

# 7 ways to improve your tech life

Your software is sluggish; your gadgets are glitchy. Here are seven easy updates that will improve your technological life.

**1. Get a smartphone.** Having instant access to your e-mail, calendars, address book, GPS and anything on the Internet will make your life easier.

Upgrade using your existing carrier for now. AT&T users can get a refurbished iPhone for \$29, for example. Sprint users can snag a decent Android phone for \$50.

**2. Stop using Internet Explorer.** While the latest version has some real improvements, IE is bloated with features. Switch to Mozilla Firefox or Google Chrome: both are speedy, free and include useful features such as bookmark syncing.

**3. Upload your photos to the cloud.** Why? One computer crash could wipe out years of memories. Using an online photo service ensures their safety and you can more easily share them with family and friends. Try Google's Picasa service, which creates a full backup from your photo library.

**4. Back up your data** using an online backup service. *Benefit:* No additional equipment is needed. Simply install the software, and it runs in the background, regularly copying all your files. *Recommendation:* [sosonlinebackup.com](http://sosonlinebackup.com); \$80 per year.

**5. Set up a file-sharing service.** It's a more elegant solution than e-mailing files to yourself. Set up a free account with [Dropbox.com](http://Dropbox.com), and you'll have an icon that sits on your desktop. Drag a file onto the icon, and it instantly saves it to the cloud, where you can retrieve it from any computer or smartphone.

**6. Call and ask for a better deal** from your cable, phone and Internet providers.

*Other tactics:* Measure your Internet speed, using [dslreports.com/speedtest](http://dslreports.com/speedtest); if it is less than what you are paying for, ask for a free upgrade.

**7. Buy charging cables,** so you'll never have a gadget's battery die on you. Have enough cables to charge at home, the office or the car. Get the cables for less by searching eBay for what you need, and including the terms "original" or "oem" (original equipment manufacturer).

— Adapted from "10 Ways to Get the Most Out of Technology," Sam Grobart, *The New York Times*.