

PC Retail

Issue 47 August 2007

www.pcretailmag.com

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PCRETAIL CONTACTS

Editor
Scott Bicheno
scott.bicheno@intentmedia.co.uk

Staff Writer
Ben Furfie
ben.furfie@intentmedia.co.uk

Production Editor
Samantha Loveday
samantha.loveday@intentmedia.co.uk

Managing Editor
Lisa Foster
lisa.foster@intentmedia.co.uk

Advertising Manager
Katie Rawlings
katie.rawlings@intentmedia.co.uk

Advertising Executive
Carly Bailey
carly.bailey@intentmedia.co.uk

Production Manager
Suzanne Powles
suzanne.powles@intentmedia.co.uk

Designer
James Martin
james.martin@intentmedia.co.uk

PUBLISHER: 01992 535646
Stuart Dinsey
stuart.dinsey@intentmedia.co.uk

EDITORIAL: 01992 535646
ADVERTISING: 01992 535647
FAX: 01992 535648



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Subscriptions Manager: Hannah Short, Hannah.Short@intentmedia.co.uk

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What's the problem?



A COMMON THREAD running through this month's issue, and indeed many prior to this, is the concept of solutions. For as long as I can remember members of the technology industry have been proclaiming, to the point of cliché, that they are "solution providers, not box shifters," the inference being that they do more than simply pile 'em high and sell 'em cheap.

Probably the biggest single driver of this tendency has been the Internet, which has allowed the likes of Amazon to pile 'em higher and sell 'em cheaper than ever before. This left everyone else having to either follow suit or justify not doing so.

The Internet has made retail either follow suit or justify why it hasn't done so

Which brings us to the solution-sell. Most people haven't taken the time to suss out how technology works. This is where retailers come to the rescue; offering their knowledge and judgement to ensure they make the right choice for them.

So this month we see Commodore present its mobile content solution (p6), Sony unveil its new laptop retail concept, designed to help consumers relate their lifestyle to the kind of laptop they need (p7).

Further on we have an exclusive interview with Bhavesh Patel, commercial director at Ingram Micro (p23). It seems that solution selling is a key feature of Ingram's business, with the many uses of digital storage getting particular attention in the interview.

One conclusion was that network attached storage is of growing importance as domestic wireless networks become more widespread. I take a look at home networking on p55 and find that any retailer that can do an effective 'solution' sell on a home network could be unearthing a goldmine.

One of the things that has always intrigued me about the use of the word solution is that, grammatically at least, it presupposes that there is an existing problem the solution solves. I guess if there is a problem in this instance, it's the oldest one of all: how do I make more money?

Scott Bicheno

Scott.Bicheno@intentmedia.co.uk

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Three is clearly a magic number for Microsoft

Vendor keeps all three broad-line distributors ● Trio of UK independent software vendors rewarded

by Lisa Foster

IT MAY HAVE announced at the start of the year that only two of its three broad-line distributors were going to be retained at the end of a six month assessment period, but Microsoft has now opted to retain all three.

Speaking to *PC Retail*, Microsoft's partner group manager Steve Haddock explained the thinking behind the decision: "Following the extension of our distributor channel last October, we have been through a rigorous six-month scorecarding process, to ensure each distributor is performing in line with the demands of the market. Because of the performance of each of

our distributors during the six-month scorecarding process, we are pleased to announce that we will continue working with each of our current distributors.

"The preservation of these relationships is in recognition of the unique value each one of our distributors brings to our distribution channel and, ultimately, the value which is driven to our resellers and their customers.

He added: "We are extremely satisfied by the diversity of expertise which exists in our distribution channel as a result of the review process, as well as the fact that there is a clear differentiation between each of our current distributors. This will enable our network of UK



HADDOCK: "The preservation of these relationships is in recognition of the unique value each one brings to our channel"

resellers to be more competitive and drive forward their own businesses which will in turn benefit our end customers."

Elsewhere, at its Worldwide Partner Conference, Microsoft awarded Partner of the Year status to three UK independent software vendors. Information Management Group, Bytes Technology Group and Aspective were announced earlier this month as ISV award winners. They picked up the accolades for Data Management Solutions, Business Intelligence Partner of the Year, Licensing Solutions, Software Asset Management Partner of the Year and Microsoft Dynamics CRM Partner of the Year respectively.

Gem releases Flash security titles

GEM HAS rolled out the second wave of products from CA Internet Security.

They come following the successful launch of the CA line-up by exclusive distributor Gem last month.

The first of the two products is the *CA Flash Drive*. Including *CA Internet*

Security Suite 2007 and home protection for three PCs, the product is delivered – as the name suggests – on a 2GB Flash Drive.

Retail price is £49.95.

The second is the *CA Internet Security Suite* with Desktop DNA Migrator Flash Drive. As well as providing

security software for three PCs, this allows users to easily migrate their files, settings and preferences from PC to PC. Retail price is also £49.95.

"We've been working closely with CA in their introduction into the UK market," said Gem's



commercial director Simon Lee (pictured). "Following a successful launch which had a great impact on the channel, now we've got the release of the Flash Drive skus, which are memorable, provide a great hook for consumers and retailers and are excellent value," he added.

News Bytes

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Big Mother

IBASE's new MI910 Mini-ITX motherboard includes the Mobile Intel GM965 Express Chipset consisting of Intel GM965 Graphic Memory Controller Hub and Intel I/O Controller Hub, an optimised integrated graphics solution with a 533MHz and 800MHz front-side bus.

www.ibase.com.tw

Entatech expands

Entatech is now stocking Foxconn motherboards and graphic cards. "Increasing the Foxconn range through Enta shows a joint commitment to providing customers with a more flexible approach in buying Foxconn components," said Foxconn MD Stephen Ling.

www.entaonline.com

Panda top in UK

The UK operation of Panda Software is the fastest growing of all countries in which it has a presence. The UK was named top overall sales performer, achieving higher year-on-year (Jan 2006 – May 2007) sales revenues than the other 54 operations.

pandasoftware.co.uk

Ingram Googled

Ingram Micro has signed a deal with Google to distribute its enterprise software boxes in the US. The devices are aimed at firms which have such a large amount of documents that normal desktop/server search application wouldn't be able cope.

ingrammicro-europe.com

Go wireless

Lexmark's wireless printers are now being stocked at Currys, Currys.Digital and PC World. The range includes the Z1480 single function wireless colour printer, X4580 wireless all-in-one printer, Z1380 single function inkjet printer, and X2580 and X3580 two-in-ones.

www.lexmark.co.uk

UK push for Commodore

Big hopes to revolutionise mobile media market with wi-fi enabled streaming portable device...

by Scott Bicheno

A NEW CONCEPT sporting an old brand has been launched into the UK market.

Anyone who remembers the 80's will be familiar with the Commodore brand, but other than the logo this version has nothing in common with the computing company of old.

Today's Commodore describes itself as a wi-fi entertainment platform and aims to redefine the way people consume their media on the move. Its unique proposition is to do away with storage and have everyone stream their media live over wi-fi.

"This is a completely new concept," sales director Frank Akihary said. "By emphasising streaming and video-on-demand we're changing the way content is accessed."

The launch product will be the Commodore Gravel In Pocket, a device with a 2.8-inch TFT screen and full wi-fi connectivity. It is designed to access the CommodoreWorld media portal via wi-fi and stream video and audio from it.

For the concept to work there has to be good wi-fi



"By emphasising streaming and video-on-demand, we are changing the way content is accessed."

hotspot coverage, but just as important is a commercial model which spares the user the need to establish a new commercial arrangement every time they pass from one hotspot to another. Akihary believes the current hotspot paradigm is destined to change.

Commodore has deals with Boingo – a hotspot aggregator

that provides flat-rate access to public hotspot providers – and FON – a wi-fi community in which people share access to their personal wi-fi.

It is estimated that the Gravel will retail for around £200, a price that will include a router and, initially free, access to CommodoreWorld. commodore-gravel.com

Green group targets the tech industry

ENVIRONMENTAL advisory group the Energy Saving Trust is offering its 'Energy Saving Recommended' accreditation to the most efficient 20 per cent of technology products.

The not-for-profit organisation identified technology products as being major contributors to power consumption in the UK. It is hoping its accreditation will encourage retailers to stock only the 'greenest' products, as it can serve as a powerful differentiator between otherwise similar products.

In its report, snappily entitled *The Ampere Strikes Back*, the trust listed information, communication and entertainment as major energy consumers, estimating that by 2020 they will account for almost half of domestic power consumption.

The Energy Saving Trust states as its mission statement 'to reduce UK emissions of carbon dioxide, one of the greenhouse gases responsible for climate change, by 20 per cent of 1990 levels by 2010'.



The Trust wants to reduce UK emissions of carbon dioxide by 20 per cent of 1990 levels by 2010.

Major retailers such as PC World, Currys and Comet have already joined the initiative and it is looking to recruit new members.

It believes the 'Recommended' accreditation could be especially valuable to smaller retailers, who can explain the significance of it to their customers.

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk

News Bytes

Save energy

Fujitsu Siemens Computers has revealed the most energy efficient server in the world – the PRIMERGY TX120 tower server. It apparently sets new standards in environmentally conscious design with the smallest carbon footprint of any server available today. www.fujitsu-siemens.com

CeBIT speaks

In the words of Ernst Raue, the Deutsche Messe board member in charge of CeBIT, the 2008 show is gearing up to "underscore its outstanding role as the digital community's No. 1 marketplace". The new look CeBIT will aim to be more user-centric than ever from next year. www.cebit.de

Microsoft Blowout

Microsoft's COO, Kevin Turner, has revealed a triple software launch for February 27th 2008. Turner announced that *Windows Server 2008*, *Visual Studio 2008* and *Microsoft SQL Server 2008* will launch at an event in LA, kicking off hundreds of launch events around the world. www.microsoft.com

Your Dell

Dell is preparing to launch a line of laptop and desktop computers aimed at small businesses called Vostro. The range of is being targeted at businesses with 25 or less employees and is tipped to come with subscription-based services and a dedicated tech support staff. www.dell.co.uk

Shoppers up

The latest Retail Traffic Index from research group SPSSL reveals that June saw retail footfall rise by three per cent year-on-year and by 4.4 per cent on May. The quarter two numbers were up 2.2 per cent against 2006, a reverse of the 0.9 per cent drop recorded for Q1. customercounting.com

Sony unveils its retail vision

Research leads to creation of a new consumer friendly retail environment in London hotspot...

by Scott Bicheno

THE SHINY new 'VAIO experience' has been opened at its flagship Sony Centre on Tottenham Court Road.

While it only occupies the first floor, on first inspection it makes the Apple store look like a corner shop.

Its aim is to create more of an 'experience' for customers by allowing them to try out products. Sony's research has found that the traditional retail set-up is too intimidating and has driven customers on to the Internet or put them off purchasing altogether.

The new concept focuses on VAIO laptops. However, it aims to concentrate on the lifestyle benefits of the products rather than purely the technical specifications. It does this by segmenting the range into 'In Home' and 'On the Move' laptops, to allow consumers to identify the correct product for their lifestyle needs.

In the 'In Home' section there are a number of sub categories: Simple Computing, All Purpose, High Performance and Digital Home. Within the 'On the Move' section are the following sub categories: All Purpose, High Performance and Ultra Portable products.

Nicolas Barendson, VAIO business unit head at Sony UK, explained: "The new VAIO



The Vaio Experience focuses on the lifestyle benefits of the products rather than the technical specifications

"We are making a considerable investment in the experience of our consumers."

experience has been designed to increase footfall into stores through a relaxed and informal environment that encourages shoppers to interact with our portfolio of products so they can find the model that best suits their needs."

The intriguing news for the retail channel is that Sony plans

to extend the initiative across the country in due course.

"This is not a one-off initiative," said Barendson. "Instead we are making a considerable investment in the experience of our consumers and we are also rolling this concept out across 20 of our key stores across the UK."

VAIO CONSUMER RESEARCH KEY FINDINGS

- Price is not at the top of the consumer decision tree
- The retail environment is undifferentiated, confusing and stressful for the shopper
- In-store communications encourage the shopper to make their decision based on price and specification alone
- Shoppers are taking weeks to make a notebook purchase decision

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Enta-Personal

Enta Technologies has a new addition to Entaonline. 'Meet the Team' gives customers the chance to put faces to names, request a call back and get a bit of background on their contacts. The specialist sales team is available to speak to customers every day.

www.entaonline.co.uk

AMD price cuts

AMD has dropped the RRP's across its whole desktop processor range. "AMD cut the price of the 3GHz Athlon 64 FX-74 from \$799 to \$599," said the site. "The dual-core FX-72's price remains unchanged, but the remainder of the dual-core desktop CPUs, the Athlon 64 X2 line, became cheaper."

www.amd.com

Avnet and Sapphire

Avnet Technology Solutions EMEA is to offer Sapphire-branded AMD/ATI graphics cards across EMEA. The agreement will see Avnet market and distribute Sapphire products to leading edge PC manufacturers through its extensive network of resellers.

www.avnet.com

Broadband satisfaction

A report into customer satisfaction of broadband services, based on responses from nearly 9,000 home phone and nearly 11,000 broadband users, shows that consumers have yet to see any improvement. Free providers came bottom of the survey.

www.uswitch.co.uk

HD-DVD vs. Blu-ray

HD-DVD players are outselling rival Blu-ray players by a margin of three-to-one, according to the European HD-DVD Promotional Group. HD-DVD has a 74 per cent market share in the likes of Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Switzerland for standalone players.

www.hddvd.org

Trade bodies rally to find WEEE compromise

DTI advises independent trade bodies of a possible solution to the unfair WEEE burden...

INDEPENDENT RETAIL trade bodies ITACS and NASCR have continued their lobbying of the Government over the unfair burden of the WEEE regulations on smaller outfits.

On July 6th this took them to the Department of Trade and Industry, where they met the director and assistant director responsible for WEEE.

The key development to emerge from the meeting was the possibility of local authorities allowing smaller retailers to use registered DCF (distributor collection facility) civic amenity sites. Apparently nothing in the WEEE directive prevents this, but pre-existing regulation does.

It appears that local authorities have the power to disregard this legislation if they choose, an option already being exercised by Wessex County Council, with others expected to follow. However, even Wessex's concession limits the amount of waste allowable to what seems to be an unrealistically small amount.

"The major outcome of the meeting has been the establishment of a communication channel where none previously existed,"



ARMSTRONG (inset): "Our major concern is the expensive WEEE transportation cost burden"

Hendy Armstrong, ITACS Secretary told *PC Retail*.

"Our major concern has always been the expensive WEEE transportation cost burden – in our view a very real business killer. We do hope the enlightened policy of West Sussex County Council cascades in time across the country," he continued.

"However, we feel that a limit of eight computer monitors per year applied by that Authority is a serious restriction to our businesses."

There was also a clarification of the situation regarding 'joint and several liability' in producer compliance schemes (PCS). The DTI advised that such a thing does not exist and

that members are only liable for their own obligations whether or not other members fail. What this news implies for any PCS' that have sold insurance to cover such an eventuality remains to be seen.

It has been suggested that, pending a full resolution of the problem, smaller retailers should explore the possibility of

access to private DCFs and Waste Transfer Stations. Jenny Stimpson, a NASCR committee member, agrees but thinks retailers should proceed with caution.

"Many Councils run detection programmes and the consequences can be severe if caught," she told *PC Retail*. "To help us in monitoring development the Associations would be grateful if individual businesses enquire if the local authority is indeed considering changing its policy and, if so, by when and let us know."

It seems that the ball is still very much in the DTI's court, with decisive action necessary before independents start crumbling under the financial burden of complying with WEEE in its current form. ITACS and NASCR intend to remain diligent.

"In the course of the coming weeks we shall be checking the rate of advance of Local Authority policy change and forming a view on its effective distribution," said Armstrong.

"Our associations take the view that the WEEE wheel is indeed round but a few spokes are still missing and these affect our independent sector most."

News Bytes

Netgear joins with Bell Micro

Netgear and Bell Micro have teamed up to give retailers a helping hand with selling network solutions in the UK. The deal will see the firms supporting the sale of Netgear's ProSafe business products. www.netgear.com

Museum of UK Computing

The UK is to get a museum dedicated to its place in the early development on computing technologies. The National Museum of Computing will be at Bletchley Park – where the Allies broke the codes used by Germany in WWII. bletchleypark.org.uk

Chimei hits UK

UK distributor VIP is introducing the CHIMEI brand by MIRAI for its range of LCD monitors. CHIMEI is already renowned in Asia as a leading LCD TV and monitor brand and is the world's third largest supplier of LCD TV panels. www.chimei.com.tw

Second-shop

Second Life, the popular virtual reality portal, has seen the first retailer selling products through the program. Depending upon the success of the trial, it could signal a move towards the world of the virtual High Street with more retailers moving in. www.secondlife.com

Hama-time

Hama PVAC has officially re-branded to Hama (UK) as it continues to focus on UK growth. MD Nick Grey said: "Hama has evolved over the past few years and our presence in the UK has grown. We felt it was the right time to focus on our image and our future." www.hama.co.uk

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Sales Projections

PANASONIC has unveiled its new F100 series of projectors, designed to offer long lasting performance, increased brightness and advanced energy saving control. The F100 series currently consists of two models – the PT-FW100NT and the PT-F100NaT.

Both models offer Panasonic's range of technologies, which improve brightness, ease of use and, most importantly, incorporate an Anti-Dust

design and Auto Rolling Filter which work together to keep the air inside the projector dust-free at all times.

This maintains high picture brightness for longer and eliminates the need for the end-user to regularly maintain and clean the projector filter. The electrostatic air filter uses ions to attract and collect dust particles and minimises image degradation due to dust.
www.panasonic.co.uk

Six new Sweex mice squeak into retail



SWEEX has unveiled a range of six new mice designed for a variety of different uses.

The Notebook Optical Retractable USB, which has a retractable USB cable making it ideal for laptop users – the mouse is also available in a laser variety. It is also possible to buy a non-retractable version of the mouse.

The company has also created a range of mice for desktop PCs.

The MI550 laser mouse comes with three mouse buttons and a scroll wheel. Also available are two variations of Sweex's top of the line five-button mice: one wired and the other wireless.

www.sweex.com

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Contrary to popular belief most users today don't require a Xantium 53Ghz processor, nor is a 6 terabyte drive at the top of their shopping list.

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Barracuda 1TB drives boost Seagate portfolio

SEAGATE HAS unveiled a series of one-terabyte drives which are set to go on sale later this year.

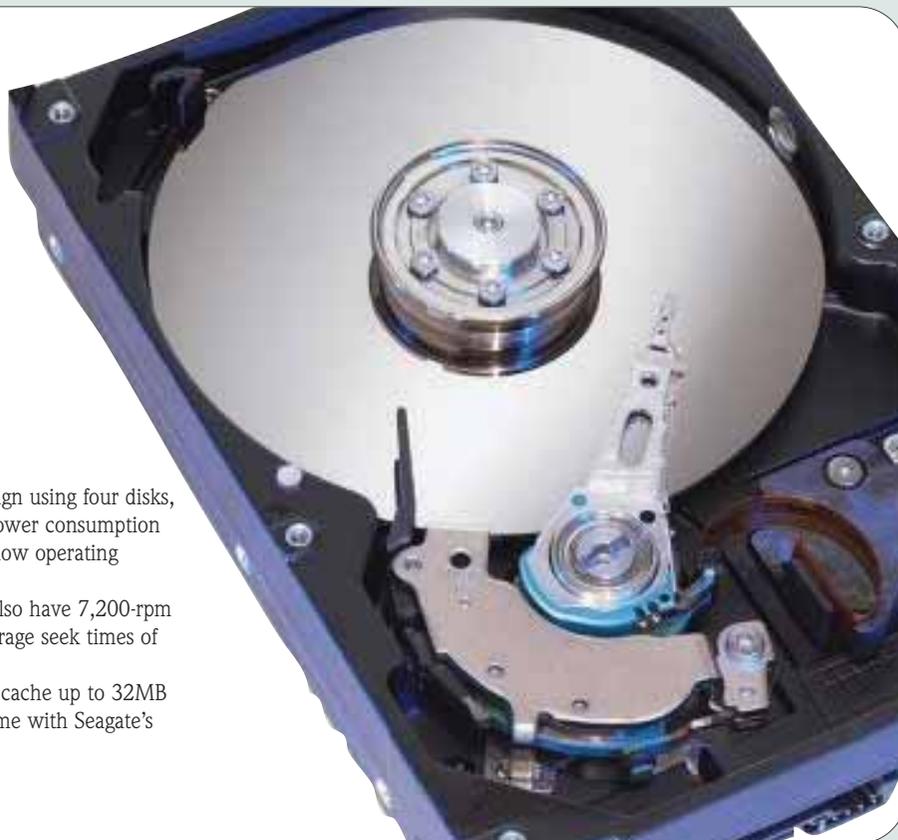
Aimed at both enterprise and consumers, the Barracuda 7200.11 and Barracuda ES.2 are being positioned as the perfect drives for those who are looking to upgrade or build their own PCs as high definition and content driven media platforms become more and more common.

Based around a design using four disks, the drives have low power consumption and also benefit from low operating temperatures.

Both of the drives also have 7,200-rpm spin speeds giving average seek times of just 8.5ms.

The drives can also cache up to 32MB of information and come with Seagate's five-year warranty.

www.seagate.com



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Roll out on for new SideShow book

VIP COMPUTER CENTRE is now stocking a dual screen notebook from ASUS featuring 'SideShow', designed for quick and easy access on the go.

The ASUS W5Fe is a compact 12.1-inch wide notebook with an additional 2.8-inch SideShow display on the outer cover. The W5Fe's auxiliary display is a short cut to viewing a wide range of information, including meeting schedules, phone numbers, addresses and recent email messages.

The idea behind Sideshow is that if you need to check a meeting agenda or new email while on the move, you can access this data without opening and booting up the notebook. It also has the ability to keep you entertained on a long journey, as you can use SideShow to view photos, play music and games, and it can even act as a mobile navigation device, guiding your way with an onscreen map display.

Portable and powerful, the ASUS W5FE features a slim, lightweight design and Intel

Centrino Duo Mobile Technology. A built-in 1.3 mega-pixel 235-degree swivel webcam and microphone, plus exclusive LiveFrame software developed for the W5Fe, allows easy capturing, recording and playing of photos and videos too.

Product manager at VIP, Stuart Watson said: "VIP is excited to introduce this revolutionary laptop to the UK. As the first notebook PC to support 'SideShow' gadgets, e.g. a second screen on the external lid, the W5Fe has already generated a huge amount of interest."

Account manager for the Notebook Team at ASUS, Valeriy Kosovan added: "Once again ASUS has produced a highly innovative product. The ASUS W5Fe is the first dual screen notebook, allowing users to enjoy new *Window Vista* features and making long journeys easier."



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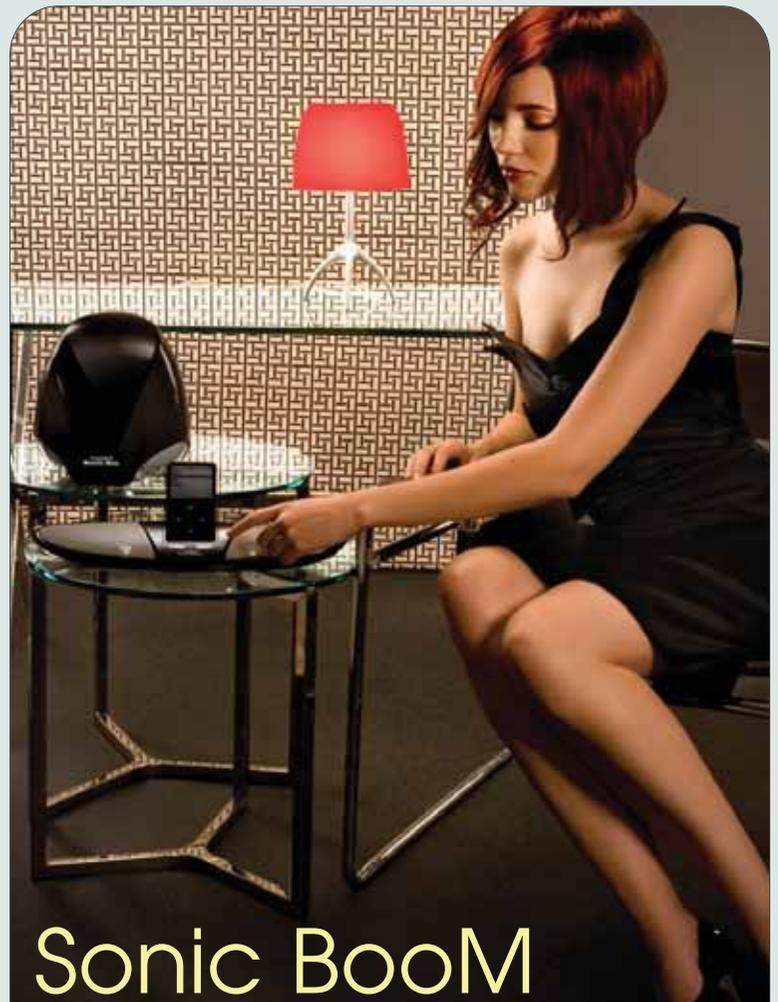
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Sonic Boom

TWINMOS has announced its new BooM series of iPod-inspired docking and speaker accessories. The first in the series to be launched in the UK is the BooM1 – a charging dock and speaker system that comes with a subwoofer and the ability to connect to TVs to view videos and look at photos stored on the docked iPod. www.twinmos.com

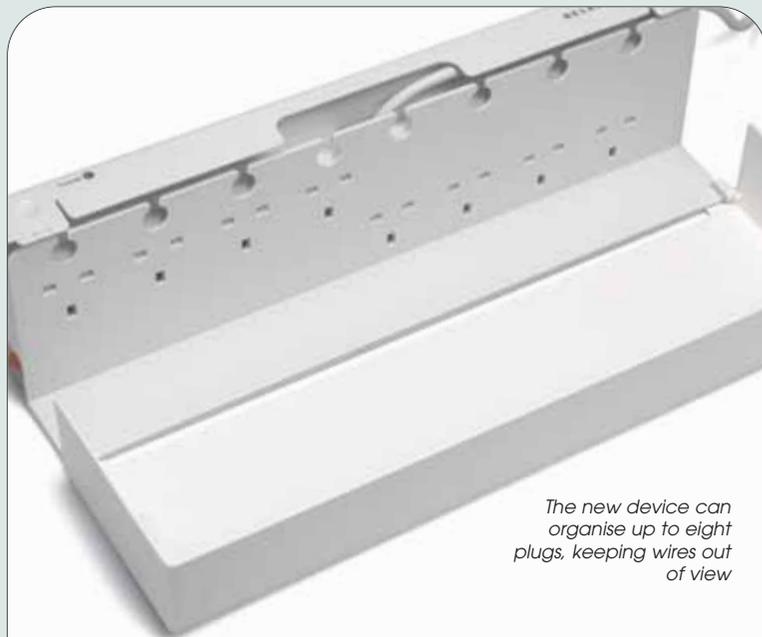
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The new device can organise up to eight plugs, keeping wires out of view

Belkin Surges ahead

BELKIN has launched what it hopes will be the end to that eternal conundrum of messy wires and worries about surges.

The new Belkin Concealed Surge Protector organises up to eight plugs, including the larger block adaptors and keeps out of view wires that would have otherwise likely become tangled and become a safety hazard.

The device is also designed to ensure that it cannot be opened by accident or by children, reducing the

risk of electrocution. A single light lets users know if everything is working reducing the time the device needs to be open, further reducing danger.

The device also comes with phone/fax and modem connections, as well as a single on/off switch that controls of the ports. It also comes with a connected equipment warranty of up to £175,000 which guarantees to protect any products linked to it.

www.belkin.com

Iford grows paper line



PHOTO paper specialist Ilford has unveiled its range of specialist inkjet paper for the photo enthusiast.

Coming in three collections – pink, silver and gold, signifying the papers quality – each has their own use.

Pink is aimed at sharing and exchanging everyday photos, Silver is for persevering special family photos, meanwhile Gold is for



displaying photos in frames.

The paper also comes in a variety of sizes – ranging from 4x6 snapshot paper to A3+ professional for framing those larger, special images.

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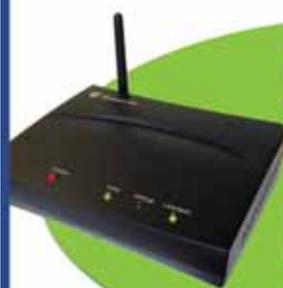
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Driver Unit Subwoofer: 3"
Material of Box : Wooden



C021W Multimedia Speaker 2.1
PIANO PAINTED SURFACE
Output Subwoofer (RMS) : 20W
Output Front (RMS) : 10W
Output P.M.P.O. : 500W
Driver Unit Subwoofer: 4"
Material of Boxes : Wooden



C021 Multimedia Speaker 2.1
PIANO PAINTED SURFACE
Output Subwoofer (RMS) : 20W
Output Front (RMS) : 10W
Output P.M.P.O. : 500W
Driver Unit Subwoofer: 4"
Material of Boxes : Wooden



C001 Multimedia Speaker 2.1
Output Subwoofer (RMS) : 20W
Output Front (RMS) : 8W
Output P.M.P.O. : 500W
Driver Unit Subwoofer: 3"



C003 Multimedia Speaker 2.1
Output Subwoofer (RMS) : 8W
Output Front (RMS) : 3W
Output P.M.P.O. : 200W
Driver Unit Subwoofer: 4"
Material of Boxes : Wooden
FM RADIO

SPEAKERS



C022 Multimedia Speaker 2.1
PIANO PAINTED SURFACE
Output Subwoofer (RMS) : 20W
Output Front (RMS) : 10W
Output P.M.P.O. : 500W
Driver Unit Subwoofer: 4"
Material of Boxes : Wooden
LED Equaliser
REMOTE CONTROL



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C024 Multimedia Speaker 2.1
WOODEN EFFECT SURFACE
Output Subwoofer (RMS) : 8W
Output Front (RMS) : 3W
Output P.M.P.O. : 300W
Driver Unit Subwoofer: 3"
Material of Boxes : Wooden
LED : Bezel



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Output : 10W x 2

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E106B Multimedia Speaker 5.1
Output Subwoofer (RMS) : 50W
Output Surround (RMS) : 20W
Output P.M.P.O. : 600W
Driver Unit Subwoofer: 6.5"
Material of Boxes : Wooden
LED : Bezel



C050 Multimedia Speaker 2.1
Output Subwoofer (RMS) : 15W
Output Front (RMS) : 5W
Output P.M.P.O. : 300W
Driver Unit Subwoofer: 4"
Material of Box : Wooden



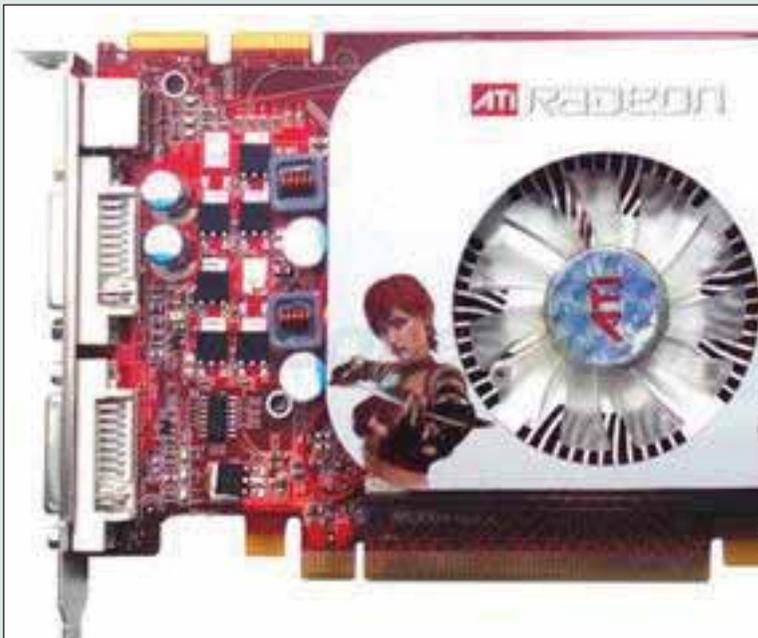
C007 Multimedia Speaker 2.1
Output Subwoofer (RMS) : 20W
Output Front (RMS) : 10W
Output P.M.P.O. : 500W
Driver Unit Subwoofer: 5"
Material of Box : Wooden

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New Radeon arrives

AMD has announced the arrival of the ATI Radeon HD 2600 and the ATI Radeon HD 2400, two graphics cards designed to work with Windows Vista and Direct X 10.

The two cards, based around the energy efficient 65nm process technology – one entry level (2400), the other mid-range (2600) – are designed for use with high definition media content.

Both cards feature AMD's unified video decoder (UVD) for advanced hardware processing and HDMI with a built-in high definition audio controller for stunning big-screen entertainment.

The cards also come with CyberLink's PowerDVD Ultra, which offers support for HD-DVD and Blu-ray discs and also utilises AMD's UVD technology.
ati.amd.com

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Jumbo launch from Innovage

INNOVAGE has launched a universal remote control that aims to be the user-friendliest device of its kind on the market – and is aimed at solving several of the major problems that normal remotes cause and suffer from.

The Jumbo Universal Remote combines all the functionality that you'd expect from a replacement remote control from the ability to connect four devices through to it being easy to use and replacing all the functions of your old remote. It also comes with a programmable 'off' button, which can switch off devices such as a DVD player without switching off others.

However, the most obvious use for the control, and one of the things Innovage is keen to put across, is its accessibility for less able people including those with poor eyesight and mobility disabilities, as well as the elderly. Another accessibility feature are the soft touch keys, which aside from being far larger than normal keys, are designed so as not to hurt more fragile fingers.

Of course, it is also great for those people who have a habit of forgetting where they put the remote since it's that big that it would be pretty hard to lose. www.jumbo-remote.com



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New Sony Vaio storms in

WITH THE VAIO VGC-RM1N desktop Sony is offering consumers, business users and professionals the hardware and software needed to provide professional-level HD editing capability.

In a radical departure from the norms of desktop design, the RM1N's system unit comes in two parts. The primary chassis holds the motherboard and major components, while the secondary unit houses the optical drives.

Aimed at giving users huge flexibility in the way they set the machine up, it has the potential to revolutionise the way people arrange their PCs. The optical unit can be placed under the monitor for easy access, while the system unit is stood off to one side. Both units can stand vertically and horizontally.

Sony claims that the RM1N has been designed to be the pinnacle of the HD world, utilising the highest quality components from leading technology partners such as Intel, Nvidia and Adobe. The RM1N also comes with *Windows Vista Business*.

The VAIO RM1N is supplied with a video editing Jog controller, which is fully compatible with the pre-installed copy of *Adobe Premiere Pro 2.0*.

In addition, the Sony VAIO RM1N is supplied with all that is needed for handling HD content. WinDVD BD for VAIO lets you watch HD-format movies, and full HDCP support means consumers can enjoy the latest Blu-ray High Definition Hollywood releases.

In order to give the VAIO RM1N the power it needs to tackle the demanding work of HD video editing it has the very latest Intel® Core™ 2 Quad processor. With four processor cores and 8MB of shared L2 cache,

this represents the state-of-the-art CPU for professional-grade multimedia applications. There's a similarly impressive amount of storage, with a twin disk Serial ATA RAID 0 array totalling 1 terabyte (1000GB).

The RM1N also comes with the Nvidia GeForce® 8600 GTS built-in to tackle the sheer load of work that is a by-product of HD video processing and rendering. From video manipulation to high-end gaming, with full DirectX 10 support, superlative 3D effects and performance backed by 256MB of GDDR3 video memory, this is a GPU that delivers exactly what is required for HD video editing.

The system unit has room for an additional four SATA hard disks, and there are three open PCI-Express slots capable of taking full-length cards. It also comes with 10 USB 2.0 connectors and three firewire ports that are front-mounted.

"The RM1N will exert a unique appeal for those needing serious HD editing capability," said product manager for VAIO Digital Home products at Sony UK, Chris Trehwhitt. "It has quad-core processing power, professional software pre-installed, a specialised Jog controller for speeding up editing, and it has Blu-ray Disc. So once you're done you can record 50GB of high-definition video on a single-sided disc."



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Logitech expands range to include notebook bags

New products include notebook cases, webcams and a wireless 'Wii style' mouse

LOGITECH has entered the notebook bag market with the launch of two new products aimed at stealing a piece of the highly lucrative notebook essentials market.

As notebook PC sales outpace desktop PC sales, a more diverse set of consumers are enjoying the benefits of the compact notebook. A recent Logitech-sponsored study of more than 1,000 notebook users highlighted four types of notebook users: home users; younger users; technology enthusiasts; and mobile professionals.

Logitech's two new advanced notebook cases, the Logitech Kinetik 15.4 Backpack and the Logitech Kinetik 15.4 Briefcase, offer a flexible take on the traditional notebook case. Both feature an exo-shell casing, which helps protect the



Logitech's new Kinetik 15.4 backpack

laptop from damage, and a contoured back panel, which conforms to the back.

A unique compartmental

design provides organised bays for devices and access to the laptop and other equipment.

Both cases are made from

lightweight, durable materials and are easy to carry and built to last.

In addition to the bags, Logitech announced that following the sale of its 50 millionth webcam, it has entered into a collaboration with lens maker Carl Zeiss to fit co-designed lenses into its new webcams. The Logitech QuickCam Pro 9000 and the QuickCam Pro for Notebooks are the first webcams to meet Zeiss's world-renowned standards for lens design and manufacturing.

The company also revealed a new mouse, which works in a similar way to the hugely popular Nintendo console, Wii. The MX Air Rechargeable Cordless mouse works by using gesture commands to control certain aspects of the PC such as volume.

AMD to offer regular processors and low-power alternatives

AMD the first chipmaker to do so with its Quad-Core Opteron processors

CHIP giant AMD has announced that it will, for the first time ever, be launching both regular and low-power versions of its new Barcelona Quad-Core Opteron processors.

It is also the first x86 CPU range to incorporate four processing cores onto a single die of silicon.

It is designed to work in the same thermal envelopes as current generation Opteron processors while offering a performance increase of up to 70 per cent.

The processor range is due for shipment to platform partners this month with the first hardware complete with the new processors arriving

on the shelves and catalogues of retailers and resellers next month.

"More than ever before, customers are expecting energy-efficiency and performance-per-watt leadership as much as absolute performance.

"With this new reality of computing, greater performance at the expense of greater power consumption is no longer an option," said corporate vice president, Server and Workstation Division at AMD, Randy Allen.

"AMD has prioritised production of our low power and standard power products



because our customers and ecosystem demand it," he went on to say.

"And we firmly believe that the introduction of our native

Quad-Core AMD Opteron processor will deliver on the promise of the highest levels of performance-per-watt the industry has ever seen."

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This month we look at x and x...



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Processors

- **Approved:** Intel Core 2 Duo E6320

Media Streamer

- **Approved:** Logitech Wireless DJ

Cases

- **Approved:** Lian Li PC-A12 Classical Series

Memory

- **Approved:** OCZ PC2-8500

Creative's Stone skims in



CREATIVE has revealed the Creative ZEN Stone Plus, a new MP3 player that complements the ZEN Stone. The ZEN Stone Plus is a featherweight 2GB MP3 player with a wide selection of features including display, FM radio, clock/stopwatch and voice recording.

It comes in six high-gloss colours: black, white, red, blue, pink and green. It also has a similar smooth finish to the Stone, and comes with 2GB of memory storing up to 1,000 songs.

"Last month we introduced a huge new market for MP3 players with the launch of the ZEN Stone, the tiny, featherweight 1GB MP3 player priced at £27.99," says chairman and CEO of Creative, Sim Wong Hoo.

"Now, with the ZEN Stone Plus, we are giving consumers another great choice. For £49.99 they can have 2GB of memory and a vibrant screen that enables them to access their favourite FM radio stations, plus a built-in microphone for voice recording."

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High-end welcomes GeCube

WITH THE launch of the GeCube HD2900XT, the GeCube HD2600 and HD2400 have now arrived on the market to fill the hole left in the high-end sector. The GeCube HD2900XT comes with complete support for DirectX10 and Universal Video Decoder (UVD) technology.

It also incorporates several GeCube technologies, pushing the products limits of performance.



It is joined by the launch of AGP 8x versions of the Radeon HD2600 and HD2400 series at the same time.

Now there's no excuse for being late for work



EDIFIER has unveiled a new range of iPod compatible alarm clocks.

The retro-styled iPod docks are styled like old-style double-bell and are comes with a universal docking plate so that almost all iPods can be used in it.

In addition, it has 360-degree built-in omni-directional speakers designed so that no matter where it is in the room, you can wake up to the sound of the music on your iPod and kicks

out a huge 85dB to make sure you wake up.

And what's more, you don't have to worry about forgetting to set your alarm either as the dock automatically switches your iPod to alarm/clock mode every time.

Each iPod audio alarm clock comes with a large chrome plated volume dial on the back, as well as coming in three different colours – black, white and pink.

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Just adds to portfolio with ViSo UK deal



ViSo allows your mobile phone to connect to up to four wired or wireless USB video cameras via your PC. Not only can you record and connect to a live stream, but you can also set ViSo to send alerts directly to you when set to motion detection.

User friendly, the initial unit comes with a high quality USB camera with night vision. The package will retail for £99.99, but unlike similar products available, there are no additional subscription charges, only the standard charges of your mobile phone provider for downloading data.

Just Distribution has signed the exclusive distribution rights for ViSo mobile phone Video Surveillance System for the UK leisure market.

“Products like ViSo are a natural progression for Just – both we and our customer base have a keen interest in the latest gadgets available to the leisure sector, and with home security being ever increasingly important to your average consumer,” said director of Just Distribution, Russell Clark. “ViSo is the perfect piece of equipment for those with a limited budget, as well as those people who want cutting edge technology on their mobile phones.”

Added Bruno Mercolli of ViSo: “Just’s reputation as a company hungry to grow and diversify in its chosen sector and their successes so far made it an easy choice for us to make when choosing our partners in each territory.”
Just: 01992 703810

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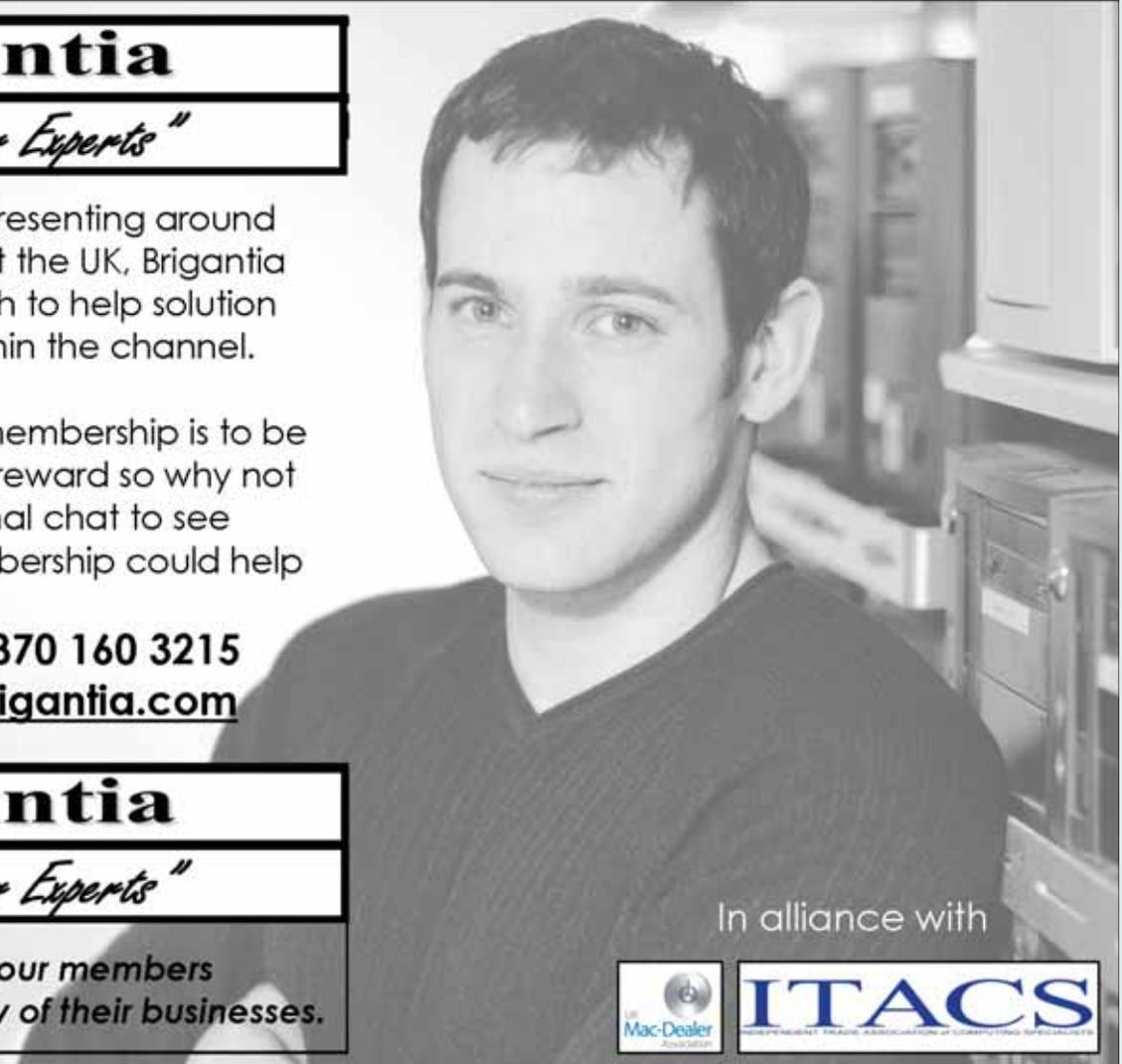
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OFF THE RECORD

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DIVING FOR CHARITY

Emma Rae and Paul Young of Avanquest recently took part in tandem skydives at the Army Parachute Association near Salisbury. They raised £950 for the RSPCA and Oxfam jumping a combined 20,000ft. Emma can be seen here in mid jump.



GRAND PRIX WINNER



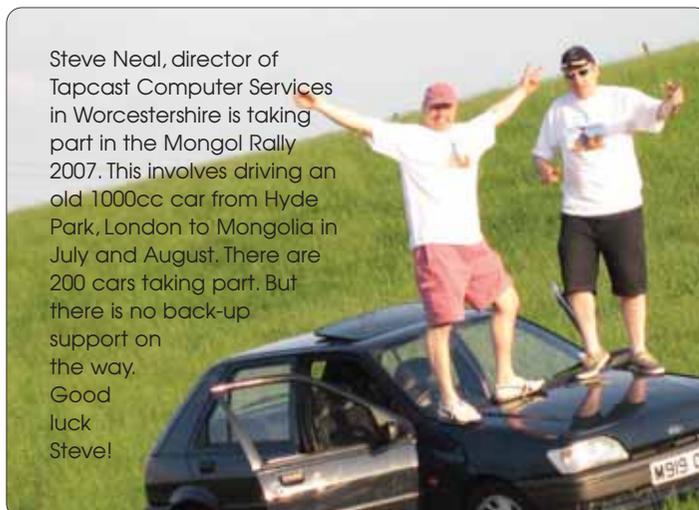
Following Trust International's successful attendance this year's Channel Expo show, Pete Johnson, national account manager at Trust was pleased to formally present, Arfan Sher of Sher Bros Trading Company with platinum tickets to this year's F1 British Grand Prix as winners of its grand prize. Trust International is a Spyker Formula One Team official partner.

SUBTLE PR STUNT



Internet telephony company Jajah has used the time honoured technique of employing an attractive young lady to help it gain publicity. PCR would never dream of rewarding such a stunt with any publicity.

MONGOL HOARD



Steve Neal, director of Tapcast Computer Services in Worcestershire is taking part in the Mongol Rally 2007. This involves driving an old 1000cc car from Hyde Park, London to Mongolia in July and August. There are 200 cars taking part. But there is no back-up support on the way. Good luck Steve!

In the hotseat



Karin Jones,
Sales and Marketing
Director, VIP Computers

How did you get your current job?

I have been at VIP for almost six years. I was originally recruited as marketing manager and was promoted to sales and marketing director about 18 months ago.

What's the best thing about it?

The whole job is great, in particular leading a successful team to create solutions that make a difference to retailers' businesses.

And the worst?

Sometimes the work/life balance is challenging.

Of the technology products you currently own, which is your favourite?

My iPod

What will be the next piece of technology you buy?

An external hard drive to store my digital images and music

If you weren't doing this interview right now what would you be doing?

Developing a campaign with the marketing team

What do you like most about PCR magazine?

Well written, interesting content

And least?

Nothing, it's great!

To be considered for *In The Hotseat* email Scott.Bicheno@intentmedia.co.uk

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CONSUMER PRESS

This month we look at Computer Buyer and PC Plus...



Vista Laptops

- **Best Buy:** Gateway MT6839b
- **Recommended:** Acer Aspire 5613AWLMI

Inkjet Printers

- **Best Buy:** Canon Pixma iP5300
- **Recommended:** Canon Pixma iP3300

Headphones

- **Best Buy:** Sony MDR-NC22
- **Recommended:** Sennheiser PXC250

Browsers

- **Best Buy:** Opera 9.20

Cameras

- **Recommended:** Nikon D40x



Laptops

- Value Award:** Samsung Q45
- Editors Choice:** Zleo N500 HD

Desktops

- Value Award:** Zoostorm 2-3423
- Performance Award:** HSC Dark Whisper

TFT Monitors

- Performance award:** Acer AL2623W
- Editor's Choice:** ViewSonic VX2435w.m

Software

- Editor's Choice:** Corel Ulead Studio Plus 11
- Performance Award:** VMware Workstation 6

Labs - Cameras

- Editor's Choice:** Fujifilm FinePix F31fd
- Value Award:** Nikon Coolpix L11

An Intelligent solution to component cooling

BFG explains the features and benefits behind its ThermoIntelligence technology

NVIDIA board partner BFG has told *PC Retail* why it feels its new ThermoIntelligence technology benefits customers and has the potential to not only improve the reliability of its card's performance, but also prolong the lifespan of the products itself.

The benefit of having ThermoIntelligence on the card is made all the more apparent in that it doesn't come at the cost of increased noise or the loss of an additional hardware slot.

Aside from keeping it cooler than similar cards without the technology, it also manages to maintain its performance over a long period of use thanks to the principle that the cooler the card is, the closer it can get to its peak performance.

It doesn't increase performance, however, other than allowing the card to be overlocked more than a



The BFG GeForce 8600 GTS claims to offer superior cooling to other equivalent cards

similar card without ThermoIntelligence technology.

"The main reason why retailers should stock this card instead of another similar card is that the 8600 GTS ThermoIntelligence fansink maintains a 5 degrees

centigrade lower GPU temperature on average versus the Nvidia reference fansink with a single card setup," said marketing manager at BFG Europe, Graham Brown.

"For power users running dual cards in an Nvidia SLI

configuration, the thermal performance gets even better with the primary card operating at up to 11 degrees cooler."

"The bottom line is that better cooling gives the card more stability within its performance and long term use, which from a consumers perspective protects their investment," added Brown.

"Ever since the inception of BFG Tech back in 2002, we have been at the forefront of high-performance custom cooling," said senior director of marketing, Dean Brady.

"Today with the launch of ThermoIntelligence, we have renewed our commitment to gamers and enthusiasts to provide exceptional and exclusive cooling solutions on BFG Tech graphics cards including the new BFG NVIDIA GeForce 8600 GTS OC2."

The best thing out of Canada since the Blackberry?

Device promises fast Internet browsing without compromising the experience

CANADIAN company Datawind officially unveiled its latest product, the PocketSurfer2, at a recent press event in the Canadian High Commission in London.

Talking about the potential customer base, Datawind spoke about the device's adeptness with popular sites such as Facebook and MySpace along with other functions such as instant messaging.

Datawind was also keen to promote the product as a

piece of hardware that would sit alongside the likes of a mobile or Blackberry, allowing business people to operate outside the office. One of the examples given was the potential benefit the device offers business owners who operate via eBay.

One demonstration was a comparison between an iPhone and the PocketSurfer2, which connects to the Internet via an inbuilt Sim card. It connects to a phone network (currently O2 in the UK) via GPRS. The



demonstration was between the two devices attempting to load the auction website.

It took the iPhone over three minutes to load the site.

In comparison, the PocketSurfer2 loaded the site in seven seconds before wandering off to look at various other sites.

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Dynamite for Dabs

By **Keith Warburton, CEO, PCA**

After taking Dabs.com to task over some unfair trading terms, the Office of Fair Trading asked for some changes to be made to the directives. But the jury is still out on whether all distance sellers will comply voluntarily...



Several years ago the PCA got involved at an EU and UK government level in consultation on the Consumer Guarantees Directive. Interestingly we were the only voice heard across the whole of Europe on behalf of IT retailers and direct sellers. Happily, we had some of the worst provisions removed from the directive.

The Distance Selling Directive, in many respects closely allied to Consumer Guarantees, was being developed at about the same time. Once it was passed, it was then down to the Member States to implement the provisions in their national laws. In the UK some of these conditions are covered by the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations and some in the Sale of Goods Act as amended, and some can be managed under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations.

One of the key principals of the Distance Selling regulations is that consumers should have the same rights when buying 'at a distance' as they have when buying in store. Which means among other things that they have the right to return goods free of charge within seven working days of delivery. The OFT's interpretation of this is that if a customer changes their mind about buying something once they've received it, not only do distance sellers have to refund the purchase price, they must also refund the cost of delivery. Furthermore, once the notice about cancellation has been issued by the customer, the supplier must refund in full within 30 days - notwithstanding that the customer might not actually have



The OFT changed some of its trading terms after the Dabs incident, but will other distance sellers comply?

returned the goods, or that they have been received back in a used or damaged condition.

The OFT recently took Dabs.com to task for some unfair trading terms, and the firm voluntarily changed its terms to, for instance, remove its previous insistence that goods had to be received back and condition checked before a refund would be issued, and refunds didn't include the cost of

delivery. But they also had to change a condition that stated customers 'needed' to obtain RMA number before returning goods, saying instead 'we request you to obtain an RMA number'. There are many other changes that have been required by the OFT, including removing the phrase 'You agree to be bound by terms and conditions' to be replaced with 'We strongly advise that you read our terms and conditions'.

Whether you are a distance seller, a retailer, a vendor, a distributor or a service provider

you are invited to The Industry Conference taking place on September 26th. Members of organisations that are part of The Reseller Committee get a special delegate rate of £35.

The PCA has invited the MacTechnology Association to hold its conference alongside. Not only will delegates have chance to gain an insight into other technology arenas, they will also benefit from the professional advice given by our other speakers, under the title 'How to stay in business and make money'.



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APPOINTMENTS

PCR adds to team

Furfie welcomed as new staff writer, while Future, OKI and Widget also make changes...

PC Retail ■ Following the move of former deputy editor Andrew Wooden to sister title *MCV* – the trade magazine for the computer games industry – *PC Retail* is delighted to announce the appointment of Ben Furfie to the role of staff writer.

Furfie had previously worked in a similar capacity on *MCV* having been recruited on the basis of his experience as a freelance journalist in the fields of gaming and mobile technology.



Widget/Datawind ■ At the recent press event for the PocketSurfer2, it was announced that David Elder commercial director at UK distributor Widget, is to work with Datawind as its new chief operation officer.

He will be heading up the European side of the company as it looks to expand its operations across Europe.

At the press event, he made it clear he felt that the Datawind's device is going to be the biggest product Widget has handled since the TomTom and suggested that it could even out perform that.

Elder will also be retaining his position at Widget.



OKI ■ After serving as acting managing director since March, Phil Scrase has been appointed as the company's new UK managing director and regional vice president for the Western region with immediate effect. The appointment of Scrase, a 15-year veteran of OKI, comes after the early retirement of Chris Gill. During his period as acting managing director he also continued in his role of vice president of consumables EMEA.



From top: PCR's Ben Furfie, OKI's Phil Scrase and Luke Peters from Future

Future ■ The former deputy editor of features at *Computeractive*, Luke Peters has joined Future's flagship technology magazine *T3*. Joining the gadget magazine and website, Peters will work with the editor, Michael Brook to continue the editorial development of *T3*. The UK edition produces a large body of the content syndicated across *T3*'s growing portfolio of

international editions, currently standing at 22 worldwide.

In his most recent position, he commissioned and edited consumer technology and gadget features for the title, as well as producing podcasts and video content for its associated website. Peters will continue to regularly write about technology for *The Sunday Express*.



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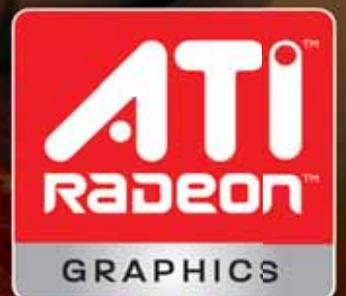
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POSITIVE COMPUTING

Norfolk optimism

Brigantia's Clive Bishop visits an East Anglian business support specialist...

This month sees me writing about Positive Computing at Heacham near Kings Lynn in East Anglia. Positive Computing was founded by Richard Dix in January 2000 from his farmhouse kitchen table following on from the decline in his native industry.

Positive Computing offers a full support and repair service for both Microsoft and Apple Mac users, supplies and supports wireless broadband services for villages and caravan parks in the area and offers a full web hosting and design service. It sees its core market as the home and SOHO/SME area, as well as doing a good deal of IT support work with local charities in particular



Positive computing was founded in a farmhouse kitchen

maintaining the IT infrastructure for West Norfolk Citizen Advice Bureau, Aids East and KLARS (Kings Lynn Refugee Service).

Positive Computing has a policy of providing all wireless network customers with AVG

protection and is an AVG reseller partner. Having been a farmer, Dix is very well known locally and subsequently supports many local farms and agricultural dealers. "We only provide quality products and will not compete purely on

price just to get the job," said Dix. "In a village setting if anything goes wrong because you have provided poor quality cheap products, then the word soon gets about."

Dix told me he found the Brigantia member forums invaluable as well as the power of the 'Part Finder' stock availability and price comparison system.

Regular email updates from Brigantia associate members also help to keep them informed of the latest deals and trends.

Dix feels the twice-yearly Brigantia Member Roadshows are a must for all serious indies and he is particularly keen on such special deals as the member only terms with AVG.



Fact Box

Year established: 2000
Regular vendor lines stocked/supplied: AVG Antivirus, Microsoft, Apple, Netgear, APC
Number of staff: Three
Address: Unit 1 Marea Farm, School Road Heacham, Kings Lynn, Norfolk PE31 7DH
Telephone number: 01485 572253
Email: mail@positivecomputing.co.uk
Website: positivecomputing.co.uk



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- Memory Interface: 128 bit
- DX10.0 Support
- BUNDLE: Restore IT 7.0, VirtualDrivePro 10.0

8600GTS (256MB & overclocked versions)



- GPU Model: GeForce 8600GTS (256MB)
- GPU / Memory clock: 675/2000 MHZ
- Memory size: 256MB GDDRIII
- Memory Interface: 128 bit
- DX10.0 Support
- BUNDLE: Restore IT 7.0, VirtualDrivePro 10.0

The overclocked version of the 8600GTS has a core / memory clock at a stunning 700 / 2200.

8800GTS (320MB) FV-N88SMCD2-ONOC



- GPU Model: GeForce 8800GTS (320MB Overclocked)
- GPU / Memory clock: 575/1800 MHZ
- Memory size: 320MB GDDRIII
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Each month, industry veteran Clive Bishop will choose a topic taken initially from the Brigantia members forum and provide a considered response for PC Retail readers.



Dear Clive

This month: **Alternative revenue streams**

DEAR CLIVE

As a Brigantia member I was interested to read in last month's Uncle column about alternative revenue streams and would ask you to take it a step further with some more illustrations of what is currently on offer through Brigantia?

CLIVE SAYS

There are a good many other alternative revenue streams available through Brigantia that you could be tapping into with little or no upfront outlay and would enable you to make more margin from your hard won existing customer base. This month I have chosen four, as follows:

XOffice, Bunker Backup, E-BCM (from DMSL) and Messagehub all offer significant opportunities to generate additional margin from your existing customer base for little or no outlay other than your time in getting to know the offers available. Brigantia is also arranging a number of training seminars in partnership with them so as to make this process even easier for Brigantia members

The XOffice mobile environment includes calendar management, contact management, email management, document management, project management, mobile mail and OTA synchronisation of calendar, email, tasks and contacts with mobile devices. XOffice pledge to continue to provide revenues, to you for the lifetime of your clients contract with XOffice.

Bunker Backup is a professional online data backup service that employs software endorsed by PriceWaterhouseCoopers, the top accountants. It keeps data completely secure from any privacy invasion, safe from any technical failure; it is great value for money, fully automated and totally convenient.



New, web-based products such as XOffice offer incremental revenue streams to resellers as customers renew

It will provide you with a generous recurring income in respect of each of your customers that you introduce to their service. Each time the client pays them, they will pay you; it's that simple. Their standard commission rate is 15 per cent but as a Brigantia member you will receive an uplift to 20 per cent.

E-BCM is an inspirational enterprise that aims to provide you with an easy to use, powerful and effective business tool to manage your credit risk, cash flow and debt recovery. Perhaps more importantly you are also able to resell the service to your business customers and to make significant margins. The E-BCM online service allows you to take the swift action necessary to check a company's creditworthiness, chase late payers and recover your money all at low costs. Despite various Government

initiatives to combat late payers, nothing has changed... until now, with the introduction of E-BCM.

Messagehub is a solution that will offer you and your customers complete peace of mind. With Messagehub there are no hidden extras; they simply invoice you at a discounted cost, payable monthly by direct debit and you are free to resell the service at retail prices of your choice. Their highly trained support centre provides second line

technical support 24x7x365. You will also receive on-going remote training, and full relationship support with a dedicated Brigantia account manager. As standard, the Brigantia member supplies first line support to their clients.

I trust that you will find XOffice, Bunker Backup, E-BCM (from DMSL) and Messagehub useful new offerings and next month I will introduce you to four more opportunities to generate

Contacts

Brigantia Membership - Roger Humm - roger.humm@brigantia.com
 XOffice - Simon Draper - info@xoffice.net
 Bunker Backup - Vernon King - v.king@bunkerbackup.com
 E-BCM - Faye Chisnall - faye@e-bcm.co.uk
 DMSL - Nikki Kavanagh - nkavanagh@dmsl.co.uk
 Messagehub - Nigel Redwood - nigel.redwood@e-know.net

Clive invites opinions from PC Retail readers and will respond through this column.

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¹ NVIDIA SLI technology requires a system that has an NVIDIA-based SLI-Ready motherboard with dual PCI Express x16 slots and a second BFG NVIDIA GeForce 8600 GTS OC PCI Express graphics card. Functionality depends on your operating system and specialized drivers. Check www.nvidia.com for up-to-date support information.

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Talking shop

As one of the worlds biggest technology product distributors, Ingram Micro has to try to please all of the people all of the time. **Scott Bicheno** speaks to commercial director Bhavesh Patel to find out how...



The visitors book at Ingram Micro's UK HQ in Milton Keynes reads like a who's who of the UK technology retail scene. Every major vendor and retailer appears to have paid a visit the morning I arrived and a cheeky flick back through the book reveals this is far from unusual.

I'm invited to Ingram Towers to meet commercial director Bhavesh Patel. Ingram has been a giant of distribution for so long that, as *PC Retail* editor, I'm curious to know how it caters for the smaller members of the channel.

"The market is always tough when you've got big players and retail independents trying to co-habit," says Patel, "but we've worked hard at understanding that segment and with the help of internal CRM systems we've developed intimacy with smaller retailers and resellers."

I ask Patel how that intimacy has manifested itself. "We're continuously creating marketing programmes that facilitate communication with this sector," he says. "This includes a continuous stream of bundles and 'deal' type offers, which allow this sector to add a bit of margin to the sale and hopefully increase their revenues."

"One of the ways in which Ingram can help retailers to 'attach' products – for example selling peripherals to a customer buying a laptop – is to relieve them of the burden of stocking the product. We do this by guaranteeing we can get it to their customer by the next day."

Another way Ingram keeps in touch with the independent channel is by hosting its own events. "We will be hosting an event aimed specifically at independent retailers in the second half of this year and will make sure *PC Retail* readers are aware of it closer to the time," says Patel. "It will focus on products that we think will be close to the retailers' hearts and on the kind of extra opportunities, for example bundles, that we can offer retailers."

THE BIG INTERVIEW

INGRAM MICRO

One of the keys to the future of technology retailing is to be able to offer solutions, like this wireless digital home set-up



Patel is also keen to bring attention to Ingram Micro's web strategy for indies. Specifically the facility it offers bricks and mortar retailers to bring some clicks into their business. "We have a reseller web-store solution, which can give resellers a full web presence in a relatively short space of time if they want it," says Patel. "In doing so, we also offer accessibility to our entire portfolio of products." Ingram has created a demonstration site to give an indication of what's possible at <http://fulloption.securewebstore.co.uk>.

Ingram isn't the only distributor to be developing its own events programme, so I ask Patel if this heralds the end of traditional big shows. "I think the market is still crying out for events, it's a question of getting the right formula together," he says. "Moving forward, events that are more in line with what the sales channel wants, tend to be much more intimate in nature and allow you to focus on specific solution sets for those specific sales channels. I would say that, regardless of size, those are the kind of shows that would be much more appealing than shows with a broader remit."

The 'solution rather than just product' message has been shouted from the rooftops since the turn of the millennium and before, but clearly it still needs emphasising. When put on the spot and asked to identify a 'solution' that he is particularly keen on right now, Patel identifies storage. "Whichever way you look storage has become pretty big in everyone's lives," he says. "The members of a household all have different interests and thus different collections of media. You also need storage for backup, another thing that's becoming big now, which is also a strong driver for external hard drive sales."

Probably the key storage product of the near future is network-attached storage (NAS). With the

contemporary domestic model being a multi laptop household it stands to reason, as Patel explains. "NAS is where the digital home is, or soon will be at. It's a fantastic example of a usage model where, in a classic home, three or four laptops all wirelessly linked to the net also need to be wirelessly linked to NAS."

Of course, the popularity of digital storage products isn't confined to hard drives. As capacities grow and prices drop, devices using flash storage are more popular than ever. Flash is continuing to grow and evolve as a product category," says Patel.

“NAS is where the digital home is, or soon will be at. It's a usage model where, typically, three or four laptops all wirelessly linked to the net are also wirelessly linked to NAS.”

"I would say, again, that's an area that's fantastic for retail. Everyone wants one; everyone needs to do a bit of backup every now and then."

Flash has also proven to be one of the main drivers for convergence between the IT and consumer electronics (CE) worlds. Nowhere is this more evident than at Ingram, where the product portfolio has taken on a distinctly CE character. "Devices that use portable storage, like MP3 player

and satnav devices, are pretty big categories for us and are very significant in terms of the retail opportunities that they bring to retail independents," reveals Patel. "Outside of that we're also doing well with digital and video cameras, screens and projectors. These more consumer electronics type products also provide a lot of opportunity to do 'attach', which I mentioned earlier. And remember, the retailer doesn't need to physically stock an item to be able to offer it to their customer."

Patel finishes by citing the example of the most publicised product launch of the year, which has brought the convergence of the IT, CE and telecoms markets one step further on (see if you can guess what he's referring to). Specifically, involvement in the telco market requires familiarisation with commercial models you don't really find elsewhere.

"The recent launch of a highly publicised convergent mobile device shows how smaller retailers and resellers need to adapt themselves to be able to add this bit of value," says Patel. "With convergent devices we're also selling bandwidth time, data. Every laptop needs to be freed up and needs to be able to be used in an out-of-office context. So I cannot emphasise enough that every retail independent who is selling a laptop should always ask 'would you like to be mobile?'"

As you would expect, Ingram has ensured it's in position to capitalise on this commercial opportunity. "We have the solutions to offer retailers in this area," says Patel, "be it embedded SIMs – which a lot of new notebooks come with, so it's just a matter of advising the customer about invoking the tariff and programmes – or by just attaching a PCMCIA card."

If you want a snapshot of where the technology market is headed, you could do worse than talk to a broad line distributor like Ingram Micro.



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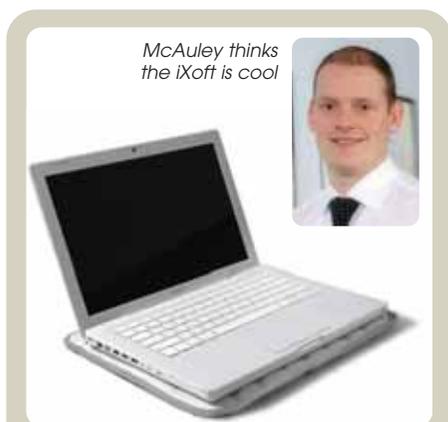
SUMVISION

Margin Makers

So you've got your core ranges sorted out, but it's also worth considering a selection of smaller products which can significantly boost revenue. **Ian Osborne** asks the channel for their views, while also highlighting some good items for retailers to consider...

Margins are tight and competition is fierce. To prosper in today's technology retail industry, you have to maximise your revenue sources. And that means paying attention to margin makers, those little asides away from your core business that can make the difference between profit and loss. But there's so much to consider.

PC Retail has spoken to the distribution channel and discussed what products are likely to prove key margin makers in the run-up to the winter holiday period. We also asked some of the industry's key players to identify a specific item they think will do really well. So without further ado, let's take a look at what they came up with...



McAuley thinks the iXoff is cool

VIP SAYS: THERMALTAKE IXOFF

Is your laptop too hot to handle? Does its performance suffer during continuous use due to cooling issues? According to distributor VIP, Thermaltake's novel new cooling mat could well be a very profitable solution.

VIP purchasing director, Duncan McAuley, says: "There is a big push on notebook coolers this year. The notebook market is continuing to expand at a healthy rate, which means resellers can capitalise on this growth by selling add-ons like these coolers. Cooling is a significant issue for laptop users which is often overlooked, as excess heat can seriously affect the performance of the machine. Thermaltake's iXoff passive cooling mat has a revolutionary new design, containing a gel that absorbs the heat from the notebook. It's a relatively cheap, simple product, but one that attracts a high margin at retail."



Nia Campbell believes concerns over environmental issues will inspire high sales for energy-saving devices

INTERACTIVE IDEAS SAYS: BYE BYE STANDBY ENERGY SAVER STARTER KIT

By plugging a Bye Bye Standby unit into your wall socket and then plugging a standard electrical appliance into it, you can cut the power using a remote control unit. Just the thing (for example) to switch off the CD player when the music's over instead of leaving it on standby, thereby saving both power and money. It's available in UK and European versions (European model shown).

Nia Campbell, marketing executive at Interactive Ideas, says: "As more people take an interest in the environment, saving energy is the best step forward. The Bye Bye Standby Energy Saver Starter Kit lets you remotely control the power of your electrical appliances from the comfort of your sofa."



TwinMOS' Ingrid Chen predicts big things for the BooM1

TWINMOS SAYS: BOOM1

According to TwinMOS Technologies Inc, the BooM1 iPod-inspired docking and speaker accessory will be a big hit in the run-up to Christmas. It's compatible with most MP3 players and mobile phones, and can also connect to laptops and televisions. And if it's an iPod you're using, the BooM1 recharges your audio player while in use.

According to TwinMOS Territory Manager Ingrid Chen: "Our new BooM1 is an ideal accessory and consequently up-sell for the iPod or other MP3 player. We are living in an iPod world, and so any associated products are guaranteed to sell well. We have already began embarking on a UK PR campaign and are now looking for partners that can offer the expertise and experience to help drive our new products to a mass consumer audience."

Freecom's McCarthy reckons networked data storage will prove an increasingly profitable sideline



FREECOM SAYS: NETWORK DRIVE

The 3.5-inch Network Drive, which can be connected to the home or business router so data can be accessed both on the internal network and from outside the network via the internet. The firm believes data storage is no longer as simple as connecting a HDD to a computer, as customers want data to be stored and accessible from one central secure location in their home or office, especially if they have a number of PCs or notebooks.

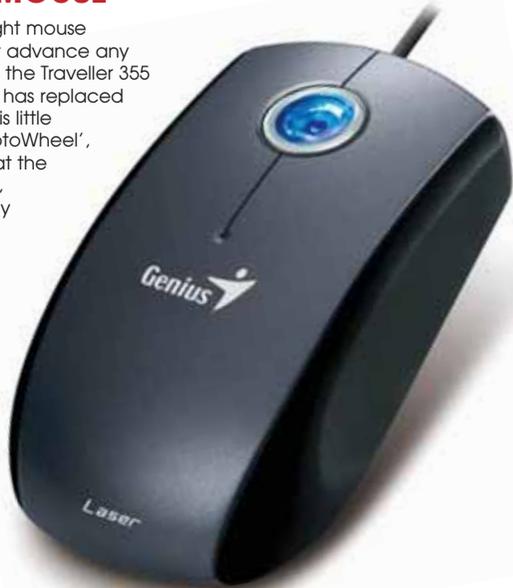
Says Andy McCarthy, business development manager at Freecom: "Now is the time for retailers to further capitalise on the booming storage market, increasing profitability, revenue and awareness of the additional features alongside service and installation of the home networks. The new range of feature-rich storage devices allow the retailer to up-sell from standard hard drives to more profitable storage solutions, which everybody will have a need for. Between now and the end of the year, retailers should keep these products at the forefront of their minds and enhance the product offerings to their customers, demonstrating that the traditional High Street retailer can offer the next generation of storage peripherals."

PRODUCT FOCUS

INCREMENTAL SALES

GENIUS TRAVELLER 355 LASER MOUSE

Just when you thought mouse technology couldn't advance any further, along comes the Traveller 355 Laser Mouse. Genius has replaced the scroll wheel in this little number with the 'OptoWheel', an optical sensor that the users strokes for easy, comfortable four-way scrolling.



SAITEK ECLIPSE II KEYBOARD

Everyone needs a decent keyboard, and they don't come much better than this little number from Saitek. It's a sleek, low profile USB device with under-the-keyboard lighting which shines through laser-etched keys - choose from purple, blue and red.

BELKIN CONCEALED SURGE PROTECTOR

Surge protectors can look ugly, especially in the home. That's why Belkin's Concealed Surge Protector boasts features such as better cable management, more outlets, an overall unobtrusive design, a longer cord and more space for block-type adapters. It also features phone/fax and modem protection. Belkin offers a Connected Equipment Warranty of up to \$175,000 that will insure your connected equipment against damage from electrical imbalances, while the Surge Protector itself carries a Lifetime Warranty.



THERMALTAKE MEDIA LAB

Thermaltake Media LAB VFD Panel turns any PC into a home multimedia system. It fits standard 5.25 drive bays and comes with its own remote control and software included. Available in black or silver.



WD PASSPORT PORTABLE DRIVES

WD Passport Portable Drives have become popular worldwide for their plug-and-play capability, stylish, ultra-portable design and sleek piano-black finish, and they're now available in capacities of up to 250GB. At less than five ounces, this lightweight drive fits neatly in a pocket or backpack and is ideal for carrying digital data around with you.

PRODUCT FOCUS INCREMENTAL SALES



FREECOM NETWORK MEDIAPLAYER - WLAN

Freecom's Network MediaPlayer connects to your wireless access point, and allows you to play back any multimedia content stored on any computer in your network, and also watch it on your TV. It's also available without a hard drive built in, so you can assemble a hard drive yourself or use the MediaPlayer without one as a AV Wireless streaming device.



GUILLEMOT DJ CONSOLE MK2

For the budding Fat Boy Slims among us, the Guillemot DJ Console MK2 is an all-in-one DJ Controller with audio for a complete computer DJ mix. It boasts two jog wheels to navigate within your music, speed up, slow down or even scratch tracks, plus a wealth of controls to keep even the most discerning mixer happy.

PEAK DIGITAL TV USB STICK

The switchover to digital TV is happening, and there are an awful lot of systems out there with analogue TV tuners that will need to upgrade before the signal is switched off. The Peak Digital TV USB Stick lets you watch, pause and record all free-to-air digital channels on your computer.

TRUST WIRELESS SCROLL TABLET

For the dedicated computer artists among us, there's Trust's wireless tablet for drawing, handwriting, sketching, colouring and picture editing. The overall package features a tablet with a USB cable, a wireless three-button mouse and a wireless three-button pen.



SWEEX SPEAKER BAG

More than a mere carrier for your digital music player, the Sweex Speaker Bag boasts an integrated 2.0 speaker. It uses a 3.5mm plug, so it's compatible with pretty much any MP3 or MP4 player, and also has a small compartment which can hold the audio device or other accessories such as memory cards or spare batteries.



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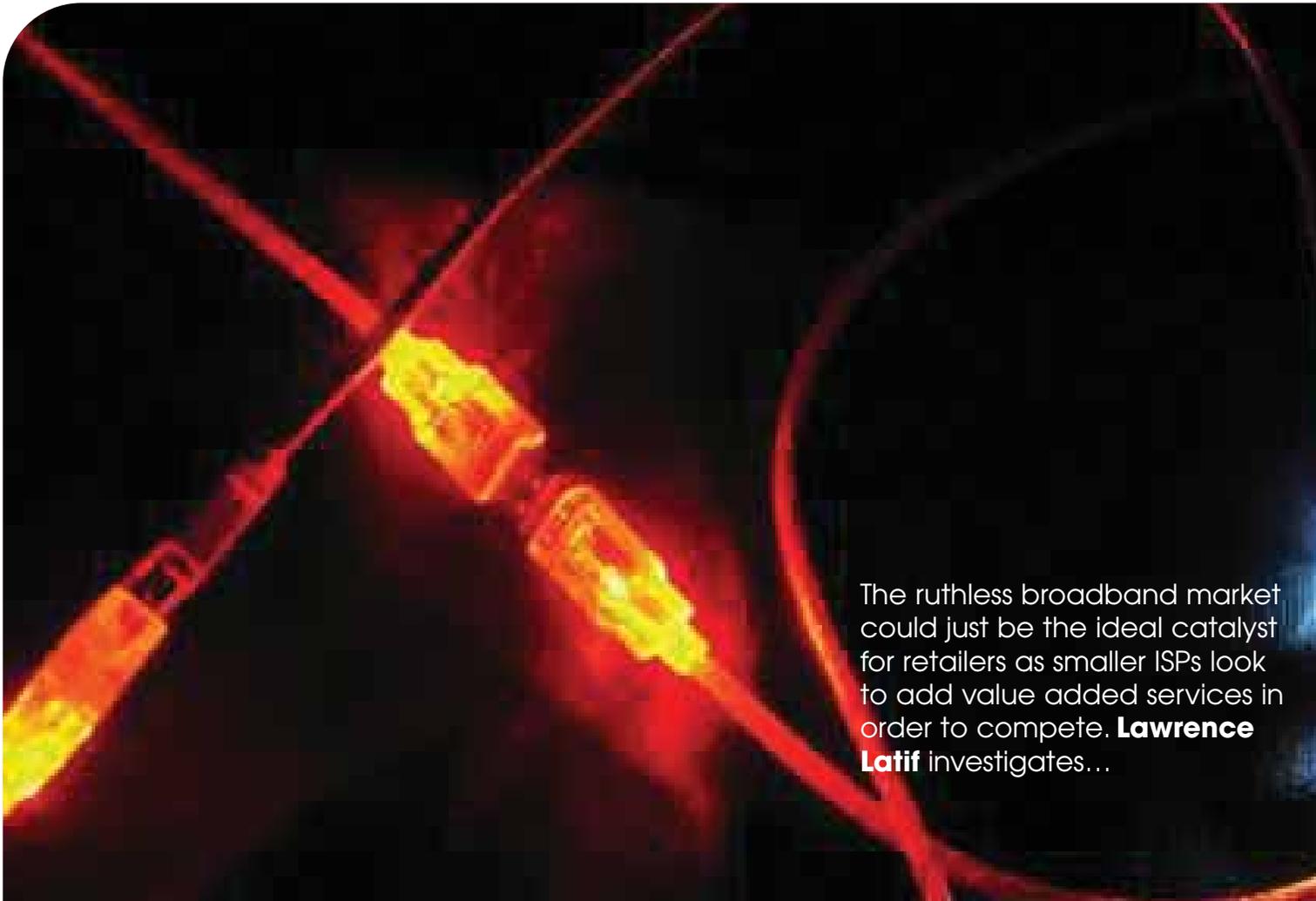
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The ruthless broadband market could just be the ideal catalyst for retailers as smaller ISPs look to add value added services in order to compete. **Lawrence Latif** investigates...

The Internet **Experience**

When it comes to accessing the Internet there's no doubt that broadband is what consumers and businesses want. It offers a low cost and reliable method of getting on the Internet without the worry of phone bills.

As users expect ever lowering costs, how can ISPs compete with the likes of BT, Sky and Virgin? The answer lies in the user experience provided by the provider.

The broadband industry is split into the large players who offer 'triple play' services such as television, telephone and broadband and smaller outfits who just specialise in Internet access. The triple play providers such as Virgin and Sky are in a constant price war amongst themselves, seemingly leaving little room for smaller companies to feed off the scraps. Not only are they hit on price but exposure, as many of these firms are unable to

“The industry is split into the large players who offer 'triple play' services such as television, telephone and broadband and smaller outfits who just specialise in Internet access.”

spend the millions required for national media coverage.

However we spoke to three industry experts who believe that there's a lot more to selling broadband than just lowering the price. Their views provide an interesting insight into what direction smaller providers can take the fight to the giants.

The neutral

There are a number of resources that try to untangle the vast web of packages, providers and prices that are available. One of the leading websites in this area is Broadbandchoices.co.uk, run by Michael Phillips. It affords him a unique view on the industry.

Phillips' site aims to display provider neutral information and, as he states, its goal is to "help customers make decisions based on value not just

SECTOR GUIDE

BROADBAND



Eddie Chapman is the director of Upstream Internet, a small broadband ISP

cost, taking into account customer service issues and connection reliability.” Educating users that cost shouldn’t be the only measure of a broadband provider is vital to the industry.

Interestingly, Phillips believes that one-stop providers such as Virgin have led to complication rather than simplification for customers. He reports that Broadbandchoices.co.uk has received complaints from customers who say their “services have been compromised with long waiting times and poor connections”.

“A quick look at the market tells you that VoIP is already seen as a critical part of ISP’s armoury to capture and retain customers. We believe 21CN will become a catalyst.”

There’s also evidence that you don’t have to be a big national company to compete in this industry according to Phillips.

“Customer service and a specialised service play very important roles. Because smaller companies can’t compete against the advertising budgets of larger ISPs, they focus their costs on providing a reliable, easy-to-use service.”

Customer service isn’t the only enabler according to Phillips. Reselling their services in white-label form has also proved successful. “Eclipse has a wide re-seller network, which includes smaller ISPs, such as Direct Save Telecom. While Madasafish has provided ‘white label’ plug-in solutions for well known brands like Waitrose.”

This opens the door for retailers not only to



Michael Phillips runs broadband comparison website Broadbandchoices.co.uk

become ISPs but work closer with ISPs to offer their subscribers incentives to purchase their products. In recent years, BT purchased Dabs Direct with increasing BT branding now appearing on Dabs’ website and almost complete integration within BT’s own shopping Website.

The cable guy

Entanet is part of the wide reaching Enta Group, which operates as a distributor and Internet service provider. Entanet’s products are pitched to businesses and ISPs rather than end-users.

Typically, a small ISP would use Entanet as its service provider, known as a transit provider. However because of Entanet’s wide reaching telecoms and distribution networks according to Darren Farnden, marketing manager, Entanet International provides much more than low level Internet access.

Echoing Phillips’ sentiments, Farnden believes that customer service is the key for ISPs. Farnden claims that the big ISPs “typically compete on price but they have been criticised for neglecting to serve their customers,” and points to feedback left by users on public forums.

Smaller ISPs on the other hand according to Farnden “value their customer relationships better and so concentrate on delivering that quality”. As a ‘level 2’



Darren Farnden is marketing manager for B2B ISP Entanet, part of Enta group

provider, Entanet provides the tools for ISPs to resell services. This can range from standard Internet access towards Voice-over-IP and it is these VoIP services which Farnden believes will be a key battleground for smaller ISPs.

Farnden goes a step further and says that he thinks the battle is already raging “a quick look at the market tells you that VoIP is already seen as a critical part of an ISP’s armoury to capture and retain customers.” Farnden continues: “We believe 21CN will become a catalyst for IP-based communication” referring to the next generation network currently being built by BT.

Entanet, however, isn’t finished with VoIP just yet, providing its resellers with tools allowing them to offer white-label VoIP services to customers. As consumers and businesses are consolidating costs, VoIP is seemingly the perfect technology, allowing users to merge call costs and line rental into their monthly broadband bill.

Farnden explains the features Entanet have created for their resellers “Our in-house team of



programmers developed the Entanet Partner Site, an incredibly informative and functionally rich online portal that enables them to place and track orders, view reports, monitor usage, view commission information and more." Farnden continues, citing Entanet's ability to set up white-label services for retailers and resellers.

For retailers, Entanet may just be the one stop shop they've been looking for. As part of the Enta Group, Entanet has access to a well configured distribution channel meaning retailers can not only strengthen their distributor ties but dip their toes into the ISP business.

The provider

Eddie Chapman is the director of Upstream Internet, a small broadband ISP which slugs it out against the established providers such as Demon Internet, Claranet and Nildram. On the face of it, Chapman is fighting a seemingly impossible battle but this network guru realises that you needn't fight fire with fire.

Chapman's company specialises in providing 'Bonded ADSL'. Through the use of software developed by Chapman himself, you can combine two or more ADSL connections to get increased speeds. Chapman sees this as Upstream's edge over its competitors and says that his company "Is

“ *The broadband market is like the rest of the technology market; as long as 'free' ISPs continue to cut corners with service there will be demand for something better.* **”**

the only provider which specialises in Bonded DSL, we optimise and design everything at our end around this."

Surprisingly when asked if big providers such as BT or Sky are bad for the industry, Chapman was philosophical. "I wouldn't say they are bad for the industry. They target the mass market but there will always be people who look for an alternative to the mass produced product."

Chapman too believes that service and not price is the key to surviving in this industry. "People usually start out shopping around on price, and eventually after they have been burnt a few times they start looking for better service". Clearly using sites like Broadbandchoices.co.uk will enable customers not to get their fingers burnt.

While Upstream Internet is a growing business, Chapman realises that at one point his company will need to consider adding features to the



THE TRUTH ABOUT VOIP

Over the past two years, voice over IP or VoIP has become the killer application for broadband in business. Much like email revolutionising post for business correspondence, VoIP affords companies who already have broadband Internet access, the ability to absorb the cost of making calls.

Generally VoIP is split into two main services. Free services such as Skype allow you to call other users using your computer are extremely popular. However, for business use commercial services are available.

These services typically offer a service level agreement (SLA) so businesses can truly replace their landline without reliability worries. Providers such as Entanet wholesale commercial services to

smaller ISPs who can then tailor the product for their specific demographic.

For the channel VoIP means sales of 'soft' phones; ones that connect to the PC, 'hard' phones which operate independently of a computer and supporting software.

Complex VoIP PBX systems are also gaining traction in the commercial world and retailers should take note of this growing sector as companies are replacing their old phone banks with a single computer.

VoIP is revolutionising the way computers are used for real-time communications. As users exploit the advantages of this technology, it's important that the channel does too.

service"it offers. "We have managed to work out a way to actually make money with broadband alone. However the profits aren't huge, and I'm sure if we want to improve our bottom line value added services will play a more important role in the future."

There's no doubt that the broadband market is a fiercely competitive industry. The weapon of choice is price cutting but as users realise that you get what you pay for, their attention will sway towards features, customer service and reliability.

The broadband market is no different from the rest of the technology market in this respect and as long as 'free' ISPs continue to cut corners with service there will be demand for something better.

Retailers should see broadband providers as an introduction service for their brand. With companies such as Entanet allowing retailers to become ISPs themselves and make use of their extensive distribution capabilities, there's little excuse for retailers not to explore this opportunity for growth.

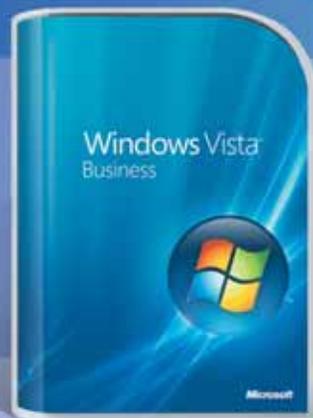
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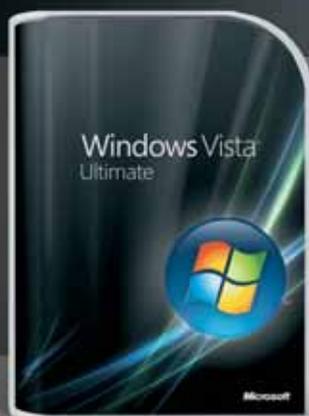
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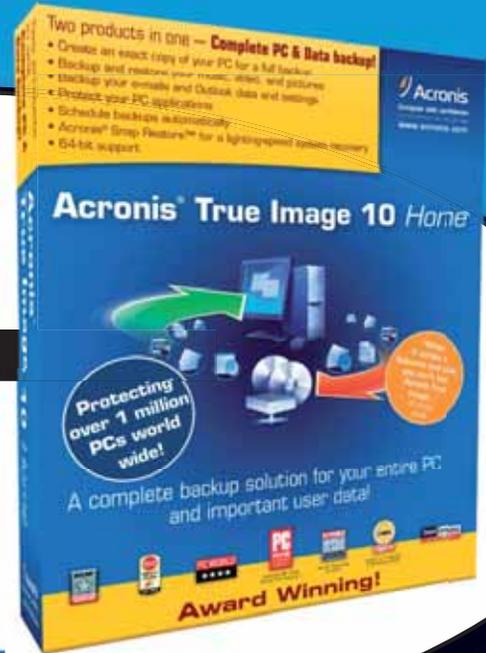


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The sound of innovation

A successful line of iPod and video game accessories aren't the only thing Logic 3 has made recently. It hasn't long moved into new purpose-built premises and it invited **Ben Furfie** to visit and told him about its recipe for success...



Formed in 1977, Logic 3 recently celebrated its 30th birthday, and throughout those years, it has remained at the forefront of innovation in every industry it has entered.

In 1983 it entered the video games industry as one of the first third party peripheral manufacturers and within a decade was revolutionising the way people interacted with games.

Even 25 years after its founding, it was still at the forefront of innovation, albeit this time in the iPod-audio accessories market. And it is that spirit of innovation that it sees as the most important thing to keep going as *PC Retail* finds out when we travelled to Logic 3's new purpose-built headquarters in Watford to speak to managing director Ashvin Patel.

"In a way I was very surprised that there weren't many people in the running to make sound accessories for the iPod," explains Patel when asked about the company's success in that area. "It was astonishing given the success of the iPod in

America at that time, that nobody was doing anything in that space.

"There were a lot of accessories being sold, but they tended to be cases – soft cases, leather cases, etc. There was also a huge market for replacement earphones. But nobody had gone about the process of making a set of speakers – and speakers were what people were crying out for.

"We have a lot of history dealing with audio from our speaker products for consoles," explains Patel. "We're one of the first companies to produce speakers that sat on the side of PC monitors back in the mid-nineties. Add to that our subsequent success with the likes of the SoundStation, which came out for both the PlayStation 2 and Gamecube, and we you can see the position we found ourselves in."

"We had all this knowledge and were presented with an opportunity to capitalise on it... the result was the iStation," adds Patel. "We thought, we have a strength in the speakers; we might as well

VENDOR PROFILE

LOGIC 3

Patel believes that the iStation was way ahead of its competitors - indeed it dominated the hardware charts after its arrival



◀ use that to make a set of speakers for the iPod. We were a year ahead of our competitors.

"The first designs for our iPod accessories began arriving at the end of 2003 – by then there were two million iPods sold and people were screaming for accessories but the nearest thing that people could get their hands on were the FM transmitters, which were of course illegal here in the UK at the time."

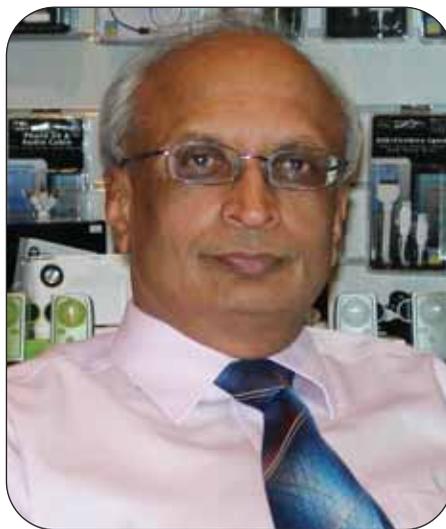
The success of the iStation was demonstrated by the hardware's dominance of the charts. But as Patel explains, the one thing Logic 3 doesn't do is become complacent with its position in the market. "We enter a market, innovate then leave when bigger players come in – you can't compete with them so there is no point in trying.

"The competition comes from both hands. You get the cheaper end, Chinese manufacturers mainly. They start looking and copying your product at which point it becomes uneconomical to try and continue competing with them.

"On the other hand, you have the big names that tend to be the major players in the accessories market. They'll come in and make their own versions of the product," he says. "Add to that they have bigger marketing budgets and it becomes useless to carry on fighting them. That's when its time to move on to the next thing... that's the philosophy of this company."

Indeed, while the very essence of the electronics entertainment industry is by necessity fast moving and often volatile, much of Logic3's success has been its ability to monitor, anticipate and react quickly to changing patterns in consumer demand and product development.

"We've got control of our overheads so we can have a bad period for a year or two and we can still carry on and come up with some new," Patel continues. "Hence, because of the success with



“ We enter a market, innovate, then leave when the bigger players come in. There's no point in trying to compete with them.

Ashvin Patel
(above) **”**

the speaker side of business, we've been able to carry on with the Playstation, Gamecube, and Xbox stuff as well as prepare for the next generation with few problems."

Despite that, Patel wasn't positive about the state of the video games industry as a whole. "The iStation has become a vital part of the

business – partly because the gaming side of the business has come under an awful lot of pressure. There have been quite a few companies that have gone under in the past few years.

"The problems aren't related to distribution or one retailer. It's something that is affecting the High Street as a whole, not just gaming or technology. It's just symptomatic of the problems faced by retail in general," he explains.

"The big problem is that as the High Street struggles, a lot of the bigger retailers are asking for longer payment periods. Whereas major retailers may have in the past have had a 12-week account with us and other distributors for example, they are now asking for periods of up to six months. It's really putting everyone's bank balances under tremendous stress and inevitably some people aren't going to be able to cope and will go out of business.

"We're lucky though because Logic 3 as a company has been extremely good at balancing the books. In fact, our year-on-year growth culminated in a record-breaking year in 2005 thanks to an aggressive growth strategy started five or so before that.

"Today the same strategy is in place, even in this increasing difficult trading environment. It's helping to ensure that we keep our place as one of the world's most successful portable audio and video game distribution companies."

One of Logic 3's upcoming products that Patel is extremely excited about is an iPod speaker called the Jivebox. "It's totally innovative and totally new technology. Nobody else has this technology in a product. It's that good we believe it has the ability to redefine speakers."

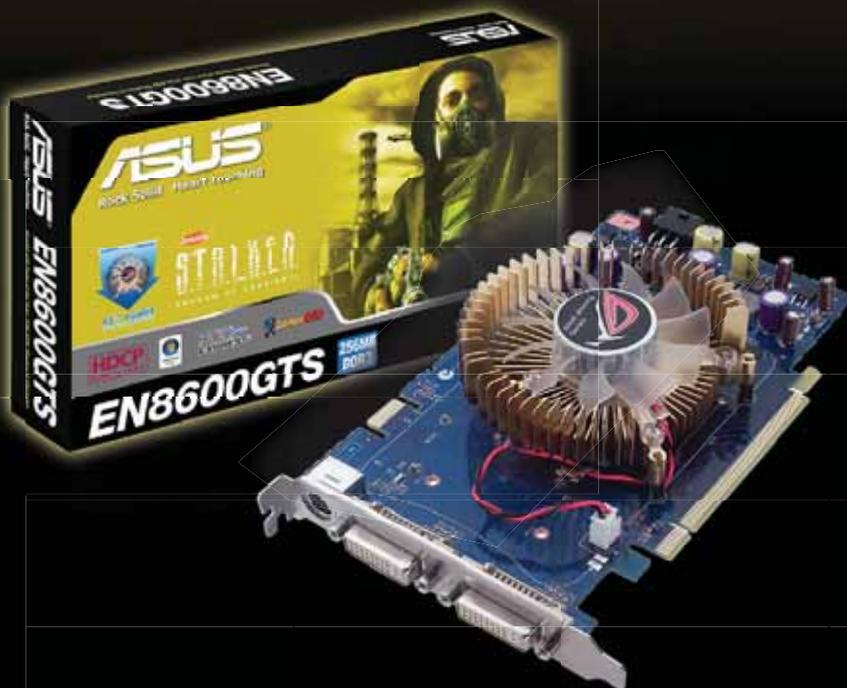
At the time of writing, specific details were not available, but rest assured it will be featured in the September issue.

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HOT TOPIC EDUCATION MARKET

Interactive whiteboards have revolutionized the way computers are used in the classroom



Top Marks

The education sector offers high rewards for the channel. But, as **Lawrence Latif** reveals, it's important to have done your homework before entering the classroom...

Educational institutions provide an interesting mix of high volume sales and specialist purchases. This mix can be very rewarding for the channel as a whole.

Whether it be schools, colleges or universities, the IT budget afforded to these institutions makes the channel stand up and take note. A number of manufacturers specialise in the education sector and, thanks to robust distribution and reseller relationships, manage to get themselves heard.

Being a supplier of an educational institution means often being a member of an elite club. Most large institutions have a select number of suppliers who have met certain criteria. Therefore most retailers should see any account in the education sector as a valuable win, one that ensures long term business. So when new products enter the channel it's important that it gets noticed by the right people.

Promethean, a UK company which specialises in

interactive whiteboards are an example of a company which relies heavily on the educational sector. In recent years, interactive whiteboards have become a

“*Educational clients first and foremost require value for money, however this doesn't mean cheaply made products.*”

staple of classrooms due to their innovative way of embracing computers and the human hand.

The system can be used not to write words onto the screen but operate programs. The true hands-on

feel it provides is a much better learning experience for children and adults. Paul Berry, director of UK business, Promethean confirms that the majority of their sales is in the education sector.

Monarch is another example of a education orientated business, providing institutions with bespoke solutions to meet their seating and storage needs. Monarch's units are geared towards classrooms but not isolating the commercial sector, they stock and build units for businesses too. Having been in business for 25 years, it's clear that Monarch are hitting the sweetspot.

Look and listen

While education institutions are gaining autonomy in spending, they remain conservative buyers, choosing mature technology which eases integration and reliability worries, a view confirmed by Berry. It's

HOT TOPIC

EDUCATION MARKET



Cary Gibbs, Business Development Manager for Education Computers Unlimited



Marvin Douglas, IT Furniture Sales Manager Monarch



Paul Berr, Director of UK Business Promethean



Daryl Clarke, Managing Director Matrix Distribution

important to remember that even small schools have over 200 pupils and one of the biggest worries for any support department is fragile products which can't stand up to the harsh, abusive school environment.

In universities the problem is exaggerated by the huge number of pupils. For institutions pricing may not be the primary differentiator as Marvin Douglas, IT furniture sales manager at Monarch explains: "Many educational clients will continue to purchase even if many others in the market confess to offering vastly reduced pricing."

As the education sector doesn't have access to a bottomless pit of money, purchasers are looking for value for money. As Douglas explains, that doesn't mean cheap products. "Educational clients first and foremost require value for money. However this doesn't mean cheaply made products as they don't have time to deal with product issues when teaching demands are tasking up so much of their time."

Channel members need to understand the institutions take a long term view on purchases and the relationships associated with that purchase. So instead of getting a product out to market *first*, more attention should be placed on getting a *good* product out to market. Berry outlines how Promethean makes sure their products are ready for their users. "Significant test programs are carried out pre-release on all products including software."

Daryl Clarke, managing director at Matrix Display Systems iterates this view: "Matrix leads the way with new cutting edge products but only once they have been tried and tested. We deal only with established reputable companies and ensure the service and warranty offerings provide the right level of response and cover."

Getting your channel right can reap rewards but unlike consumer markets, news about products is

often spread through unconventional means, as Berry explains. "In the education sector information spreads quicker through word of mouth – good and bad – because teachers are more of a community and tend to use forums and blogs. Teachers will also readily contribute ideas to improve products whereas the commercial market expect us to lead product development more."

Channel therapy

Distributors play a vital role in helping resellers cater for education. Cary Gibbs, business development manager for education at Computers Unlimited explains how they help resellers: "We sell discounted software for education which allows the end user to validate their educational status themselves through our Online Validation Programme."

"This massively helps retailers sell software into the education market as they do not need to carry out pre-sales validation." Gibbs says that currently Adobe and Quark are partners in this programme. Such programmes offer excellent hooks for manufacturers and retailers to build relationships with new customers.

Every market sector has unique needs and Clarke explains the lengths Matrix goes to attract business from all of them. "Matrix has a dedicated sales team for each specific market area, our service team cover all sectors but have different response levels and SLA agreements depending on the requirements of the market sector."

This understanding that there is no single solution to every market sector is key in building relationships with institutions. This is good news for smaller resellers who rely on local reputation.

Report card

The key to the education sector is reputation. Educational institutions are in the business of learning and not repairing equipment. Schools typically provide some of the harshest environments computer products operate in and therefore purchase decisions are based on past performance of suppliers and manufacturers.

There are few sectors where the bond between manufacturer, distributor and reseller are tested more rigorously. Education establishments expect a lot from the channel and quite rightly so as the rewards for all are high. Configuring your channel for education is a combination of listening to users and providing a high quality service. It's as easy as A-B-C.

“There are few sectors where the bond between manufacturer, distributor and reseller are tested more rigorously. Education establishments expect a lot from the channel and quite rightly so.”



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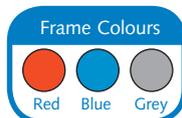


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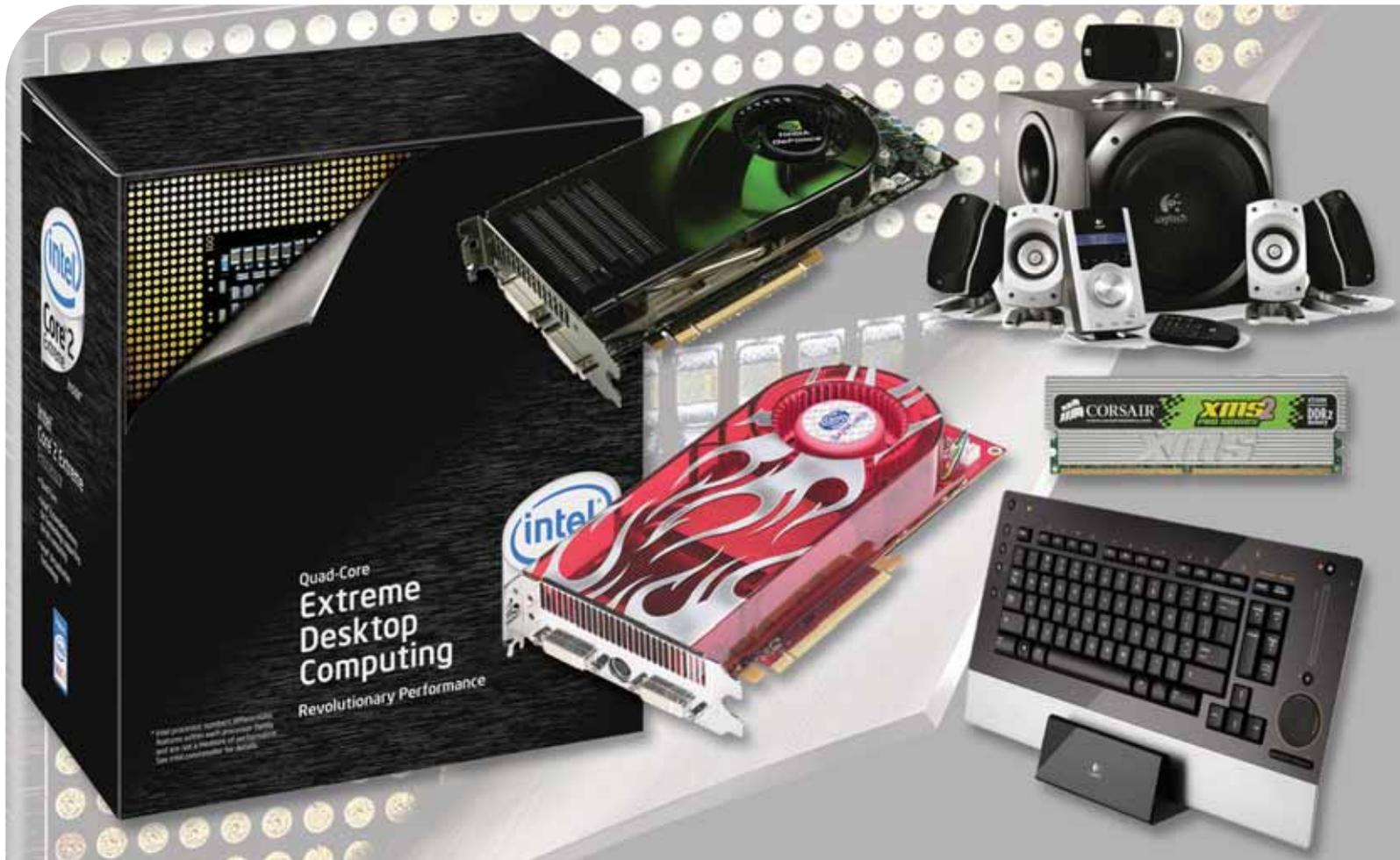
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Top of the Range

Interest in high performance PC kit now goes beyond the realms of just PC gamers. As more people start creating their own media, the sector is readying itself for a boom. **Ian Osborne** finds out more...

Sometimes, only the best is good enough. The hardcore PC user, who likes to keep his computer at the white-hot cutting edge of technology, needs the best components money can buy. The fastest processor, the most capable graphics card, the most powerful PSU – nothing but the best. But who are these power users, and what are they currently buying? According to the channel, interest in top end kit goes beyond power gamers.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, demands made by Microsoft's new *Windows Vista* operating system has inspired many PC users to upgrade their graphics cards. According to Scott Pendrey, product manager for Intel's consumer desktop components: "Graphics cards are currently the most popular component to upgrade. The benefits of DirectX 10 for gamers will see this further increase. However, for high-end systems, a new graphics card probably also means a new PSU, as they draw a lot of power these days."

“ *The popularity of YouTube means there are more people generating their own media. These things require high performance systems.*

Richard Baker,
AMD **”**

Richard Baker, European channel marketing manager at AMD, agrees: "At the moment the most popular upgrade is graphics, mainly because *Vista* requires 3D graphics for the Aero GUI.

"The second most popular is memory, mainly because it makes multitasking faster and it is physically easy to do, followed by extra HD storage because of media storage."

YOYOTech founder and owner Charanjit Kholi, known in the industry as 'CK', reckons the move to DirectX 10 will increase the demand for graphics cards still further. "While *Vista* itself may be the 'second coming of Windows Me', he says, "it's a fact that DX10 games will not play on DX9 hardware, unless Bill Gates pulls a serious U-turn. As it stands, without a brand new DX10 graphic card, you won't truly be able to play *Crysis*, *Alan Wake*, *Hellgate London*, *Bioshock*, *StarCraft 2* or *Unreal Tournament 3*."

VIP purchasing director, Duncan McAuley, sees this as an ongoing situation.

"Graphics cards and high end memory look likely to be two of the biggest sellers of the year," he explains to *PC Retail*.

SECTOR GUIDE

TOP END KIT



◀ “Vista has high memory requirements, so I’d expect sales of memory to increase as the year goes on when more people adopt this new OS. Also, as more DirectX 10 games come onto the market, sales of compatible graphics cards and memory will grow, especially near Christmas and the New Year.”

AMD’s European development relations manager, Richard Huddy has his eye on several games which are likely to inspire high-end PC users to invest in new kit.

“There are quite a few DirectX10 games coming this year which will give gamers a good reason to upgrade to the HD2000 series,” he says.

“Techland’s *Call of Juarez* was a very popular DirectX 9 game, and it looks even better in DirectX 10. To come, top of my list are *Crysis* from Crytek and *Hellgate London* from Flagship. In the more casual gaming arena we can expect Microsoft’s *Flight Simulator X* to be upgraded to DirectX too.”

But who buys top-of-the-range PC components? Is it just the gamers, or are there other categories of users who like to keep their computers at the cutting edge?

Says Intel’s Pendry: “Our top of the range CPUs are aimed at two main user categories; gamers and enthusiasts. Gamers are those who play competitively, or play for extended periods of time with little focus on other activities. Enthusiasts actually form a bigger market. They play games occasionally, but also spend time working with multimedia, high resolution photography, audio manipulation and more. The benefits of Intel’s multi-core CPUs are extraordinary when processing this kind of information.”

YOYOTech’s CK agrees: “While the majority of high-end systems are sold to gamers, we also sell a significant volume of multi-core/multi-processor systems to graphic artists, music enthusiasts and

Voice of the Channel...

The following key players in the IT industry had lots to say about high-end components...



- Scott Pendrey, Product Manager for Intel’s consumer desktop components.



- Richard Baker, European Channel Marketing Manager, AMD.



- Duncan McAuley, Purchasing Director, VIP.



- Charanjit ‘CK’ Kholi, Owner of enthusiast’s High Street store, YOYOTech.



- Richard Huddy, European Development Relations Manager, AMD.

video editors. The latest four-core Kentsfield processor from Intel costs a little over £250, and that’s very attractive for anyone looking to run the latest versions of Adobe’s creative software.” As AMD’s Baker puts it: “Certainly gamers buy high-end, but there’s also a section of people who use high-end PCs for heavy-duty multitasking. The popularity of YouTube and the like have increased the number of people who generate their own media, be it more sophisticated home movies, music videos or home ‘music studios’. These sorts of things require high performance systems.”

So what’s the most expensive, money-no-object component or PC our panel sells or distributes? Intel’s Pendrey says: “Our top performing desktop CPU, the Intel Core 2 Extreme quad core processor QX6800. However, time doesn’t stand still, and it won’t be long before something better comes along to extend our technology leadership.” Adds VIP’s McAuley: “One of our highest end cases, the Thermaltake Mozart TX case with seven-inch media screen, retails for around £260. Add to that the cost of the highest spec graphics cards, CPUs, optical drives, etc and you’re looking at two or three thousand pounds at least.”

“Building dream PCs is what YOYOTech is all about,” says CK, “and, right now, CoolerMaster’s Stacker chassis as the 830 is probably most popular enthusiast case in the world.

“We also stock the Smooth Creations-modded version that costs around \$1,000. Stick in one of CoolerMaster’s brand new RealPower M1000 modular 1kw power supplies and an Eclipse CPU cooler on top of Intel’s top end multi-core processor sitting in an ABit enthusiast mainboard, and you have the basis for a machine that’s attractive to enthusiasts and generates a sensible profit.”

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Support	Minimum H/W Requirement	
Full HD 1080p playback	CPU	Intel FSB1333 CPU (e.g. Intel® E6550)
	VGA	Onboard VGA with DVI-D port
	Memory	Dual Channel DDRII 667, 1GB x 2
	Suggested OS	Window® Vista™

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SECTOR GUIDE

TOP END KIT

PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS



INTEL CORE 2 EXTREME PROCESSOR

They don't call it the world's best gaming processor for nothing. Intel's top CPU offers energy-efficient gaming performance for a high-definition multimedia experience. Plus, with up to 4MB of L2 cache and up to 1066 MHz front-side bus, it's extremely fast in all departments.



ATI RADEON HD 2000 SERIES

Delivering amazing effects and immersive realism in DirectX 10 games, ATI's Radeon HD 2000 Series is Superior Certified for *Windows Vista* graphics performance. ATI Avivo HD technology makes for smooth video playback of HD DVD and Blu-ray content, and for the really hardcore, it supports CrossFire performance scaling.



REAL POWER M1000 MODULAR

Ultra-high end graphics cards demand a decent power supply, and Cooler Master's Real Power M1000 Modular PSU is one of the best. It's an extremely reliable power source to back up elite technology. Real Power M boasts six groundbreaking +12V independent output rails for exceptional power distribution, and is specially designed for Nvidia's next generation High End Graphic Cards.



CM STACKER 830

The Stacker 830 has proven to be the leader among all chassis, with its streamlined aluminium design, extremely powerful functionality and brilliant modularised mechanism to support both ATX/BTX form factors. According to Cooler Master, it's 'designed with value-added functionality, unmatched upgradeability, tool-free user friendliness and superior thermal management'.



ATHLON 64 X2 6000+

AMD's Athlon Dual-Core processors contain two processing cores residing on one chip, performing calculations on two streams of data to increase efficiency and speed, while running multiple programs and the new generation of multi-threaded software. For end-users, this means a significant increase in response and performance when running multiple applications simultaneously.



GEFORCE 8800 GTX

Selected as one of the Best Products of the Year in the July 2007 issue of US magazine *PC World*, the Nvidia GeForce 8800 GTX offers excellent performance, unparalleled levels of graphics realism and effects, plus full support for the latest DirectX 10 and DirectX 9 games.



ASUS STRIKER EXTREME

Asus describes its Striker Extreme as 'the ultimate gaming motherboard'. Striker Extreme provides a detailed BIOS option for enthusiast tweaking, eight-phase capless power to ensure the SLI performance reliability and the unique gaming features such as LCD poster, EL I/O, Onboard LED, Onboard button and more.



SWIFTECH H20 APEX ULTRA+ WATER COOLING SYSTEM

With all that power and performance, your PC might struggle to keep its cool. That's where a top-of-the-range water-cooling system comes in handy. The Apex Ultra+ is a complete system cooling solution, including CPU, GPU and Chipset water-blocks.



LOGITECH DINOVO EDGE KEYBOARD

The ultra-slim Logitech diNovo Edge delivers excellent feel and response. It boasts a revolutionary TouchDisc with hyper-speed scrolling and pixel-perfect control, which Logitech claims makes trackpads obsolete. A slim recharging base doubles as a keyboard stand. Work longer thanks to the longer-lasting Li-Ion batteries, and more securely via Bluetooth wireless technology.



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CORSAIR XMS PRO DDR2

On-board memory isn't the sexiest part of a PC, but you won't get far without it. Corsair's XMS Pro DDR2 includes the high-efficiency aluminium XMS heatsink, and 24 activity LEDs that show the level of memory activity on each bank.



LOGITECH Z-5500 THX

Upset the neighbours with this high-end surround sound system. It's a 5.1 speaker system with four satellite speakers, centre speaker, subwoofer and a Digital SoundTouch control centre.



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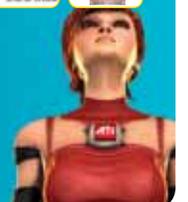


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In order to fight piracy, many of these new discs will soon incorporate the HDCP (High-bandwidth Digital Copy Protection) specification, meaning they will only play at full resolution if played on HDCP-capable equipment. Otherwise they may display anything from a low-resolution image to a completely blank screen.

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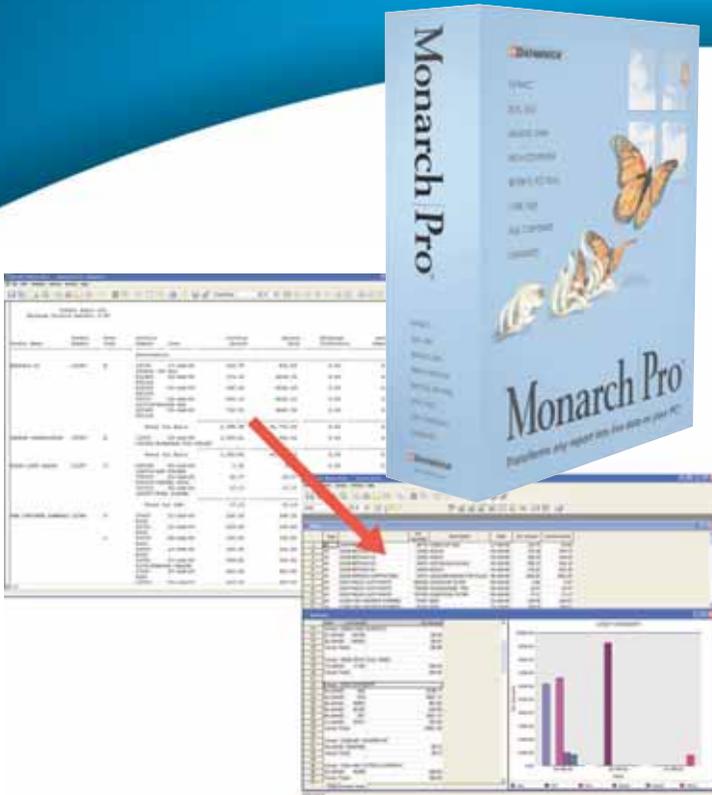
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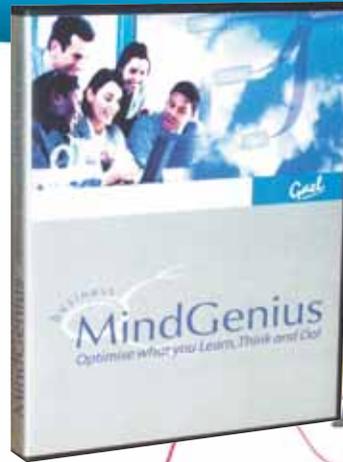
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Sales drivers

Search engines and user-generated material websites have fast made books an archaic reference tool. **Mark Sutton** looks at why the internet shouldn't always be trusted and why reference software has become the 21st century book...

In today's high-speed, fast and furious world, time is an essential factor. Modern habit has left books to gather dust, while the Internet provides a large portion of our reference material and not only that, it doesn't burn a hole in your pocket either. But, where do you turn in the circumstances beyond the internet's capabilities?

The reference software market isn't a sector you would expect to be alive with activity, given sites such as Wikipedia that can tell you virtually anything about virtually anything. There are however several life occurrences that this sector cashes in on, things everyone has to go through at some point, for example driving tests.

Driving test software is the dominant force in this market, occupying the top six spots of the reference software charts. Consumers of these, often essential, products are given little alternative unless the stropky teenager wants to read a book. Interactive material unsurprisingly is top choice and whether Myspace is minimised in the taskbar or not, at least some revision gets done. When asked why the driving test products sell so well, Rachel Boon, TSO marketing executive tells *PC Retail*: "DSA titles are authoritative, from the people who set the driving

and riding tests and are the only official titles on the market. People are reassured by the knowledge that they are referring to expert knowledge."

"The introduction of broadband has seen a change in customer buying habits and we have online versions to cover many topics now," says Lotta Farley, director of consumer markets at Encyclopaedia Britannica about the reference market. "However, there is still a need for software products,

“The introduction of broadband has seen a change in customer buying habits and we have online versions to cover many topics now.**”**

especially in underdeveloped markets where broadband is not readily available."

Admittedly, the internet is leaps and bounds ahead when it comes to sourcing material. However, this is likely down to laziness and the unwillingness to fork out the hard-earned. Those looking for reference material must remember that the Internet is justifiably regarded as the least accurate form of quick information. Contribution sites can store all kinds of distorted information, which ends up in print and thus

impatient consumers are fooled into believing inaccurate statements and information as soon as a search engine finds a relevant article. Software on the other hand is only published when thoroughly accurate.

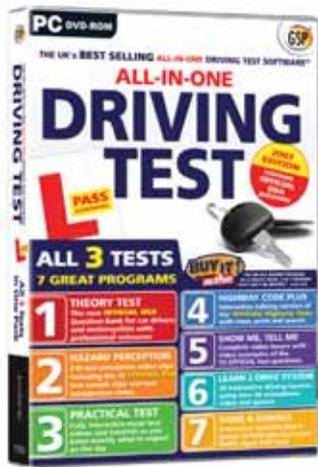
Reference software has a long shelf life as it generally doesn't change too much and additionally has the benefit of selling consistently all year round. So retailers can bet on shifting units gradually, as opposed to having to put last minute deals on expiring stock. Due to the products' consistent if not growing market share, reference software can be banked on as a lucrative source of revenue for retailers.

Also popular in the reference market, are family tree builders and design programs, which can be used to calculate the expense of

projects from the comfort of home – eliminating the cost of hiring a professional who would most likely use the same program to draw up ideas and a quote.

Most popular reference software products have one thing in common: they provide a depth of information that, even if you could find it, would take some time to get from the web. There will always be consumers willing to pay for accuracy and depth; the trick for retailers is to identify them and sell them what they want.

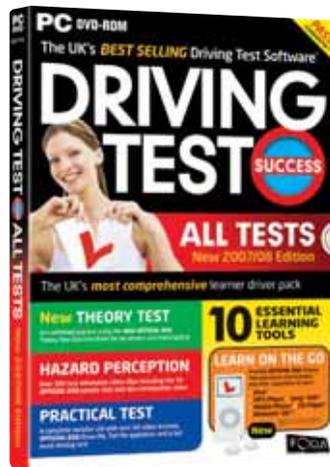
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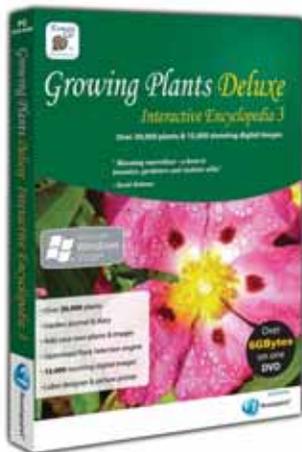
Driving Test Success has been at the top of the driving test software market since its launch in 1997. The new *2007/08 Edition* comes with official DSA theory test questions and ten official DSA Hazard Perception sample clips to ease prospective drivers into the test scenario. Also on the disc is a practical test revision aid with over 60 video lessons, including the 'show me, tell me' questions and a mock driving test.



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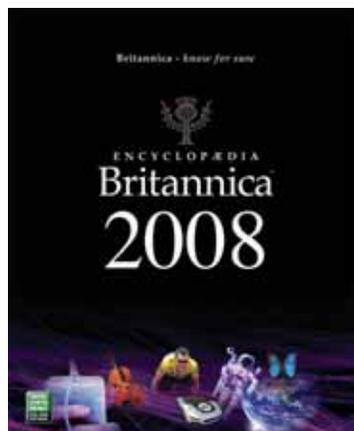
TSO's *Driving Theory Test* offering comes fully compliant with the current DSA bank of test questions. The CD-ROM contains explanations to each answer, so learners can understand why each choice is right or wrong. The theory test screens on the disc look virtually identical to those on the theory test itself, settling learners into realistic test scenarios.



GSP Growing Plants Interactive Encyclopaedia Deluxe Edition

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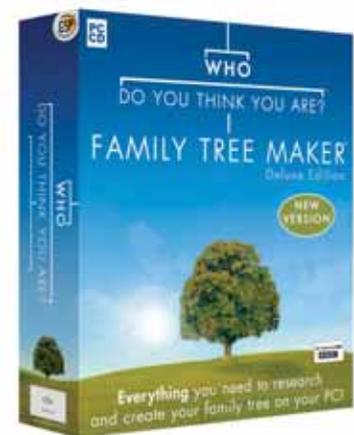
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Cables and **Wireless**

If anything exemplifies the growing 'geekification' of society it must be the boom in home networking. With 802.11n fast becoming a reality, **Scott Bicheno** takes a look at the Wi-Fi and HomePlug market...

Networking is traditionally a product category so impenetrably technical that most consumers shy away from it. Furthermore, just when things got relatively user-friendly in the wired networking sphere, it was decided that wires were undesirable and snappily named technologies like 802.11a, b, g and now n appeared to throw fiendish new challenges at the beleaguered punter.

One thing that's certain, however, is that home networking is here to stay. As the amount of digital information owned by consumers – in the form of photos, video, music, etc – grows exponentially, so does the need to store it and easily access it.

The technology industry has been promoting the vision of the digital home for what seems like an eternity, but 2007 could mark the year it finally breaks into the mainstream.

If it does it will be down to two main factors: the boom in digital content and the growth in wireless networking.

It's now possible to store almost limitless amounts of digital content and

wirelessly stream them to as many devices as you can cram into your house. The only thing preventing wireless home networks becoming as ubiquitous as the PCs and TVs they connect is ease of use.

"Many consumers are facing confusion over what products they need for their wireless network," says Andrew Mulholland, D-Link marketing manager for UK and Ireland. "D-Link has now completely redesigned its product packaging to be as user-friendly as possible. Not only will this make it even easier for consumers to buy the right product, it will also reduce the number of products returned due to incorrect selection at the point of sale."

Beverley Hancock, retail channel manager for UK & Ireland at Netgear, agrees: "The major challenge faced by networking product suppliers over the coming months and years, as broadband penetration reaches saturation point, is one of consumer education," she says.

Most consumers can probably get their head around buying a wireless router to enable wireless internet access for their laptops.

D-Link has redesigned its product packaging to be as user-friendly as possible for consumers



SECTOR GUIDE

NETWORKING



However, James Lee, UK sales manager at Buffalo Technology, thinks beyond that expert assistance may be needed. "While the average homeowner might be confident enough to set up a wireless router, they are probably less sure of setting up a storage network that can be accessed wirelessly – whether at home or away," he says. "That's where retailers can add value and increase their margins."

One of the reasons Joe Public might struggle to set up a wireless network is interoperability, as Ivar Beljaars, EMEA product marketing at Cisco-Linksys explains: "The major challenge faced by the home networking sector today is to achieve a consistent user experience between interconnecting devices."

This is the concern of wireless industry body, the Wi-Fi Alliance. Its main concern now is with 802.11n, which promises twice the range and five times the data rate of 802.11g. It's the job of the IEEE to ratify this technology, a process not expected to be completed until late 2008, but the Wi-Fi Alliance aims to ensure interoperability between products produced by its members.

(From top right) MULHOLLAND: "Many consumers are facing confusion over what products they need for their wireless network"; HUDDLESTONE: "Everyone likes the perceived wireless freedom for internet access at home"; LEE: "Retailers can add value and increased their margins with wireless set-up"

“ A major challenge for the home networking sector is to achieve a consistent user experience between interconnecting devices.

Ivar Beljaars,
Cisco-Linksys **”**

PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

D-Link DKT-410 Wireless N Starter Kit

Enta: 0870 7704996

Price: £119.14

What they say: Provides everything a user needs to get a wireless network up and running. This Wireless N Starter Kits appeals to users who demand increased wireless performance and those who want to upgrade their existing Wireless G network.



NETGEAR RangeMax NEXT Wireless N modem router, DG834N

Spire: 0870 950 0900

Price: £93.99

What they say: Simultaneously stream HD video, play games online, make internet phone calls and surf the web without wires.



Wireless N Storage Link Router, WRT350N

Ingram Micro: 0870 1660160

Price: £159

What they say: A MultiMedia Storage Router that combines a high speed internet router with a USB Network Attached Media Storage device in a single products.

SECTOR GUIDE NETWORKING



HANCOCK (top): "Consumer education is needed"; MACE: "Mixing technologies is the way forward"

"Our testing, which we call Wi-Fi certified, is really about looking after the consumer," says Karen Hanley of the Wi-Fi Alliance. "It's about ensuring that the product's been tested for interoperability across different brands."

"There's been a lot of product out there that hasn't been tested for interoperability," she says. "Our first intention was to align our testing with the finalisation of the ratification of the standard through the IEEE. Unfortunately the ratification process has taken longer than originally expected, so we felt that for the sake of consumers it was important that interoperability testing happened."

The main consequence of this is that 'n' is here and products are already on the shelves.

"Linksys expects that 802.11n mass market adoption will take another nine to 12 months," says Beljaars, going on to predict that 'n' will begin to outsell 'g' in around a year. "The advantages of Wireless N can be fully utilised when consumers use a Wireless N adapter to connect their laptops to the home network. Often consumers rely on their embedded client, but they do not take the benefit of the additional speed and range offered by the Wireless N Router."

The Wi-Fi Alliance accreditation is being referred to as draft-n 2.0 and appears to offer reassurance to vendors as well as consumers.

"This draft 2.0 approval guarantees that no further hardware changes will be required for the approval of the final standard and all D-Link's products sold to date can be upgraded to the final standard via software upgrades," comments Mulholland.

So with all this activity around Wi-Fi it's safe to assume that wired networking in the home is dead, right? Apparently not, at least not as we know it. You see we already have a wired network in every house, but until now it has been used solely for carrying power. If companies like Devolo, which specialise in HomePlug (as power line networking has come to be known), have their way we'll soon be using them to transmit data too.

"Everyone likes the perceived wireless freedom for internet access at home, and it's perfect for some applications," says Peter Huddleston, Devolo UK operations manager. "However, old brick houses and multi-floors in European buildings ensure that wireless-only networks have more penetration difficulties than HomePlug networks. Electric power sockets are normally in every room, so therefore wherever you have a plug, you have a reliable network point with HomePlug."

Most networking vendors also have HomePlug products and networking specialist distributor Solwise feels all forms of networking have their place. "Mixing technologies is the way forward, use wireless where you can, complement this with HomePlug and if you can, the best way forward is laying a cable," says Steve Mace of Solwise.

Consumers are growing their awareness of home networking and when HD content becomes more prevalent they will want the kind of bandwidth 'n' offers. The key for retailers is to offer guidance and support to their customers.



Some fast facts from the Wi-Fi alliance

- 350 million people use Wi-Fi
- 200,000 Wi-Fi 'hotspots' to connect on the go at airports, cafes, hotels, parks and more
- Nearly 1,000 cities using Wi-Fi to connect communities, attract investment and serve citizens
- 78 per cent of Wi-Fi users are interested in upgrading their Wi-Fi for more coverage and a fatter pipe
- Average number of devices on the home Wi-Fi network: 4
- Growing strong: 200 million Wi-Fi units shipped in 2006; Industry to ship 700m+ units in 2011
- Converged Wi-Fi / mobile phones a major growth area – 325m units in 2011*
- Consumer electronics devices connecting with Wi-Fi – 249m units in 2011, including all portable gaming devices



Devolo dLAN 200 AV Starter Kit
Northamber: 0208 2967066
Price: £129.99

What they say: This utilises the latest HomePlug AV standard technology, can provide a reliable and robust network bandwidth for up to 2x HD Video streams – and can also provide network coverage for about 95 per cent of a house.



Hercules Wi-Fi Router
Interactive ideas: 0208 8051000
Price: £69

They say: The Hercules router connects directly to your ADSL Ethernet modem, Cable modem or internet box. Just select it and navigate.

AirStation Nfiniti Wireless-N ADSL2+ broadband modem router, WBM-R-G300N
C2000: 0870 0603344
Price: £108

They say: Ideally suited for quick and easy setup. It features AOSS (AirStation One-Touch Secure System), the easiest and most secure one-touch wireless setup system available on the market today.



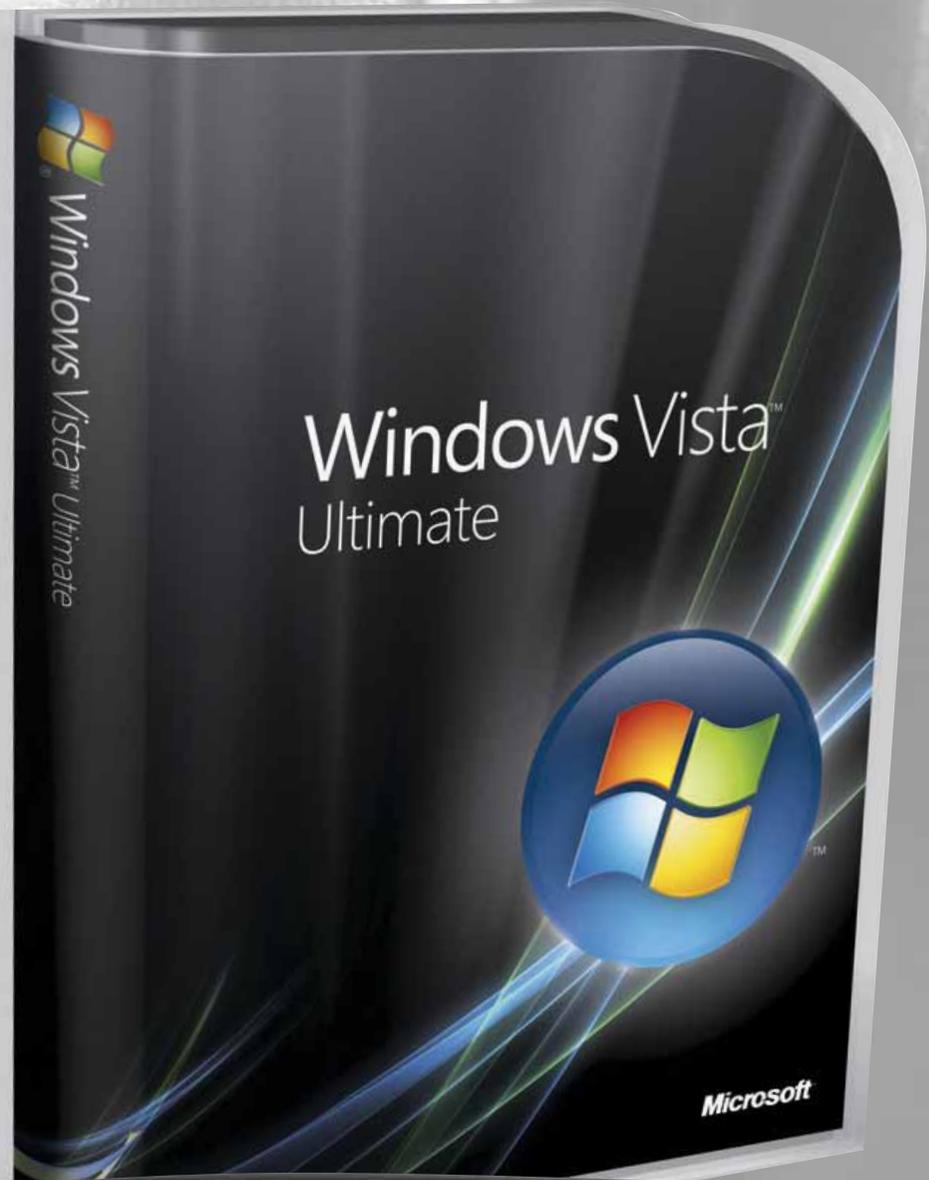
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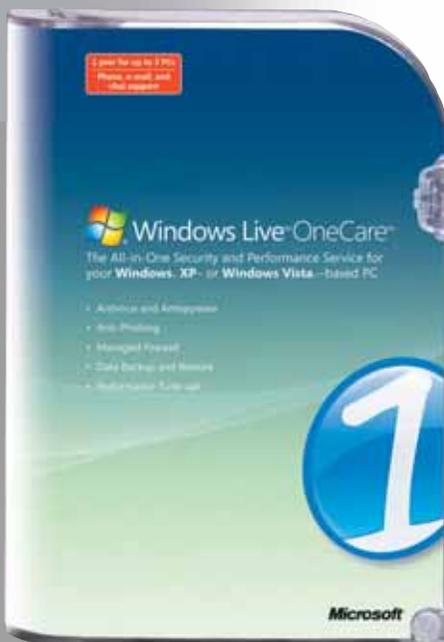
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- Wireless Laser Desktop 6000 Keyboard and Mouse



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● **Enhanced protection from spyware** – Windows Live OneCare's antispyware technology helps protect your computer from spyware programs that secretly monitor your activities or pop-ups that negatively impact your computer's security and performance.

● **Continuous firewall monitoring** – The Windows Live OneCare firewall is a two-way managed firewall. This means that both inbound and outbound traffic is controlled. The firewall is also updated continually to help protect you.

● **Easy file backup and restore** – With Windows Live OneCare you can make copies of important files and documents and store them on a CD, DVD, or an external hard drive in case of an emergency. You can do it manually or have Windows Live OneCare do it automatically so you don't have to remember to back up your files and documents on a regular basis. Windows Live OneCare will also help restore backed-up files to your computer if you've encountered system problems.

● **Continuously updated** – Windows Live OneCare updates itself automatically to help ensure that your virus, firewall, and spyware protection is always up to date and ready to help protect you from the latest threats. Windows Live OneCare not only helps protect your computer, it also helps keep it in good health. “

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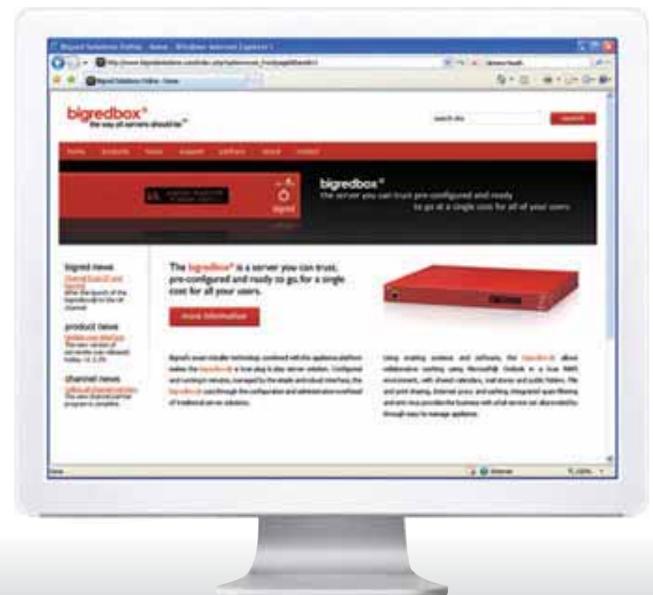


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Knight Rider I presume?

While David Hasselhoff and his Pontiac Trans-Am were clearly well ahead of the game with their in-car technology in the 1980s, the rest of us are now able to catch up. As **Ian Osborne** finds out, there are a number of firms just waiting to pimp your ride...

In-car technology has come a long way over the last few years. Gone are the days when all you needed – or indeed, all you could buy – was a basic radio/cassette player and a miniature kettle powered from the cigarette lighter.

Now your customers can treat themselves to all sorts of amazing devices, from in-car DVD players to parking sensors. *PC Retail* takes a look at a range of in-car gadgets over the next two pages (all prices offered are RRP)...

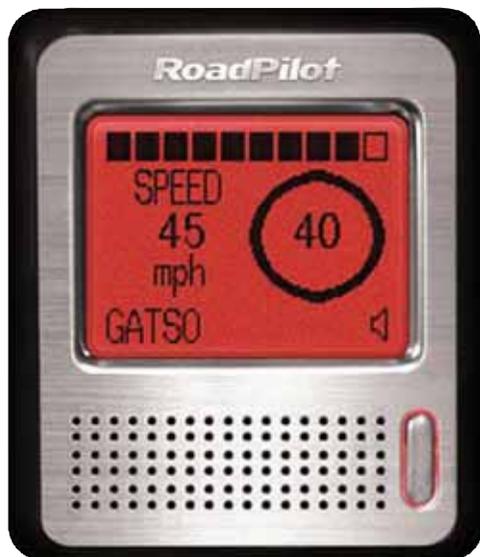
SWEEX USB CAR CHARGER

For punters who want to charge or use an MP3 player or PDA in the car – or indeed power any USB device – the Sweex USB Car Charger could be just what you're looking for. It's powered by the vehicle's cigarette lighter socket, and is suitable for 12 and 24 volts. It retails at £6.95.



LOGIC 3 FM TRANSMITTERS

Short-range in-car FM transmitters were legalised in January, so now your customers can listen to your digital audio player through their in-car stereo without any wires in the way. Logic 3 has released two such devices. Fans of Apple's iPod should be offered the In-Car FM Transmitter and Charger (£24.99), which beams sounds to an FM radio and also charges the iPod, using the car's cigarette lighter socket. It can transmit (but not charge) other audio devices too. For a cheaper (but non-recharging) solution, you can recommend the Universal FM Transmitter, which works with anything and costs around £8.50.



ROADPILOT MICROGO CAMERA DETECTOR

MicroGo is described as 'the world's smallest GPS speed camera warning system'. Utilising GPS technology, it comes preloaded with RoadPilot's database of speed camera locations and accident black spots for most of Europe. It's ready to use straight out of the box, offers a 64-colour option backlight to match a car's instrument display and costs £129.95 for the basic unit or £198.99 for the deluxe model with built-in laser detection to spot mobile speed traps.



MUSTEK IN-CAR DVD PLAYER

For customers who are planning a long journey but dreading the kids screaming 'Are we nearly there yet?' every half a mile, there's the Mustek In-Car DVD Player. Described as a 'backseat cinema', the device features two seven-inch LCD widescreens which mount into harnesses behind the front seat headrests. It plays DVD movies, music CDs and Picture CDs, and is also compatible with most gaming consoles. Not bad for £149.99.



TRUST NOTEBOOK ADAPTERS

For those who wish to use their laptops in the car, Trust has a couple of adapters which power or charge a portable through the car's cigarette lighter. The Notebook Power Adapter (Car Version) costs £19.99, is compatible with most notebook models, and is surge protected up to 10A. The 5-in-1 Notebook Power Adapter is incredibly versatile, but not cheap at £59.99. It can power a laptop and simultaneously charge an iPod, mobile phone or Sony PSP. Ten different notebook connectors are supplied.

SECTOR GUIDE

IN-CAR DEVICES



HANDS-FREE KITS

Using a mobile phone while driving is dangerous and illegal. Luckily, there's a range of hands-free solutions out there which let your customers chat without holding a phone to their ear. £25 will get them a Motorola H350 Bluetooth Headset, which fits over the ear and is compatible with all Bluetooth-capable mobile phones. But for fashion-conscious drivers who resent looking like an extra from *Star Trek* when they drive, there's a car-mounted model like the Pama Sigma Sun Visor 2300 Bluetooth Handsfree Car Kit with Caller Number Display. Costing just under £40, the device is far more petite than its rather verbose name and offers voice dialling, caller display and support for five languages.



ZYPAD WL 1000

Wow, is this hi-tech and gadgety enough for you? The Zypad WL 1000 is a wrist-wearable wireless computer designed to give the user instant access to computing capabilities while keeping hands free for tasks like driving. The WL 1000 can run *Windows* or *Linux*, and boasts built-in GPS tracking, Wi-Fi and Bluetooth capabilities. Can in-car computing get any more science fiction?



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PARKING SENSORS

For drivers who regularly trash their indicators or bend their bumpers when parking their pride and joy, a parking sensor system is a real boon. The Meta SR2 Targa System costs around £100 and fits on any rear number plate. When reversing, the device emits a buzzing sound when an object is nearby, with a broken buzz turning into a steady buzz at very close distances. For £200, there's the Steelmate PTS800MN, which boasts four front and four rear bumper-mounted sensors, two control units, two digital readouts and a patented anti-false alarm system.



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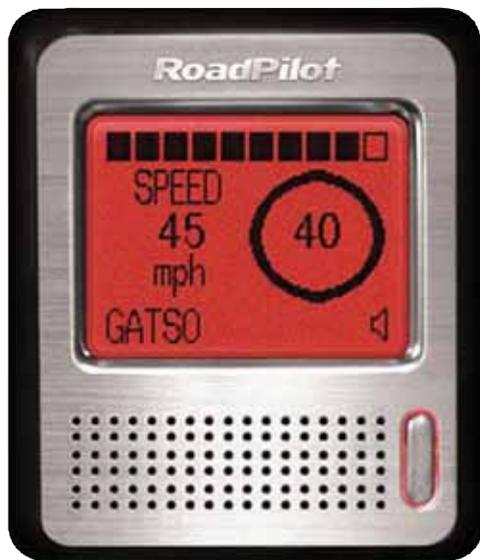
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Microsoft has hit the road with Blue&Me, an in-car entertainment system offering functionality and upgradability for owners, opening up new opportunities for retailers. **Lawrence Latif** reports...



MORGANO: Keen to stress the personalisation themes

“With two of the biggest automobile manufacturers signed up, Microsoft and supporting retailers can feel there is some mileage in supporting this new platform.”

The creation of Microsoft's Automotive Business Unit, Blue&Me aims to bring a standard interface to the entertainment platform found on most modern cars. This currently includes the likes of navigation, music and video playback.

While the thought of *Windows* controlling your car's brakes may make you shudder, Carmelo Morgano, worldwide sales manager, Microsoft Automotive Business Unit repeatedly affirmed its intentions “stop at multimedia” and that it is not targeting “safety or security”. However, Morgano envisaged a time when the system would control the climate in the car's passenger cabin – handling aspects such as air conditioning.

Currently most in-car entertainment systems are proprietary to each manufacturer, with differing components, wiring harnesses and protocols. The challenge for Microsoft was to produce a platform which can be sold to a number of manufacturers allowing them to cut costs and offer an increased level of personalisation for manufacturer and customer.

In the past year Microsoft has announced a tie-in with Ford so its Blue&Me system will be available in a number of models including the Focus. This follows on from a similar deal with the Fiat Group, Microsoft's 2006 launch partner. With two of the biggest automobile manufacturers signed up, Microsoft and supporting retailers can feel there is some mileage in supporting this new platform.

A smooth ride

Part of Blue&Me's success can be put down to the relatively low price that new car buyers have to shell out for the unit.

The basic unit costs £100 on the Fiat Bravo and while lacking the satellite navigation capabilities of its more expensive model, for a built in MP3 player with upgrade options it represents formidable value for money.

It is those upgrade capabilities which make Blue&Me such an interesting prospect for distributors and retailers. Morgano's vision of having a platform that allows the vehicle's occupants access to ‘Live services’ such as traffic reports, related pictures and information about localities are enticing. Morgano didn't stop there, talking passionately about what he termed “customer relationship management”.

The incentives for new car buyers is high. Through a simple USB port found in the glove box, users can download and install software, play music or grab updated maps from a USB memory stick or add functionality such as satellite navigation. There are security measures in place so that installed software cannot affect the core functionality that came with the system.

Going forward

At this year's CES show, Morgano's team launched an updated version of Blue&Me featuring built in satellite navigation. Morgano sees future advances being far more leading edge with features such as natural voice recognition being implemented. However, there are limits on what Blue&Me can do thanks to legislation.

Part of the Microsoft design ethos behind Blue&Me is to allow car manufacturers to customise their system for different regions and legislative tolerances. Personalisation is a theme Morgano was keen to stress. Not only for manufacturers but end-users too. The ability to personalise your system could be a boon for retailers.

By encouraging development, Blue&Me could be just the thing for retailers to wean themselves off satellite navigation units, yet continue to attract drivers. With the continual support of Bluetooth devices and software meshed to a growing user base, Blue&Me offers retailers a chance to build on the success of satellite navigation units and provide an enduring appealing to drivers.



Microsoft has hit the road with Blue&Me, an in-car entertainment system offering functionality and upgradability for owners, opening up new opportunities for retailers. **Lawrence Latif** reports...



MORGANO: Keen to stress the personalisation themes

“With two of the biggest automobile manufacturers signed up, Microsoft and supporting retailers can feel there is some mileage in supporting this new platform.”

The creation of Microsoft's Automotive Business Unit, Blue&Me aims to bring a standard interface to the entertainment platform found on most modern cars. This currently includes the likes of navigation, music and video playback.

While the thought of *Windows* controlling your car's brakes may make you shudder, Carmelo Morgano, worldwide sales manager, Microsoft Automotive Business Unit repeatedly affirmed its intentions “stop at multimedia” and that it is not targeting “safety or security”. However, Morgano envisaged a time when the system would control the climate in the car's passenger cabin – handling aspects such as air conditioning.

Currently most in-car entertainment systems are proprietary to each manufacturer, with differing components, wiring harnesses and protocols. The challenge for Microsoft was to produce a platform which can be sold to a number of manufacturers allowing them to cut costs and offer an increased level of personalisation for manufacturer and customer.

In the past year Microsoft has announced a tie-in with Ford so its Blue&Me system will be available in a number of models including the Focus. This follows on from a similar deal with the Fiat Group, Microsoft's 2006 launch partner. With two of the biggest automobile manufacturers signed up, Microsoft and supporting retailers can feel there is some mileage in supporting this new platform.

A smooth ride

Part of Blue&Me's success can be put down to the relatively low price that new car buyers have to shell out for the unit.

The basic unit costs £100 on the Fiat Bravo and while lacking the satellite navigation capabilities of its more expensive model, for a built in MP3 player with upgrade options it represents formidable value for money.

It is those upgrade capabilities which make Blue&Me such an interesting prospect for distributors and retailers. Morgano's vision of having a platform that allows the vehicle's occupants access to ‘Live services’ such as traffic reports, related pictures and information about localities are enticing. Morgano didn't stop there, talking passionately about what he termed “customer relationship management”.

The incentives for new car buyers is high. Through a simple USB port found in the glove box, users can download and install software, play music or grab updated maps from a USB memory stick or add functionality such as satellite navigation. There are security measures in place so that installed software cannot affect the core functionality that came with the system.

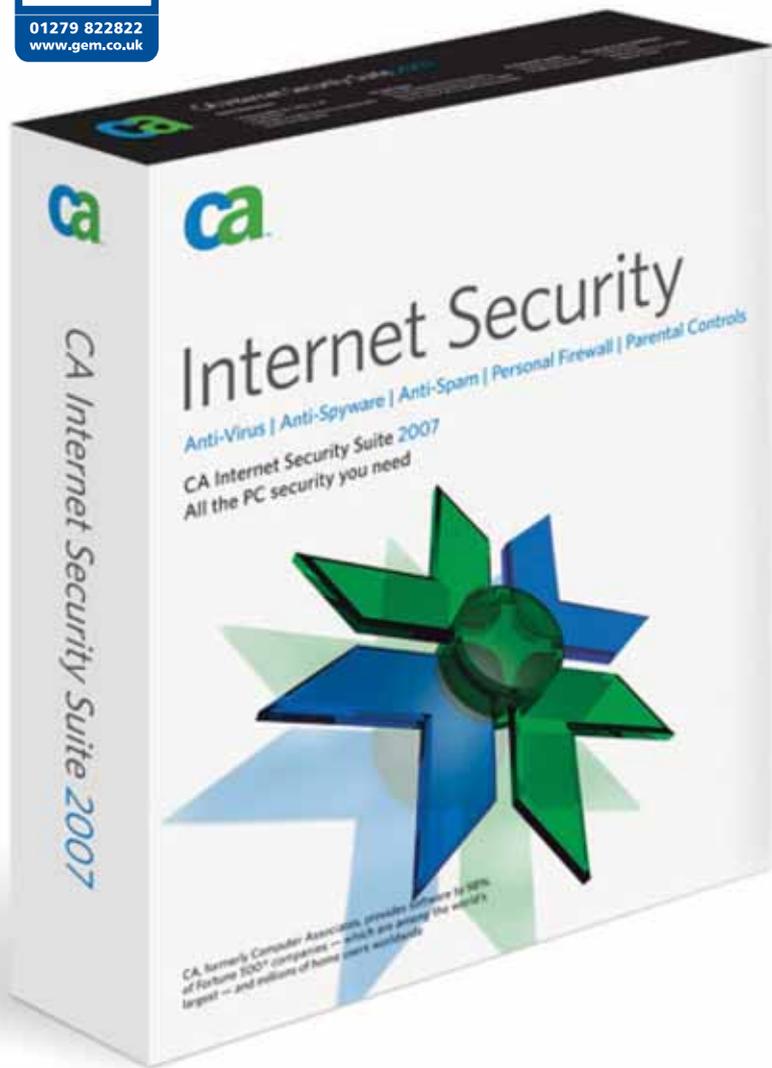
Going forward

At this year's CES show, Morgano's team launched an updated version of Blue&Me featuring built in satellite navigation. Morgano sees future advances being far more leading edge with features such as natural voice recognition being implemented. However, there are limits on what Blue&Me can do thanks to legislation.

Part of the Microsoft design ethos behind Blue&Me is to allow car manufacturers to customise their system for different regions and legislative tolerances. Personalisation is a theme Morgano was keen to stress. Not only for manufacturers but end-users too. The ability to personalise your system could be a boon for retailers.

By encouraging development, Blue&Me could be just the thing for retailers to wean themselves off satellite navigation units, yet continue to attract drivers. With the continual support of Bluetooth devices and software meshed to a growing user base, Blue&Me offers retailers a chance to build on the success of satellite navigation units and provide an enduring appealing to drivers.

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Mission: Mid-market

Having emphasised 'bang per buck' with its first major post-acquisition graphics launch, AMD now offers up its key mid-range cards. [HEXUS.net](#) gives us its first impressions of these critical products.

Last month saw the official launch of AMD's latest mid-range graphics cards. The Radeon HD 2600 and 2400 family aim to dethrone NVIDIA's GeForce 8600/8500/8400 by offering a greater feature-set, better performance and a lower comparative street price.

It all seems too good to be true from a company that has made late introductions something of a mission statement of late. After all, its exceedingly late-to-market Radeon HD 2900 XT could only compete against NVIDIA's G80 by having a hacksaw taken to its original pricing.

With all this in mind, let's now see if the DX10-compatible HD 2000-series can make AMD some decent money – it needs it.

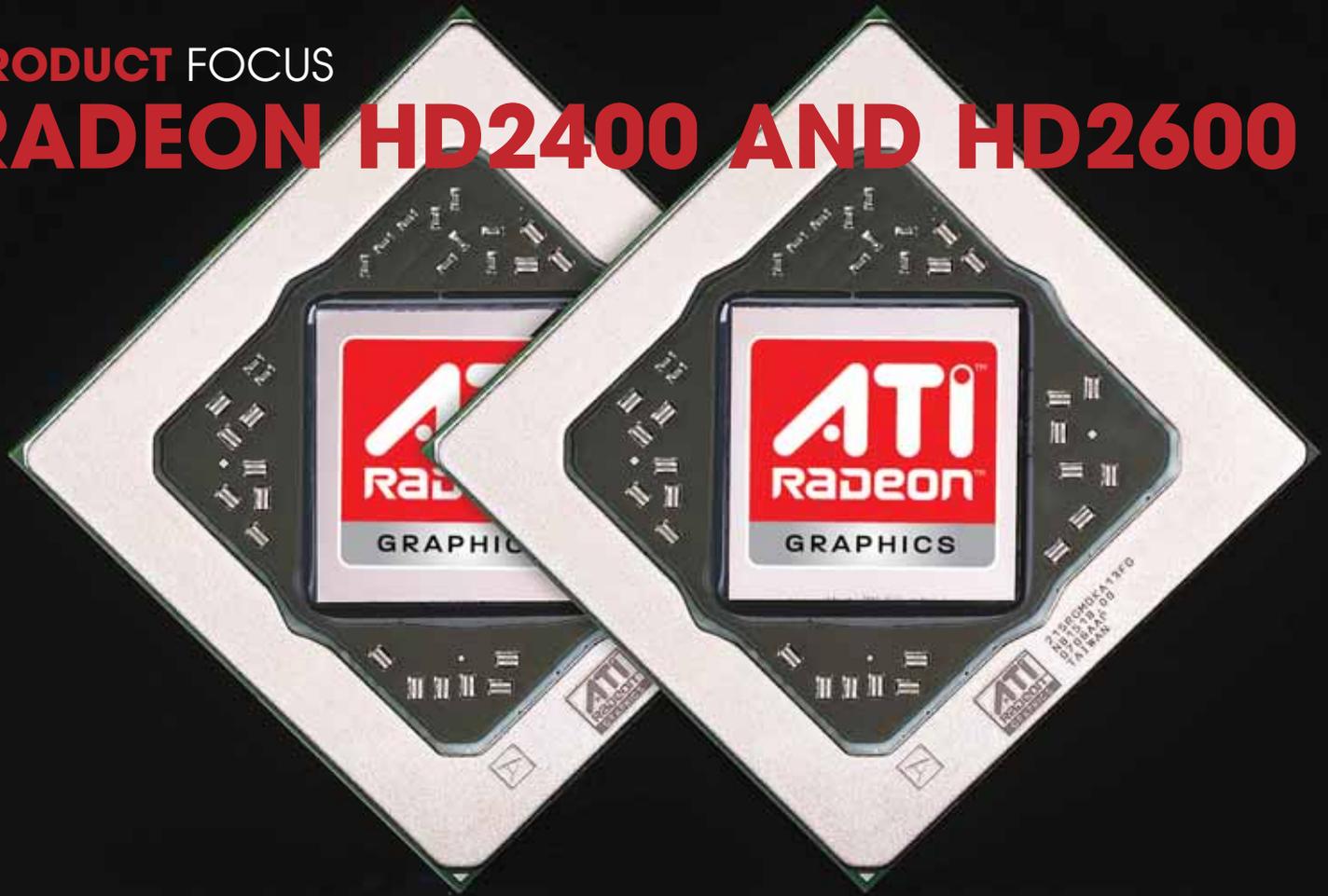
Under pressure

AMD, in its infinite wisdom, provided HEXUS with Radeon HD 2600 XT and Radeon HD 2400 XT cards on a Sunday night. The time between grabbing the hardware and publishing this review has been spent in pulling out what hair (collectively) we have left.

Short-notice, poor drivers and re-testing of copious amounts of hardware together mean that this should be considered more of an architectural-look and a performance-preview than a comprehensive, non-time-dependent appraisal of AMD's mid-range graphics technology.

Excuses out of the way: the AMD Radeon HD 2600 and HD 2400 series in detail, which sees AMD fill out the mid-range and

RADEON HD2400 AND HD2600



low-end with its DX10-supporting GPUs. Thinking about it some, the Radeon HD 2600's architecture is, for all intents and purposes, a shrunken version of the Radeon HD 2900 XT

Having an architecture that's cut down compared to the R600 brings down the transistor count to around 390M. Models in the Radeon HD 2600 series, obviously, are designed to compete with NVIDIA's GeForce 8600 range. A quick look at the comparative specs tells us that the HD 2600 should do well in titles where shading is called to the fore, thanks to its higher pure FLOP rate, but will suffer in scenarios where pure pixel fill-rate is still the all-important factor.

Runt of the litter

Pricing, though, looks to be competitive. We're informed that the range-topping Radeon HD 2600 will debut at below £90 and drop to around £60 for the DDR2-equipped model. The Radeon HD 2400 is the runt of the DX10-litter. It's designed as a low-cost solution for those looking to upgrade to DX10 visuals but hamstrung by a limited budget.

AMD's done just what we expected it to do with its low-to-mid-range DX10 parts. There's been a sensible saving of silicon by the lopping off of stream processors and memory bandwidth when compared to the Radeon HD 2900 XT.

The HD 2000 series has been primarily architected for DX10, it seems. The shading power can be considered reasonable from the unified set-up. The compromise has been in reducing the pure pixel-pushing power to a level that, frankly, even a Radeon X1650 XT card can easily out beat out. That, on paper, makes the 2000 series a top-heavy set-up that will sacrifice performance in older titles for higher potential throughput in DX10, and beyond.

The HEXUS.bang4buck index simply divides the normalised marks by the current price, to give you

an easy-to-understand metric that takes value into account. The comparatively low street price of the Radeon HD 2600 XT is compromised by lacklustre – and that's being kind – performance exhibited in our benchmarks.

Current performance in *Far Cry*, in particular, drags the normalised HEXUS.bang4buck graph down to an unacceptable level.

“But – and it's a big but – the current drivers aren't delivering the kind of performance that we'd expect from knowledge of the Radeon HD 2600 XT's set-up.”

AMD needs to fully exploit the decent hardware with drivers to match - and that doesn't seem to be happening right now. The HEXUS.bang4buck graph doesn't account for non-3D features such as Avivo HD. Further, the metric takes DX9 into account, yet doesn't factor in possible performance advantages when running DX10 code under Vista.

Room for improvement

We began with some architectural facts and figures showing both the Radeon HD 2600 XT and 2400 XT models in a decent comparative light against their NVIDIA counterparts, especially with price factored in.

The hardware designers may now be sitting back, content that their DX10-supporting mid-range SKUs are at least as compelling as the competition's. We'd pretty much agree and reckon that AMD's been eminently sensible in castrating its mid-range and low-end parts.

But – and it's a big, big but – the current drivers aren't delivering the kind of performance that we'd expect from knowledge of the Radeon HD 2600 XT's set-up. Performance is so poor that the card is often outclassed by a Radeon X1650 XT – and totally caned by a similarly-priced, albeit DX9, Radeon X1950 Pro.

With time so limited, we were left still needing to investigate DX10 performance so, for AMD's sake, let's hope the RV630 can pull its socks up by the time that testing is carried out. We've rightfully – and repeatedly – lamented the lacklustre performance of NVIDIA's GeForce 8500/8600 cards, yet in comparison to the HD 2600, they seem fast. Only the HD 2400 XT's in our low-end look demonstrated any kind of real promise.

AMD's woes are further compounded by additional driver-related problems that plague high-def playback via UVD. We could, and maybe should, write another thousand words on why the Radeon HD 2000 series isn't quite ready for public consumption. But I'm going to save myself the bother – and you the headache.

How? By stating that AMD needs to have its drivers in full working order before rolling out new SKUs. And that could never be more true of products such as the Radeon HD 2600 XT and Radeon HD 2400 XT that can, potentially, make or break the company's graphics arm.

Bottom line? There's a heap of promise in the Radeon HD 2400/2600 series. But that promise is concealed – and severely compromised – by the lacklustre performance and instability caused by the test drivers.

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2000:1

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Light-in-Motion
scenario lighting
Effects

Notes from the frontline

Richard Mills runs a local computer support company in Cottingham, East Yorkshire. He is a regular tech columnist for his local newspaper and has fronted a long running phone-in on BBC Radio. Each month he shares his experiences from the tech support frontline...



INDESTRUCTIBLE:

Following some recent severe flooding in the area, we have been doing quite a number of quotes for replacement equipment. Many businesses and home users have been badly affected. Proving the robustness of some devices, we found a 1Gb SD card that had been submerged in flood water for 24 hours and then lay undiscovered under a desk for a week. After a drying session by the office window for a few hours, we plugged it in and off it went, all the data still intact.



NOT SPEEDY:

We did a *Windows Vista* upgrade for one of our customers recently and on collection he announced he a Speedtouch modem – no good with *Vista* then. We supplied him with a nice little Zyxel modem/router and told him how to set it up. About a week later we get a call to say he never did get online since getting the machine back (what was he doing all that time)? I went along to have a look and instead of setting up the router like we'd explained, he had run the ISP CD for the Speedtouch modem and ended up with 7 x new connections none of which would work of course. However, the worst bit of it was that he had plugged the lead from the router into the analogue side of the microfilter with an old modem lead.



RAINDROPS KEEP FALLING:

We have come across some strange reasons for broadband not working or dropping out, like bad internal telephone cabling, dodgy sockets or extension leads, etc. However, the



strangest one we had was discovered by an engineer to be a bad connection under the front doorstep that allowed rainwater to drop onto them.



VISTA 1:

Windows Vista continues to give us a few problems in some areas. It is certainly very ponderous to use, and there are one or two issues with *AVG Internet Security*. The other one is with Live Mail, where messages just sit in the Outbox and will not budge.



VISTA 2:

One of the really neat features, however, about *Windows Vista* is 'Ready Boost' – which is a great way to increase memory capacity. Temporarily you can use a memory stick for example, or a really good permanent way, particularly in suitably equipped laptops is to allocate the whole capacity of a flash card, like an SD card that fits unobtrusively into its socket.

"Proving the robustness of such devices, we found a 1Gb SD card that had been submerged in flood water for over 24 hours and then lay undiscovered under a desk for a week. After drying, we plugged it in and off it went, data still intact."



BACK UP ISSUES:

A *Windows 98* box we worked on some time ago has surfaced again, regrettably. This time it is not starting up – the old 'insert system disk' routine. We did recommend the customer keep his data backed up some time ago owing to the age of the machine, but he didn't. Luckily we were able to retrieve it for him and recommended a nice new PC.



PRICE CRASH:

Prices of TFTs have dropped so significantly. I came across some old quotes the other day and the price of a 17-inch panel was over £300. Now it has got to the point where they surely can't be made for much less.



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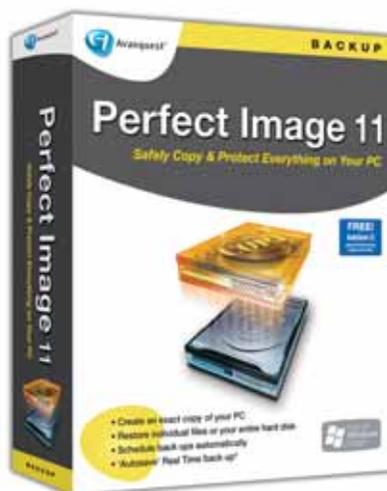
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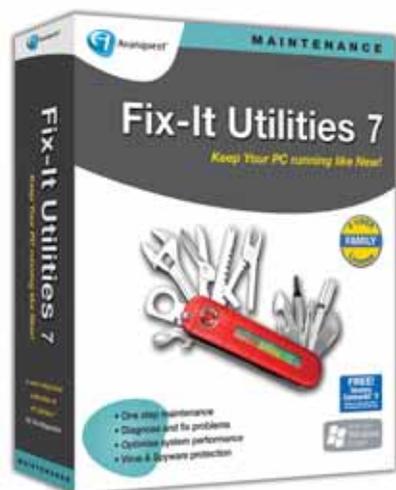
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NEW PRODUCTS PLUG AND PLAY

Stocking the latest hot gadgets can increase footfall and boost your sales. This month, we look at a new Ultra Mobile PC from Medion, while Creative rolls out another Zen MP3 player...

MEDION RIM 1000

Ultra Mobile PC

www.medionshop.co.uk

Price: £799

The UMPC (Ultra Mobile PC) market is in its formative stages, so manufacturers are still experimenting with size and format. The initial designs opted for no keyboard and Microsoft's TouchPack software that allows you to type directly on to the screen. The problem is it's a little too fiddly. So Medion has opted to build a keyboard into the RIM 1000.

Weighing 745g, it's not too heavy and being made of plastic it feels solid in the hand. But it's not as robust as we first thought though. The QWERTY keyboard is hidden behind the screen and you slide it out.

The screen is a 6.5-inch touch screen panel, which needs a firm press, either with your finger or the supplied pen to register. We initially had a few problems and had to format it a few times before the pointer actually clicked where we wanted it too.

This is the first UMPC we've seen running Vista and were actually a little surprised to find that it would run. It's powered by a VIA 1GHZ processor that isn't exactly designed for performance but rather for budget price and power conservation. With 768MB of memory, Windows takes a while to load and if you try and run more than one application at a time, you'll find it slows considerably.



This isn't the worst UMPC we've seen, but it suffers from lack of power and long-term battery life.

UMPC devices tend to be only as useful as their connections and the RIM 1000 doesn't lack for them.

You'll find 802.11g Wi-Fi as standard, as is Bluetooth. The inclusion of a webcam is nice, but with only two USB 2.0 ports, the placing of one on the

bottom of the unit seems a little strange. If you refrain from using this port, you'll be able to take advantage of a stand on the rear of the device that angles it slightly towards you.

The Medion RIM 1000 isn't the worst UMPC we've seen but it suffers from the same flaws inherent in all the devices: lack of power and long-term battery life. The design works reasonably well but we're still left thinking, especially for the price, why not opt for a fully feature notebook?

CREATIVE ZEN STONE PLUS MP3 PLAYER

Flash MP3 Player

Inram Micro: 0870 166 060

Price: £49



It seems like only days ago that Creative announced the launch of its iPod Shuffle killer the Zen Stone, but here's the follow up; the Zen Stone Plus.

The most major upgrade is the addition of a round blue OLED display for at-a-glance track and feature selection even though the size of the player hasn't increased.

Admittedly, the screen is small, but it's enough to see what is going on with your tracks, choose the track that you want next and adjust the volume. It also means you can scroll through the players options, including a newly added FM radio, a recording option, timer and stopwatch.

The Stone Plus comes in six high-gloss colours: black, white, red, blue, pink and green.

Creative has upped the ante with a 2GB memory capacity and tracks can be transferred

by the included USB cable, without the need for any software.

Creative does offer some simple software via its website so you can manage the player, however you can drag and drop tracks to the Zen Stone Plus like the Zen Stone either via a

PC or a Mac as it if was a standard USB drive.

The songs can be organised in favourite artist or playlists folder and can be played in normal or shuffle modes, but the player has lost the skip to

next folder option that we really liked on the original Zen Stone.

The Zen Stone Plus takes what we think is an already really good mini MP3 player, adds a screen, adds a radio, and more memory without changing the size or the functionality of the player. Top marks.

The Zen Stone Plus adds lots of features without changing the size or functionality of the player.



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Game of the month

BIOSHOCK

- **Publisher:** Take 2
- **Available:** August 24th
- **Price:** £34.99

Positioned as the spiritual successor of System Shock 2, it shouldn't come as much of a surprise that this is one of the most awaited games due on the PC in the next couple of months. The developer, Irrational Games, is determined to make sure that the title is just as revolutionary as its

predecessor was. Whereas SS2 was widely seen as a commentary on the convergence of consumerism and technology, Irrational is positioning Bioshock as a look at the mix of biology, technology and genetics. And with the following SS2 has, as well as the hype that is surrounding the imminent release of Bioshock, this is one title that is unlikely to sit on your shelves for long.



COMING SOON AUGUST

While it may still be hot outside, video game publishers are getting ready for Christmas with some big titles due out very soon, starting this month...

TITLE	GENRE	PUBLISHER	TELEPHONE	DISTRIBUTOR	DATE
Basketball Manager 2008	Sim	Xider	49 2131 765 01	Pinnacle	August 3rd
MotoGP 07	Racing	THQ	01483 767656	Advantage	August 3rd
Premier Manager 08	Sports	Zoo Digital	01142 636030	Open	August 17th
Bioshock	FPS	Take 2	01753 496600	Gem	August 24th
Loki	Puzzle	Ascaron	020 8309 3600	Open	August 24th
World of Chaos	Action	Xider	49 2131 765 01	Pinnacle	August 24th
Blazing Angels: Secret Missions	Sim	Ubisoft	01932 578000	Trilogy	August 31st
Medal Of Honor: Airborne	FPS	EA	020 8309 3600	Pinnacle	August 31st
European Street Racing	Racing	Xider	49 2131 765 01	Pinnacle	September 7th
Medieval II: Total War Kingdoms	RTS	Sega	020 8995 3399	Centresoft	September 7th
CSI 4 Hard Evidence	Adventure	Ubisoft	01932 578000	Trilogy	September 14th
The Witcher	Action	Atari	020 8222 9700	Advantage	September 14th
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	Racing	THQ	01483 767656	Advantage	September 21st
Heroes V Gold	RPG	Ubisoft	01932 578000	Trilogy	September 28th
Heroes V Tribes of the East	RPG	Ubisoft	01932 578000	Trilogy	September 28th
Ratatouille	Racing	THQ	01483 767656	Advantage	September 28th
Company of Heroes: GOTY	RTS	THQ	01483 767656	Advantage	September TBC
Unreal Tournament III	FPS	Midway	020 7382 7720	Trilogy	September TBC
World in Conflict	Action	Vivendi	01189 209100	Centresoft	September TBC
Scrabble 2007	Puzzle	Ubisoft	01932 578000	Trilogy	October 5th
Settlers: Rise of an Empire	RTS	Ubisoft	01932 578000	Trilogy	October 5th
C.I.D 925: An Ordinary Life	Crime Sim	Oxygen	01933 442660	Open	October 19th
Pippa Funnell 4	Sim	Ubisoft	01932 578000	Trilogy	October 26th
Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures	Action	Eidos	020 8636 3000	Centresoft	October TBC
Jackass TV	Racing	Empire	020 8343 7337	Open	October TBC
PES 2008	Sports	Konami	020 8987 5730	Open	October TBC
Assassin's Creed	Action	Ubisoft	01932 578000	Trilogy	November 9th
Toy Golf 2	Sports	Zoo Digital	01142 636030	Open	November 9th
Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway	FPS	Ubisoft	01932 578000	Trilogy	November 16th
Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	Shooter	Eidos	020 8636 3000	Centresoft	November 16th
Splinter Cell Conviction	Action/Stealth	Ubisoft	01932 578000	Trilogy	November 16th
PDC World Championship Darts 2008	Sports	Oxygen	01933 442660	Open	November 23th
Empire Earth III	RTS	Vivendi	01189 209100	Centresoft	November TBC

ON THE RADAR



Medieval II: Kingdoms

Sega: 020 8995 3399
Available: September 7th
Price: £19.99



World in Conflict

Vivendi: 0118 920 9100
Available: September 2007
Price: £34.99



Splinter Cell: Conviction

Ubisoft: 01932 578 000
Available: November 16th
Price: £34.99



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Photo Frames

The Christmas gift of the year

The next big thing? Digital photo frames are currently doing the business, but how long will it continue..?

Six million digital cameras were sold in 2006; 82 per cent of all mobile phone and smartphone devices purchased so far in 2007 contain at least one camera, while new phones entering the market continually come with improved picture quality. In 2006 MP3/MP4 players offering photo-viewing features accounted for 39 per cent of total MP3/MP4 sales compared to only four per cent in 2005. Product features catering for the digital image are booming.

With all this imaging activity, the success of the digital photo frame is no surprise. The evidence points to potentially an even more successful end of year than 2006 and the opportunity for the photo frame to cement itself in 'Christmas product legacy'.

Boom products of Christmas past include the small photo printer. In the last quarter of 2004, sales increased from 25,000 units in the summer up to 240,000 units in December, with a value of about £27m. Sales of these products dropped off enormously after Christmas, however, this market still performed well the following 2005 Christmas. It was only in 2006 that we saw the first decline in this market.

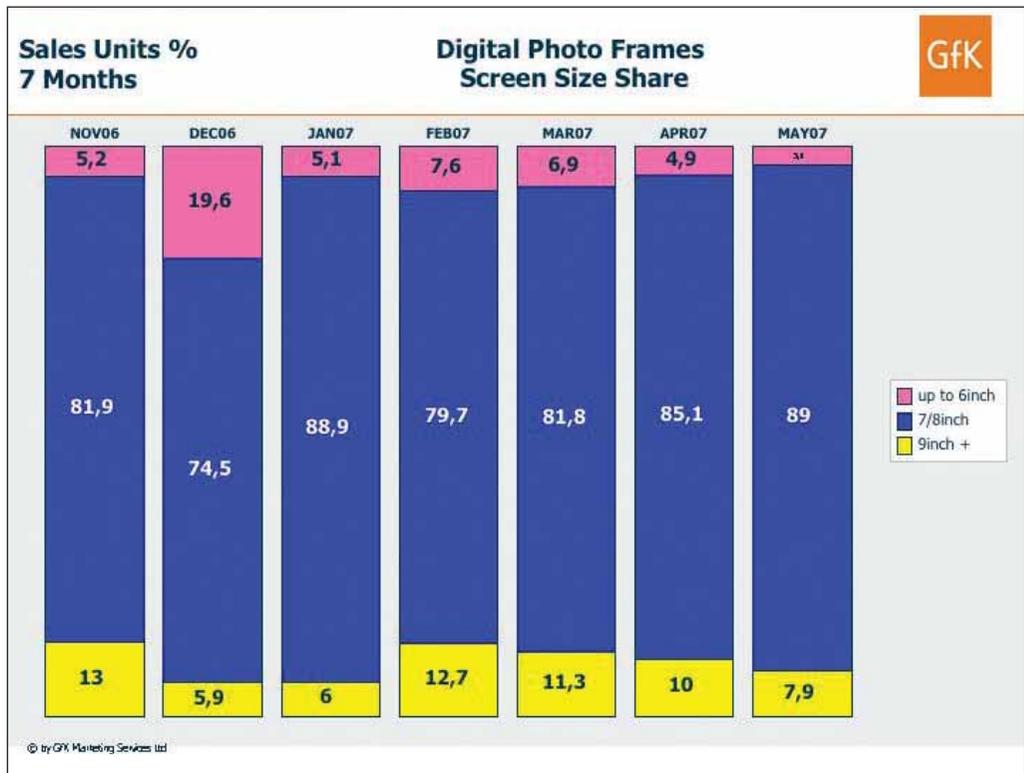
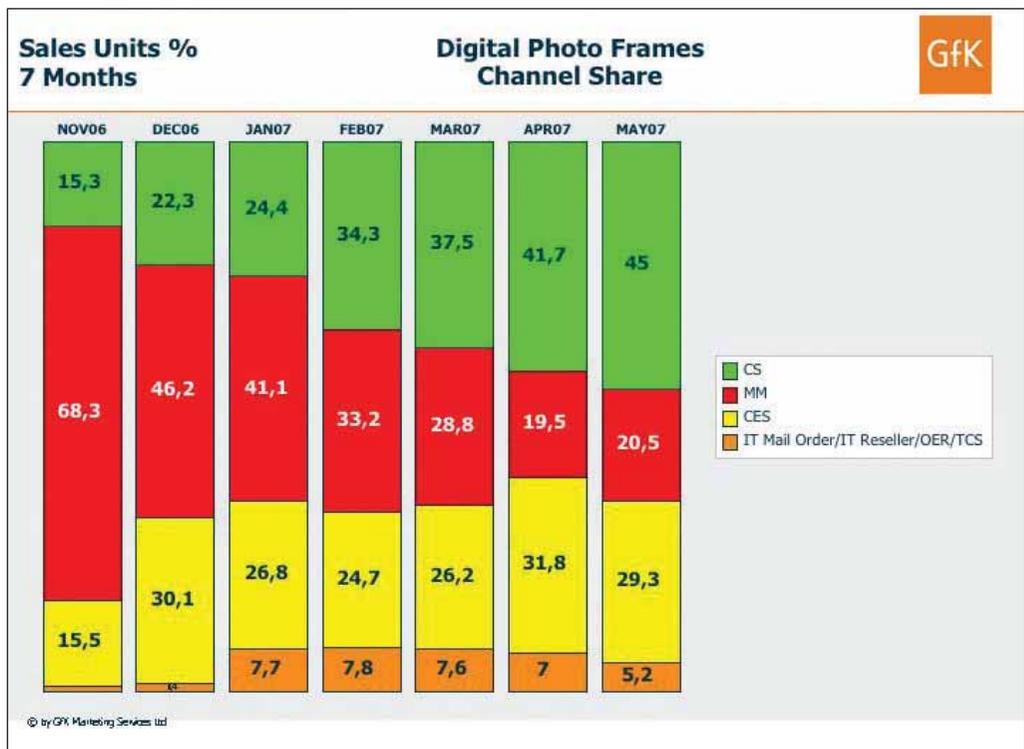
It can be argued that the introduction of digital photo frames at the end of 2005 played a part in the

“Expectations remain high as more manufacturers and retailers see the opportunities.”

sales decline of small photo printers, markedly so in the second half of 2006 when there was a year-on-year volume decline of 25 per cent in small photo printer market. Either way, the great sales performance of digital photo frames last Christmas came at the time unexpected to most; sales reported around 3,000 units up to September 2006. However, what then followed was a volume explosion each month up to December when 90,000 units were sold, with a value of almost £1 million.

The most successful channel then was mass merchandiser, reaching a 46 per cent volume and a 52 per cent value share. Following Christmas and since the beginning of 2007 this started to change. The computer shop and consumer electronic store channels started to increase their presence in the market and by May this year accounted for 45 per cent and 29 per cent of total sales respectively, with the mass merchandiser channel losing its dominance.

Expectations remain high in the market for the last two quarters of 2007 as more manufacturers and retailers see the opportunities to be had.



At the end of 2006, mass merchandisers were the most successful channel for digital photo frame sales (top), although since then computer shops and consumer electronic stores have started to pick up the pace

FEEL THE FORCE

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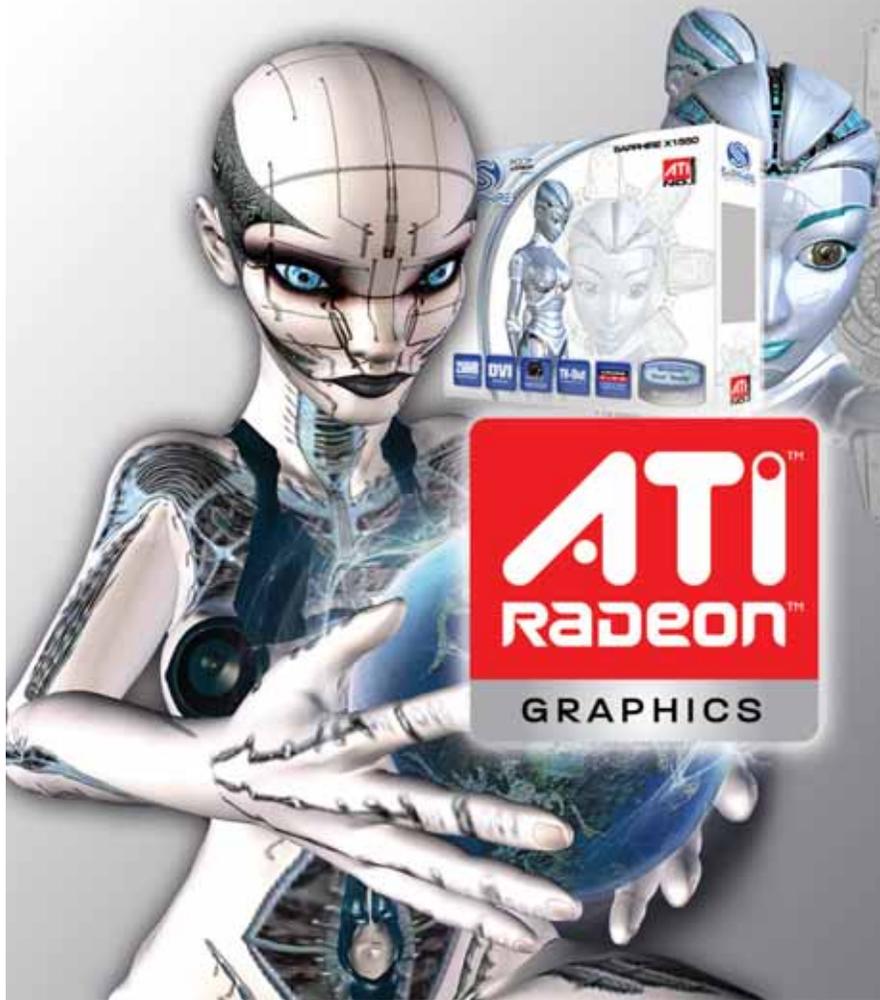
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- 7 HP, NX6325
- 8 TOSHIBA, SATELLITE P100-160
- 9 HP, PAVILION DV6330EA
- 10 ACER, 5633WLM

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- 5 VIEWSONIC, E 70
- 6 VIBRANT, VM 7VRDA
- 7 VIEWSONIC, G90F+/B
- 8 ELONEX, XV15
- 9 SAMSUNG, SYNCMASTER 793DF
- 10 IBM, E74 T07N7UK

FP MONITORS



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L1906

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967561-0120

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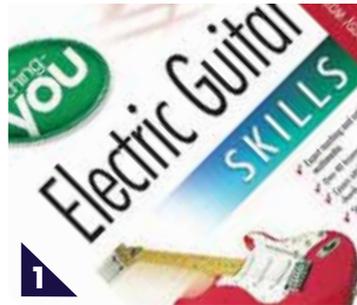
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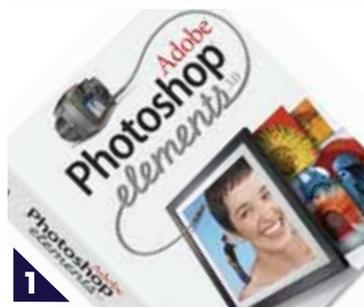
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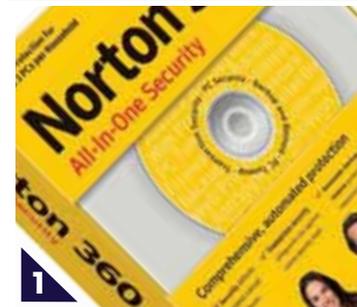
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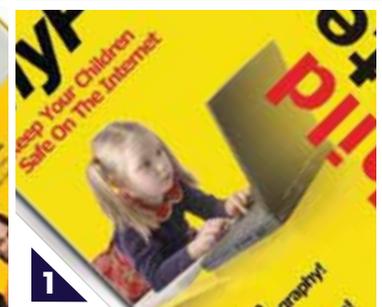
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EPSON has unveiled the latest scanner in its Perfection range – aimed at the professional and enthusiast markets. The V200 Photo benefits from Epson's Matrix CCD scanning technology, which boosts image quality.

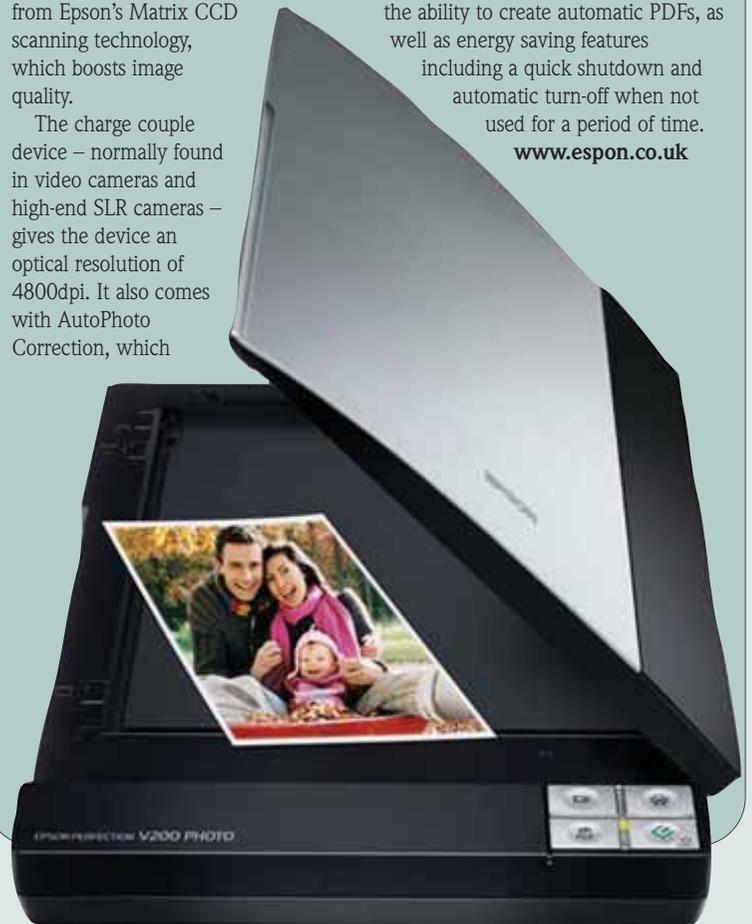
The charge couple device – normally found in video cameras and high-end SLR cameras – gives the device an optical resolution of 4800dpi. It also comes with AutoPhoto Correction, which

automatically adjusts the scanned image to ensure that the photo is straight even if scanned at an angle.

The scanner is also equipped with the ability to create automatic PDFs, as well as energy saving features

including a quick shutdown and automatic turn-off when not used for a period of time.

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Zonealarm for Vista

CHECKPOINT has released Zone Alarm Security Suite for Microsoft's new *Windows Vista* operating system.

Taking advantage of *Vista's* new Windows Filtering System Firewall

protection programming interface, it allows comprehensive multilayered protection for the first time on the new operating system.

www.zonealarm.com

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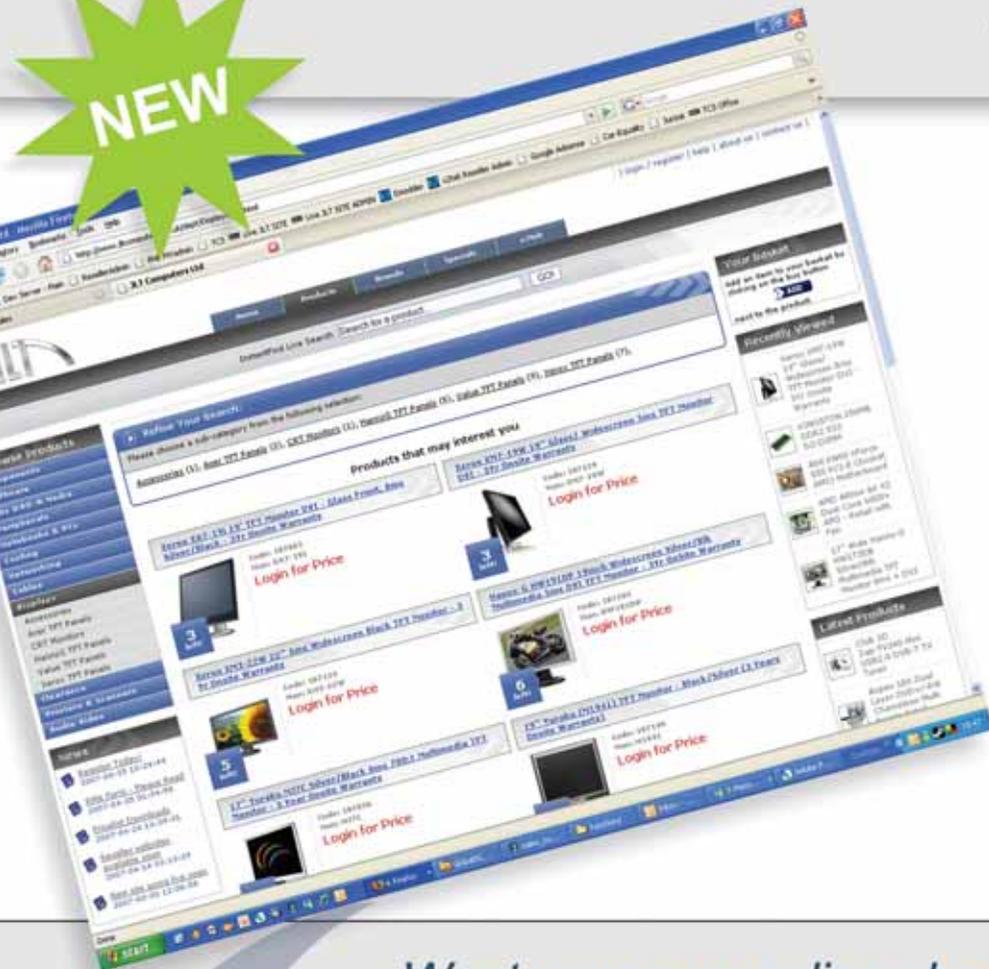

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Sony Vaio G11VN/TC

High-End Laptop

Distributor: TBA

Price: £1700

SONY'S latest notebook will leave road warriors drooling at its combination of features, battery life and featherweight construction. Sony takes its thin 'n' light notebooks very seriously, sporting a range which include some of the lightest models available anywhere in the world. As with most notebooks of this kind, compromises have to be made but you'll have to look very hard to find any on the G11.

In a marketplace that has been dominated by Lenovo's X-series for years, Sony knew it had to pull some big punches in order to muscle out the heavyweight incumbent. From just about every angle the G11 weighs in very competitively.

Styling heavily mimics the X-series with angular lines but this special edition model features a brown lid and a Filofax-esque carrying sleeve. Weighing in at just over 1.1Kg, you'll be hard-pressed to notice it, even after carrying it around all day.

The innards of the G11 are well specified. The Intel Core Solo processor only runs at 1.3GHz but it's more than capable of running a spam bloated email client, Internet browser and word processor all at the same time.

Memory is also well catered for with 2GB RAM providing ample memory not to tax the 100GB hard drive with swap space duties.

However, it isn't the processor and memory which really impresses, that's left to the screen which is barely thicker than a coin. The anorexic dimensions are possible thanks to new LED backlighting technology, which not only offers thinner displays but increased brightness and lower power consumption. Even in extreme battery-saving mode, the contrast and brightness of the screen was very usable.

The waif-like screen is so thin that it is possible to visibly bend it lengthways. As one MicroAnvika assistant explained, within a couple of hours of a G11 going on their shelves someone had cracked the screen. Although the screen itself feels fairly sturdy, some care must be taken when opening and closing the lid.

As these notebooks are typically purchased by people who spend their lives in airport departure lounges they have to blend portability and battery life. These two paradoxical features are often met by allowing users to plug in bigger batteries, which bulge out of the standard chassis. G11 users needn't worry about their battery failing during all

but the longest of hauls. In typical use you can expect around eight hours with that falling to seven when wi-fi is enabled.

Unlike most notebooks of its ilk, the G11 features a built-in DVD writer. Handy not just for burning the odd DVD but watching a film during that flight if your company has booked you on a no-frills airline.

The only downside comes in the shape of the one year warranty. Rivals typically offer three years and while that option exists, it costs a further £200.

With the G11 retailing for around £1,700, expect to pay nearer £2,000 if you want the peace of mind that comes with an extended warranty.

Price aside, the G11 offers an exceptional blend of features and portability. If you're looking to replace your on-the-road companion then Sony's G11 is definitely worth considering.



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SAMSUNG Q70

Laptop
C2000: 0870 060 3344
Price: £898



They don't make budget notebooks like they used to. Just a year or two ago, you'd have to put up with a poorly designed lump of plastic if you couldn't spend over a grand. Now, you can pick up a well-engineered machine such as this Samsung Q70.

A combination of Intel's 2GHz T7300 Core 2 processor and 2GB of RAM means there's enough grunt here to keep the Q70 looking speedy for several years. It raced through our benchmarks, scoring 1.01 overall – 1% faster than our reference 3.2GHz Pentium D desktop PC.

You'll find a mini-FireWire port on the side with two USBs. The reason these ports aren't more conveniently located at the rear of the machine is the battery. It sticks out 17mm from the main body of the chassis; Samsung could have used a battery that sits flush, but there wouldn't have been much

room inside for battery cells. The 2kg weight gives the Q70 fair claim to being a portable companion. At some point in the future you should also be able to buy an extended battery, which will boost the battery life by 50 per cent.

People typing up long reports might not be quite so chuffed with Samsung's choice of key positioning. One Shift button is tucked away at the far right of the keyboard, and we kept on hitting the "\/" button instead. The keyboard is quite compact as well; this is one area where it loses out.

We don't dispute that the Samsung has some foibles, but you're getting an astonishing package for the price: good styling, heaps of power and storage, and a vibrant, widescreen TFT. If the irritations we've highlighted won't upset you, this is certainly a great buy – a deserved Recommended award winner.

Foibles aside, you're getting an astonishing package for the price

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D-Link hits G spot

NETWORK SPECIALIST D-Link has launched its latest wireless G access point, the DAP-1160 incorporating software and support for developers using *Linux*.

As well as open-source support, the DAP-1160 can be configured to perform a number of tasks ranging from acting as an access point, through to being a repeater in order to cover deadspots. The device also has the capability to be an AP client for other access points and a workgroup bridge to connect two wireless networks together.

The DAP-1160 comes with a wireless transfer speed of 54Mbps and is also WiFi IEEE 802.11g compliant ensuring

interoperability with other 802.11g client devices.

It aims to ensure that wireless networks will not be abused, with support for advanced security features including 64/128-bit WEP encryption plus WPA/WPA2 security to prevent unauthorised access. Other features include the ability to filter MAC addresses, disable SSID broadcasts and a scalable broadcast area.

www.dlink.com



Hard as nails drive arrives from Seagate

SEAGATE has unveiled the second-generation of its EE25 Series ruggedised hard drives. The 2.5-inch EE25.2 is designed to give maximum storage for those operating in environments where other non-ruggedised hard drive might not survive.

Among the eventualities it has been ruggedised against are extremes in temperature, vibration, humidity, shock and altitude conditions. With up to 80Gb of storage, the EE25 is aimed at use in ruggedised PCs, commercial aircraft, vehicles, marine vessels, commercial and industrial control systems and CCTV applications.

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New from BTC – The 9029URF keyboard for Windows Media centre Edition, now available from RD-UK – the UK's largest authorised distributor of BTC keyboards & mice.

Live TV: Switch to live TV if TV isn't currently playing. If the TV is paused, skip to live programming.

Guide: Go to the Electronic Programming Guide.

DVD Menu: Display the DVD menu.

Volume - : Adjust the volume

Volume + : Adjust the volume

Mute: Mute the sound without stopping playback. Press Mute again to turn the sound back on.

Back: Go to the previous screen.

More: Show information about the selected item.

Record: Record the TV show to disk

Multimedia Keys

Play: Play the selected song, album, play list, recorded TV show or video.

Pause: Pause the currently playing media. Press again to resume.

Stop: Stop the currently playing media. Press play to start the track again from the beginning.

Rew: Rewind the currently playing media.

Fwd: Speed up the currently playing media.

Previous: For TV, go back 5 seconds.

Next: For album or play list, play the previous song. For DVD, play the previous chapter.



This product will carry out three main functions in a compact and sleek form factor – it's a keyboard, a mouse as well as an MCE remote.

The 9029URF has a very low profile and is very compact. It has 16 hot keys that enable you to easily and conveniently control your TV & multimedia functions. The 9029URF with its built in

pointing device, mouse and remote control functions gives you the freedom to remotely control your Media Centre PC. You get the freedom to sit anywhere in your living room and interact with your MCE PC – no wires – the 9029URF 2.4ghz wireless keyboard gives you the freedom to be up to 10m away from your MCE PC and still interact with it.



5211/859

Black standard office keyboard with M859 3D optical mouse



5145

Full function keyboard in small footprint



6100

Mini keyboard with scissor action keys - USB



6300

As 6100 but full size with numeric keypad



8193URFII

Wireless keyboard/mouse set

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All brand names, trademarks and logos acknowledged

VIA MICHELIN X-960

SatNav Device
Distributor: TBA
Price: £145



The X-960 is the lightest satnav on test at only 136g. It has a bright 3.5in touchscreen TFT with a non-reflective coating. UK and Ireland maps are bundled, and a European version is available for around £30 more.

Menus are intuitive and the main menu has three simple buttons: Navigate, Plan Your Journey and My ViaMichelin. Plan Your Journey allows you to plan a route, display a map and search for a POI without a GPS fix.

You can plan multi-destination routes, too. The guidance display can be set to a full-screen 3D or 2D view, or a schematic of the next turn, complete with no-entry signs showing illegal turns.

But rather than add unnecessary frills like a music player, ViaMichelin includes genuinely useful extras such as POI categories for hotels and restaurants in the Michelin Guide. Tourist information from the Green Guide is also included, with major event locations, too. You

get permanent free updates of fixed safety cameras and map updates for three months, while a two-year map subscription with at least four updates costs £70. Plus, using the My ViaMichelin area on the firm's website allows you to synchronise favourite routes, addresses and POIs.

Entering an address is easy as there's a QWERTY layout with numbers, and keys are greyed out if there are no matching city names or postcodes. The 300MHz CPU might not be the fastest, but the X-960 is

responsive, even on battery power.

Although no mains adapter is bundled, you can charge the unit via USB or the car charger. The windscreen mount is solid, but you have to twist an awkwardly placed slippery

dome to create suction. Another gripe is the inability to avoid specific roads in the planned route, or calculate a route around a roadblock or traffic jam.

If you don't need live traffic updates, it's one to add to your shortlist.

ViaMichelin includes genuinely useful extras such as POI categories for hotels



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NEW. RUGGED. ERGONOMIC. BLUETOOTH.

The Wasp WDT3200 is a feature rich portable data terminal designed to handle even the most demanding mobile data collection needs. Featuring a crisp, QVGA screen and running the latest Windows CE 5.0 operating system, the WDT3200 portable data terminal can handle today's inventory applications and is ready for future programming needs.



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- Vivid, backlit screen
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WDT3200 Portable Data Terminal (with pistol grip)
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These complete solutions include MobileInventory stock tracking software with the new WDT3200 portable data terminal (including



ergonomic pistol grip) and a WPL305 desktop barcode printer. It's an all inclusive and highly integrated inventory tracking solution. The WPL305 barcode printer adds the capability to print inventory labels/shipping labels with unique text, company logos and flexibility to change label sizes.

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MARKETPLACE



Asus rolls out new slim line GPS PDA

TO ANSWER the needs of consumers who require a versatile and functional PDA, ASUS has launched the A696 GPS PDA.

The ASUS A696 is not only ultra-slim at only 1.57cm, it incorporates full GPS functionality without the protruding antenna, is encased in stainless steel instead of plastic and comes with an anti-glare touch screen.

The Global Positioning System (GPS) puts an end to fumbling with maps by harnessing satellite technology to pinpoint precise location and to provide useful journey information. No mere gimmick, the A696 has a great variety of everyday applications like trip planning and navigating venues, taking users anywhere, for both fun and work.

Utilising Destinator Technologies' routing engine and feature rich navigation content, the A696 also has a QuickNav button making it quicker and easier to travel directly to a predetermined address or POI (Point of Interest). Other features include a random search facility that directs you to points of interest in your surrounding

location, a simple and clear user interface and an innovative trip planning feature with intermediate stops and route optimisation function.

In addition, the A696's GPS module uses the latest energy-efficient SIRF Star III chipset, enabling accurate navigation over extended periods.

It also comes with wireless capability Wi-Fi (802.11 b/g), while Bluetooth 2.0 with Enhanced Data Rate speeds up data exchange with a range of digital peripherals by up to two to three times over conventional Bluetooth.

With ASUS' user-friendly application 'Remote Presenter', it can also be easily used to link and control presentations on a computer via Bluetooth. All data is stored in Flash memory, so precious information remains stored even if all battery power in the handheld has drained away.

Running on Microsoft Windows Mobile 5.0, the A696 is also a true multimedia handheld with front-mounted speakers that play video and audio formats, plus the huge library of games for the Pocket PC platform.

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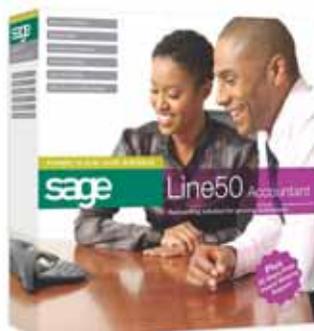


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Buffalo storms in with new routers

BUFFALO TECHNOLOGY has added two new routers to its range of wireless solutions. The AirStation Nfiniti Wireless-N ADSL2+ brings all the benefits of new draft-N wireless networking, while the AirStation Wireless-G High-speed ADSL2+ wireless modem router incorporates enhanced wireless-G, meaning that transfer speeds can reach 125Mbps.

The Nfiniti wireless modem router is based upon the upcoming 802.11n standard and offers a streaming speed of 270Mbps compared to the 54Mbps offered by 802.11g. It also offers a maximum unimpeded range of 70 metres compared to 35 metres for 802.11g.

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