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# Tech Decoded

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**Daniel Thomas**

Editor, Tech Decoded

Hello. We've probably all experienced the frustration of poor mobile phone coverage. But could satellite internet hold the key to beating signal "not spots"? With the UK the latest country to offer such services via everyday smartphones, I explore the improvements users can expect to see. We also investigate AI job interviews, hear the story of the first handheld digital camera, and check out the AI Christmas ad withdrawn by McDonald's in the Netherlands.

## THE DOWNLOAD

### Will 'not-spots' soon be a thing of the past?



Increasingly we will be able to use smartphones in remote locations thanks to satellites. Credit: Getty Images

Until recently, satellite calls required expensive and specialist kit that was typically only used by organisations like the Navy and mountain rescue

teams.

Gradually, though, direct satellite services are becoming available on everyday smartphones in areas where mobile coverage is patchy or non-existent. The US, Ukraine, Canada, New Zealand and Australia have led the charge with the UK set to join the club from next year.

**British telecoms giant O2 will join forces** with Elon Musk's satellite internet firm Starlink to offer messaging and data services initially, with "further improvements" to follow.

And Vodafone and AST SpaceMobile will begin customer trials, after carrying out what they claimed was the UK's first satellite-enabled smartphone video call **from a mountain in west Wales**.

Could mobile not-spots soon be a thing of the past? Simon Baker, a senior research director at IDC, says the services will take time to evolve. Those planned for the UK are likely to be quite limited at first and people shouldn't expect perfect signal.

While Starlink has launched 10,000 low earth orbit satellites, only around 650 offer direct-to-device services, Baker says. AST is still in the process of launching its infrastructure and there have been delays.

The phone companies say certain handsets won't be able to receive signals from space, and customers will need to have "direct line of sight" with a satellite to get the best reception, suggesting performance may be worse indoors.

Over time, services are likely to get better as smartphone specifications and satellite coverage improve. But it is unclear when we will be able to make normal network calls from really remote locations.

O2 told Tech Decoded that would only be possible with Starlink's next-gen satellite constellation, "which will be deployed in the future".

***The download:*** Direct-to-device satellite phone services can't come soon enough for those struggling with poor coverage. But the battle to end mobile blackspots is only just beginning.

## TOP STORIES



## 'Architects of AI' named Time's Person of the Year

Nvidia boss Jensen Huang, Meta head Mark Zuckerberg and X owner Elon Musk are among those sharing the accolade this year.

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## Trump to override state rules on AI

The US president has signed an executive order allowing tech firms to bypass the most "onerous" state rules in a bid to boost growth.

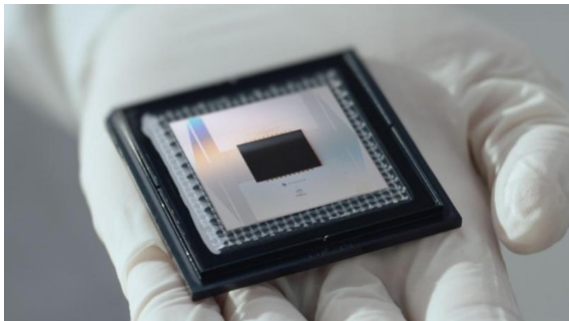
[Here's why >](#)



## Crypto fraudster sentenced for \$40bn stablecoin crash

A former entrepreneur who was behind two digital currencies that collapsed has been sentenced to 15 years in prison for an "epic" fraud.

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## Google asks experts to find uses for its quantum tech

Some say these computers have huge potential, but the ones that currently exist have few practical applications.

[Read why >](#)



## The rise of the AI job interview

What's it like being screened for a role by an AI bot, such as the one pictured?

**MaryLou Costa** hopped on a video call to find out.

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## SOMETHING DIFFERENT

# The birth of the handheld digital camera



The first handheld digital camera stored information on an audio cassette deck. Credit: George Eastman Museum

When electrical engineer Steve Sasson (*pictured*) started working at Eastman Kodak in 1973, he felt out of place. The photographic film giant was dominated by research chemists and mechanical engineers who would develop new types of film and cameras. But soon Sasson was tasked with recreating the photographic process electronically - and with a little inspiration from Star Trek, **he came up with the solution**.

## PODCAST PICK





## Charting Musk's rise

How the entrepreneur went from tech giant PayPal, to building electric cars at Tesla and launching rockets at SpaceX.

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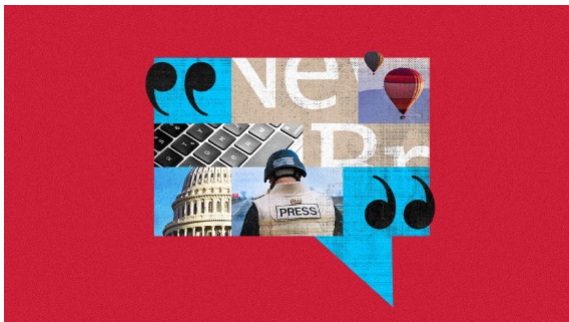
## And finally...

McDonald's in the Netherlands has taken down a Christmas advert made with AI after an online backlash. The 45-second film depicted things that can go wrong during the Christmas break, using the slogan "the most terrible time of the year". But viewers criticised its uncanny-looking characters and stitched-together clips, with one calling it "creepy" and another "god-awful". **[Check it out for yourself.](#)**

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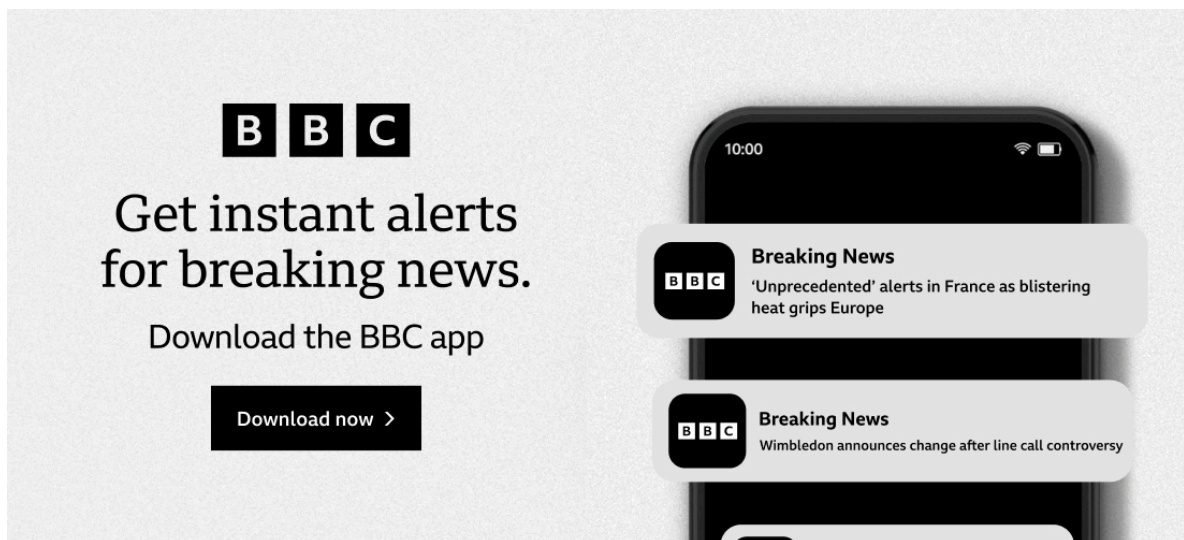
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