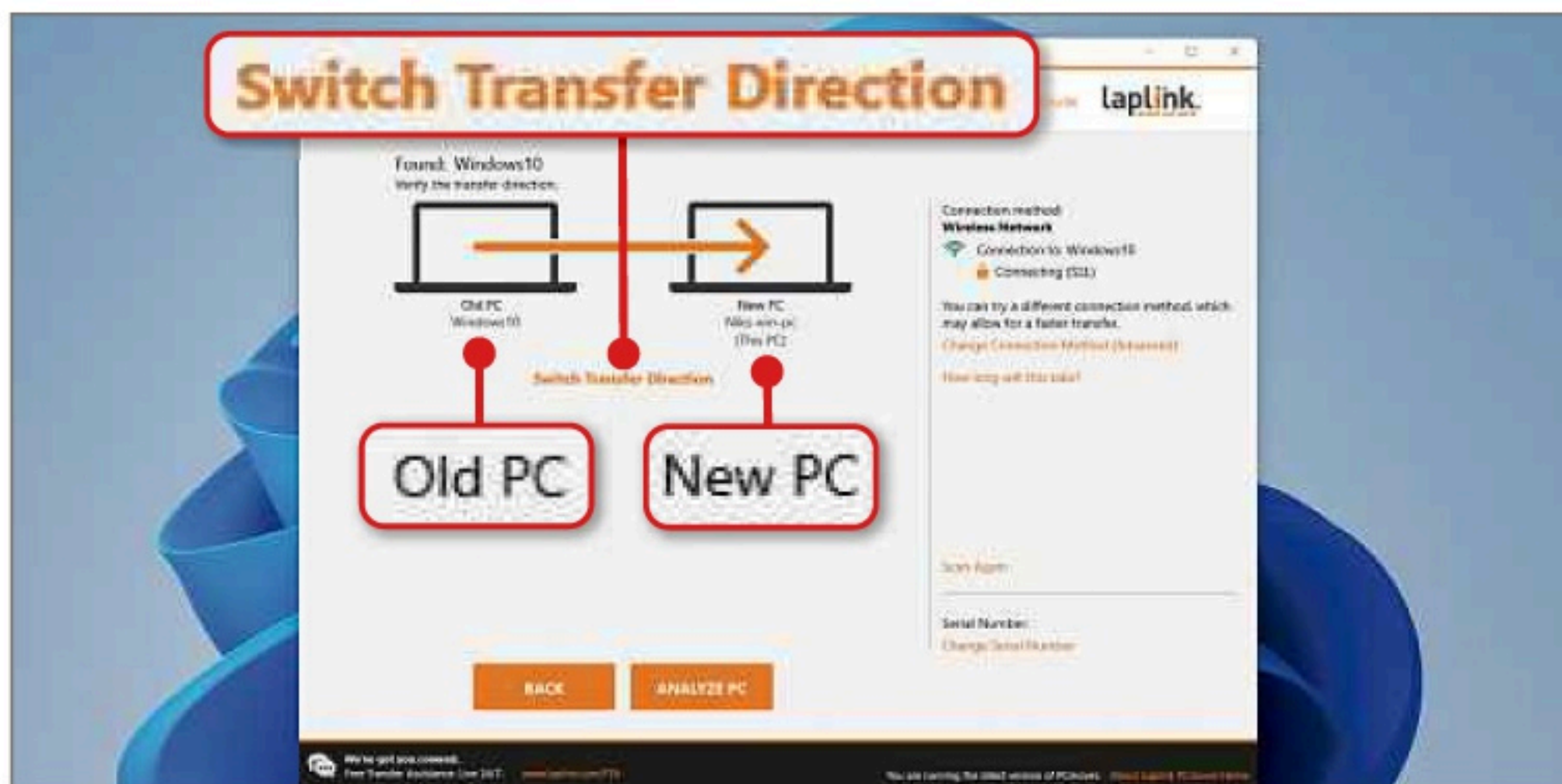
Once you've bought Laplink PCmover Home (see box on page 35), download it on your old computer, then launch the file and click Install on the first screen. When Windows asks,



If the location of your Libraries isn't as shown, click Restore Default then Apply



This transfer is going in the right direction, but if yours isn't click 'Switch Transfer Direction'



Click 'Undo Transfer' to roll back, though do so as soon as possible after the initial transfer

'Do you want to allow this app to make changes to your device?', click Yes. Work through the instructions, selecting the defaults in each case (don't forget to read the licence agreement) and, when the installation completes, leave the option to Launch Laplink PCmover Home ticked, then click Finish.

Next, click 'Transfer Between PCs', then complete the form on the following screen, providing your name, email address, and the code you received when you purchased the software.

When you reach the next screen, the title at the top of which is 'Run PCmover on Both PCs', leave your old PC running, and switch to your new computer. Download a second copy of PCmover on this computer, clicking the same link in the email that was sent to you when you bought the program, and using the same code. Install it by following the same steps you used on your old computer until you reach the same screen on your new computer that's showing on your old one.

Close all other programs on both computers so that only PCmover is running on either of them, then make sure both are connected to the same wireless network, and click Next on each. They will search for each other on your network and should spot each other within a second or two. They will each

then show which computer will send data, and which will receive it. Make certain that this is correct on both machines.

Remember, you want to transfer data from your old PC to your new one; not the other way around. If the screen shows the transfer proceeding in the wrong direction, click Switch Transfer Direction (see screenshot above).

Click 'Analyze PC' on the new computer (the one that will receive the transfer) and PCmover will examine the data that it believes should be transferred from your old computer, building up a list of important files that it will refer to once you start the actual transfer process. This can take several minutes to complete.

Once the analysis has finished, you can either accept PCmover's recommendation, or tweak it. This latter option is particularly useful if you have a limited amount of space on your new computer, perhaps because you have a fast SSD of lower capacity than the slower but bigger hard drive in your old computer.

To tweak the selection, click 'Choose What to Transfer' at the bottom of the window, followed by 'Let me choose'. Now select a category (see screenshot below), then untick any elements you want to exclude from the transfer (see screenshot below right).

When you've finished selecting what you want to copy across, click Next, followed by Start Transfer. PCmover will start the process of duplicating the files from your old computer on your new one. You can continue using it during this process for simple tasks like browsing the web but, to avoid slowing the transfer, avoid data-hungry processes like streaming.

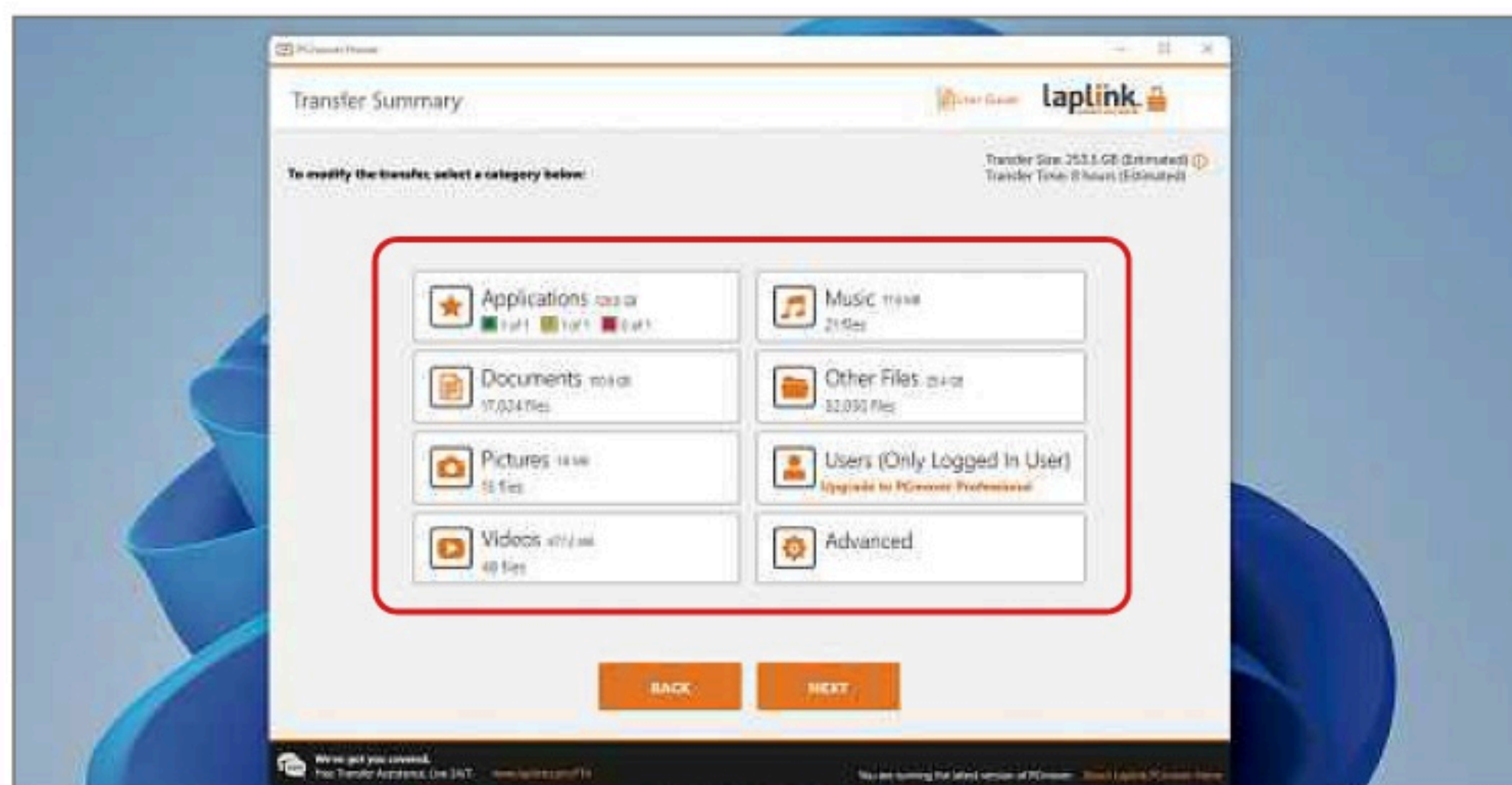
When the transfer has completed, leave the option to reboot your computer ticked, then click Finish. By restarting, you can make sure that any settings transferred over alongside your files will be properly implemented.

## 4 Roll back the transfer

If, once you've booted, the result isn't what you wanted, you can roll back the transfer. Launch PCmover again and click the small, orange Undo Transfer link in the sidebar (see screenshot above). Removing your data should be quicker than copying it over, as it doesn't rely on transferring files over your network connection, but it could still take some time if a lot of files are involved.

If you want to roll back, we advise doing so as soon as possible after the initial transfer. That way, you won't have made any changes to the migrated data.

If you don't want to transfer everything, click one of these sections...



...then untick any files you don't want to transfer