DISABLE THE BUILT-IN ADS

Windows 10 now displays ads on the lock screen via Windows Spotlight. Sometimes, Windows Spotlight will just show off wallpapers, but it'll also sneak in advertisements for games like *Rise of the Tomb Raider* and *Quantum Break* in the Windows Store.

To get rid of these lock screen ads, head to Settings (Windows + I) > Personalization > Lock Screen and set the background to "Picture" or "Slideshow" instead of Windows Spotlight.

You'll probably also want to disable the "Get fun facts, tips, and more from Windows and Cortana on your lock screen" option here, too.

Stop Suggested Apps from Appearing in the Start Menu

Windows 10 will occasionally show "suggested apps" in your Start menu. Suggested apps aren't necessarily free, and Microsoft has used this feature to advertise $60 PC games from the Windows Store. They just take up valuable space in your Start menu.

To stop suggested apps from appearing in the Start menu, head to Settings > Personalization > Start and set the "Occasionally show suggestions in Start" setting to "Off".

Get Rid of Nagging Tips

Windows 10 also has helpful "tips" that often serve to push Microsoft apps and services. Tips have included recommendations to use Microsoft Edge for better battery life, and an encouragement to use Microsoft Edge so you can earn Microsoft rewards points.

If you'd like to just use your own preferred applications without Microsoft nagging you, you'll need to disable these tips. To do so, head to Settings > System > Notifications & Actions and disable the "Get tips, tricks, and suggestions as you use Windows" option.

Stop Cortana from Bouncing on the Taskbar

Cortana doesn't just sit on your taskbar and wait for you to start talking to it. Cortana will regularly bounce in place, encouraging you to try using it.

If you don't want Cortana nagging you, click the Cortana search bar, click the Settings icon, scroll down, and disable the "Taskbar Tidbits" option. From then on, Cortana will sit quietly until you want to use it.

If You Don't Want Cortana to Run at All

If you don't want Cortana running at all, you can choose to disable Cortana with a registry setting. Microsoft removed the old, easy toggle that lets you disable Cortana with the Anniversary Update, but the registry trick still works.

Standard warning: Registry Editor is a powerful tool and misusing it can render your system unstable or even inoperable. This is a pretty simple hack and as long as you stick to the instructions, you shouldn't have any problems. You should make a System Restore point before continuing. Windows will probably do this automatically when you install the Anniversary Update, but it couldn't hurt to make one manually–that way, if something goes wrong, you can always roll back.

Open the **Registry Editor** by pressing Windows+R on your keyboard, typing "regedit" into the box, and pressing Enter.

Navigate to the following key in the left column:

HKEY_LOCAL_MACHINE\SOFTWARE\Policies\Microsoft\Windows\Windows Search.

If you don't see a "Windows Search" key (folder) below the Windows folder, right-click the Windows folder and select New > Key. Name it "Windows Search".

Right-click the "Windows Search" key (folder) in the left pane and select New > DWORD (32-bit) Value.

Name the value "AllowCortana". Double-click it and set the value to "0".

You can now close the registry editor. You'll have to restart your computer before the change takes effect.

To undo your change and restore Cortana in the future, you can just return here, locate the "AllowCortana" value, and delete it or set it to "1".

Banish "Get Office" Notifications

Windows 10 includes a "Get Office" application that sits there, providing notifications suggesting you download Office 365 and enjoy a month-long free trial.

To stop those Get Office notifications, head to Settings > System > Notifications & Actions, scroll down, and set notifications for the "Get Office" app to "Off". You can also simply find the Get Office app in your Start menu, right-click it, and select "Uninstall". However, it may come back when you update Windows 10 in the future.

Uninstall Candy Crush Saga and Other Automatically Installed Apps

Windows 10 "automatically downloads" apps like *Candy Crush Soda Saga*, Flipboard, Twitter, and *Minecraft: Windows 10 Edition* when you sign in for the first time. PC manufacturers can also add their own apps and live tiles that appear installed by default.

You can remove these apps and tiles. To do so, just open your Start menu, locate any apps you don't want to use, right-click them, and select "Uninstall." Apps like *Candy Crush Soda Saga* and *FarmVille 2: Country Escape* will appear as tiles by default on the Start screen, but you can also find them under the Apps list of the Start Menu.

Some apps are simply given a tile but aren't yet downloaded. To remove these tiles, just right-click the tile and select "Unpin from Start." You won't see an "Uninstall" option because the tiles are just links that take you to the Windows Store where you can download the app.

To disable live tiles that advertise to you, right-click a tile and select More > Turn live tile off. You can also just right-click a tile and select "Unpin from Start" to get rid of the tile entirely.

Avoid the Built-in Solitaire Game

Stay away from the "Microsoft Solitaire Collection" game preinstalled on Windows 10. This app doesn't just have advertising–it has video ads that are 30 seconds long. You can avoid the advertising by paying $10 a year. Microsoft's Minesweeper game isn't installed by default, but it too has its own $10 a year subscription fee. Those are steep prices for games that used to be free.

Play another free Solitaire game instead. Google now offers a solitaire game–just search for "solitaire" and you can play ad-free solitaire in Google's search results.

There are completely free Solitaire and Minesweeper games that anybody can access from a desktop browser. In addition to being free, they are ad-free as well.

solitaireforfree.com

minesweeperforfree.com

Expect to see Microsoft add more advertising to Windows 10 in future major updates. For example, Windows 10's Anniversary Update turned more of the default tiles on the Start menu into "sponsored tiles".