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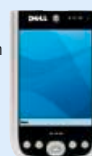


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FROM THE EDITOR

The need to protect
your home computer
is, as kids like to say,
a no-brainer. Anyone

who owns a PC but doesn't use
an anti-virus program is asking
for trouble, and in today's
internet-enabled world it won't
take long for them to find it. But
protecting your PC is easy, and it
doesn't have to cost you a penny
either. In this issue, on page 14,
we look at the top anti-virus
programs available and
investigate how they affect the
workings of your PC and whether
it's worth paying expensive
subscription charges. Also, be
sure to take a look at our spyware
feature on page 32 and learn how
you can keep even more net
nasties at bay.

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Lycos web-hosting packages and PC worth over

£2,400!

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◀ Scams ▶

Stronger powers for ICSTIS

Amendment to Code of Practice aims to tackle increase in premium-rate scams

CONSUMERS SHOULD soon have better luck getting their money back if they have been ripped off by premium-rate telephone scams.

Recommendations from ICSTIS, the premium rate watchdog, to slow down payments to companies running premium-rate services, are set to be made mandatory.

"It should only be a matter of a few weeks before this amendment becomes a mandatory part of our code of practice," said an ICSTIS representative.

The regulator's code of practice governs companies offering premium-rate services. Forcing network operators – the companies that lease the phone numbers to these companies – to stick to a minimum 30-day rule before handing over payment for services will give ICSTIS time to identify possible breaches of its Code in the event of consumers complaining. The new rule also gives ICSTIS the authority to tell



phone networks to withhold disputed funds for longer periods pending the outcome of investigations into premium-rate disputes.

This should deter companies from running premium-rate scams to rip consumers off or disappearing with the money.

Although ICSTIS had asked

the network operators to adhere to a

minimum 30-day rule not to hand over money in December last year, it said it had found clear evidence that some networks were not abiding by its recommendations and were often releasing monies to service providers within days.

What to do if you get caught out

Consumers who suspect they have fallen victim of a **rogue dialler** or other premium-rate scam should inform both ICSTIS and their phone operator. For example, ICSTIS has increasingly been called to check out companies offering mobile services, such as ringtones, games, screensavers and pictures. It has had some success in getting these companies to make terms and conditions much clearer and people are being reimbursed. On the ICSTIS site consumers can check if the phone number, including the short code used by these mobile service companies, is being investigated and lodge a complaint.

www.icstis.org.uk

Now, breaches of this code will see a network operator reported to telecommunications watchdog Ofcom and, if ICSTIS believes a criminal offence has taken place, to the police as well.

ICSTIS will now ask Ofcom to ratify the proposals. ■

IN BRIEF...

Patch that PC

Readers are strongly advised to install the 10 security **patches** released by Microsoft last week. The latest updates included seven fixes for Windows, at least one of which is ranked as 'critical' – in other words it sorts out a problem which puts users at risk of being infected by viruses. The company also warned that one alert for Microsoft Exchange is deemed 'important'. This label is given to fixes involving processes that require user interaction, such as opening an email attachment. The company said it also planned to release an updated version of its Windows Malicious Software Removal Tool, a utility which detects and removes malicious code such as **spyware**.
www.microsoft.com

◀ DVD formats ▶

DVD confusion beckons as format debate stalls

IT LOOKS as if consumers will have to trust their own judgement and make a choice between two formats when they buy one of the next generation of DVD players.

It was hoped that Sony, which is developing the Blu Ray format, and Toshiba, which is behind the HD DVD standard, could agree on a common format, thus ending confusion for consumers.

However, a group of companies involved in developing the HD DVD standard has now announced

it has developed a way to produce discs in its format using existing DVD production methods, effectively reopening the battle.

At the core of both formats are blue lasers, which differ from the red lasers used in current DVD equipment in that they allow discs to store the higher-quality data needed for high-definition movies and televisions.

The battle has split the manufacturing and entertainment industries into two camps. While talks

between the two groups are not officially over, this latest announcement appears to show a reluctance to give way. It is a boost for Toshiba because manufacturers can produce HD DVD players and discs more cost-effectively, as it won't require changing current manufacturing processes, as Blu Ray does.

However for consumers the end result is likely to be more confusion as they watch the industry battle it out in what

appears to be a re-run of the famous VHS and Betamax videotape battle.

www.blu-ray.com
www.hddvd.org

◀ The Blu Ray and HD DVD standards seem farther apart than ever



IN BRIEF...

Size matters

Computers will become more unreliable and prone to crashing as the chips that drive them get smaller. This was the stark warning from major chip manufacturer Intel. It said that the smaller and more densely packed chips become the more susceptible they are to environmental impacts such as electrical noise and oxidation. This disturbs the way they operate. In addition, as chips get more complex it will become more common for production errors to remain unnoticed during testing.

www.intel.com

Firefox flaw

A seven-year-old flaw has been found in the Mozilla and Firefox web browsers. Secunia, the Danish security firm that found the bug, has given it a rating of "moderately critical" but no patches are available as yet. The vulnerability could allow hackers to write information on other people's websites, and makes it technically possible for phishers to harvest details from a banking website. However, for this to happen the user would need to have both the legitimate and hacked websites open at the same time. Secunia has designed an online test for users.

http://secunia.com/multiple_browsers_frame_injection_vulnerability_test

Dell goes green

Dell has launched a free printer ink cartridge recycling programme. Instead of binning their empty cartridges, Dell is urging consumers to return any brand of empty cartridges to them using a postage-paid, pre-addressed envelope which is available from the company when a Dell cartridge is bought. Alternatively, consumers can post them to one of the many charities, such as ActionAid that can sell them on to be refilled or earn themselves a little money by selling them on to one of the remanufacturers.

www.dell.co.uk/recycling
www.actionaidrecycling.org.uk
www.ukara.com

Online shopping

The price is not right

SHOPPERS HAVE little idea that online retailers can charge different prices to different people for the same product.

This was one of the findings from a US survey, 'Open to Exploitation', conducted by the University of Pennsylvania. It looked at US consumer understanding of online business but its findings can largely be applied to UK consumers, according to the Interactive Media Retail Group (IMRG), the global body of internet retailing.

For example, the University of Pennsylvania study found that nearly two-thirds of adult internet users believed it was illegal to charge different people different prices, a practice retailers call "price customisation". But this does go on, not only in the US but in the UK as well.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) said there was no specific law that made this illegal unless it could be proved it was deliberately discriminating against a consumer's race or gender or violates price-fixing laws. The IMRG pointed out

that just because a retailer has a product for sale – no matter what the price – it is not obliged to sell it to a consumer.

James Roper, chief executive of the IMRG, said price differences were a sign that online retailers were getting

increasingly sophisticated about how they target shoppers. He said privacy protection in the UK meant while these online retailers should not be sharing details of customer spending habits with third parties, unless express permission is given, they are making more use of what is called affinity marketing.

This means instead of acting on their own to broadcast the same message to millions of customers, organisations team together to attract customers with particular interests.

Also, consumers should be aware that while the internet helps careful shoppers compare prices across a number of online and high street retailers, price comparison sites are not obliged to show the lowest prices. ■

www.imrg.org

www.cannenbergpublicpolicycenter.org



Web addresses

Green light for red light web zone

PLANS TO create an internet domain for adult content have been given the go-ahead.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers has decided to allow Canadian company ICM Registry to create a .xxx address to exist alongside other addresses like .com and .co.uk.

ICM Registry claims that by defining websites in this way, it will be much easier to filter adult websites to stop children from viewing inappropriate content. It also stated that it is firmly against all forms of child pornography and will make considerable effort to remove any from the internet.

John Carr from the National Children's Home charity welcomed the move.

"Filtering and blocking software products are now getting smarter and better, but even the very best have not yet reached 100 per cent efficiency," Mr Carr said. "But very few people will ever accidentally mistype something that ends with .xxx" he added.

However, the .xxx suffix would not be compulsory and the new domain names are also likely to be more expensive than standard top-level domains. As a result, Cybersurf, which develops internet child safety software, warned that vigilance would still be needed.

www.icmregistry.com



Online shopping

Shop and earn free music

A new shopping portal, Shopfar, is offering users free music downloads for visiting or buying from any one of the shopping sites it is hosting.

Independent of the retailers, which include Expedia, Figleaves, Boots, Lastminute.com, Dell and HMV, Shopfar will also give



users of the portal the chance to earn extra points for music downloads by introducing others to the site.

Currently the downloads are only available from the Apple iTunes website but Shopfar said it may widen this to other music download sites. Once a user has been credited, they receive a 12-digit song code which can be redeemed using the iTunes software.

www.shopfar.co.uk
www.apple.com/uk/itunes/download

Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

➔ **Domain** The name used to identify a site on the internet.

➔ **Hacker** Someone who breaks into other people's computers and networks.

➔ **Patch** A file that fixes problems with an existing application.

➔ **Portal** A website that offers a variety of services on different sub-sites.

➔ **Rogue dialler** Re-routes your dial-up connection to a premium rate number.

➔ **Spyware** Software installed as part of another program to monitor a computer's use.

For more on Jargon Buster visit:
www.computeractive.co.uk

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IN BRIEF...



More for less

HP has launched its cheapest multifunction copier, printer and scanning device. For just £70, the PSC1410 has a 4800 x 1200dpi colour printer, which can print borderless pictures in sizes up to 10 x 15 cm, and a 600 x 2400dpi full-colour scanner. It can even make colour or black and white copies without the PC being switched on. It includes HP's Image Zone editing software. www.hp.com/uk

It's free to talk

BT is offering limited free voice calls to anyone who signs up to its BT Communicator service. New customers to the service, which allows users to make voice telephone calls over the internet using a PC, will be able to make free calls to any local and national number for the first three months of their contract. All PC-to-PC calls are already free. www.bt.com/freecallsoffer

Call charges eclipsed

Broadband supplier Eclipse Internet will offer free evening and weekend telephone calls through its TalkVbre broadband service. The Home Broadband + TalkVbre package gives 2Mbit/s internet access with a 5Gb usage limit per month, plus 75 minutes of calls during the evening and weekends for £20 per month. BT line rental costs still exist, however. www.edipsebroadband.com

Security shop

Security software publisher Avanquest will now sell its products through an online shop as well as in the high street. The company has already launched the online shopping facility in France and other countries. Depending on the manufacturer of the software, customers can choose to either download packages or buy the boxed version. www.shop.avanquest.com/uk

<File sharing>

Drive to educate parents

PARENTS NEED to be educated about the dangers of file sharing, a leading internet-based child safety charity has warned.

Childnet International said a lack of understanding of the technology behind file sharing had left parents ignorant of their children's illegal music downloading and file-sharing habits, leaving them vulnerable to writs from the entertainment industry.

The charity now plans to educate parents through a campaign that explains file-sharing sites and the law surrounding copyright. Recently the British Phonographic Industry (BPI) claimed that a number of parents had paid the music industry hefty fines because their children had been downloading illegal copies of music from file-sharing sites. However, it has been reluctant to confirm exactly how many



Childnet aims to broaden parents' understanding of file-sharing

have been targeted.

Childnet believes lawsuits could be avoided if parents knew more about how file-sharing and the copyright law works, adding that many parents are unable to give their children advice on how to stay safe, secure and legal online.

The charity will now work with the music industry worldwide to explain to parents what file-sharing services are, outline the security and legal risks to children and the family computer as well as the benefits. It also gives practical advice on what is needed to help ensure that

children's enjoyment of music on the internet is safe and legal. Part of the campaign includes distributing a leaflet on the subject in the coming months. www.childnet-int.org

<Digital cameras>

Three new hi-tech Samsung snappers

THREE NEW additions to Samsung's Digimax range of digital cameras will be in the shops over the summer.

Included in the line-up is the slimline Digimax i5 with a 3x optical zoom and a 5-megapixel CCD. It uses Samsung's Safety Flash technology, which operates in poorly lit areas where a normal flash is inappropriate. The camera features text recognition so photos of text can be converted to an Office file. It will be on sale from July for £250. A similar version, the i50 MP3, has a music player incorporated. It will be available at the end of summer.

The Digimax A55W video camera records MPEG-4 video with a 5-megapixel CCD. Over an hour's video can be stored on the 256Mb memory card

and the camera allows still images to be produced during video playback. It is priced at £200 and is available from September.

For the more experienced photographer, the high-end Pro815 has a 15x zoom and can shoot both wide angles and telephotos with the same lens. The 3.5in screen can be split in half so the user can inspect two views of a picture to optimise camera settings. The price has yet to be confirmed but will be in the range of £500-600 and available in August. www.samsungcamera.co.uk

Samsung's latest additions to its Digimax range of digital cameras



<Internet services>

Tiscali to unbundle

Tiscali is to offer unbundled broadband connections to its customers. These services rely on what is known as local loop unbundling (LLU), where a company places its own equipment in BT exchanges.

This allows it more freedom to set prices and offer additional services such as faster lines and internet telephony services. Tiscali has already begun the process for 27 exchanges in London, with a further 200 to follow by the end of the year.

The internet service provider (ISP) joins the ranks of other ISPs such as Bulldog, which thanks to LLU has announced an 8Mbit/s service and plans to double its unbundling operations from 400 to 800 UK telephone exchanges.

New Bulldog customers have no download caps and can choose from a selection of price plans, including the 8Mbit/s service for the price of the current 4Mbit/s service, starting from £15.50 per month.

www.tiscali.co.uk

Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

CCD A light-sensitive component used in digital cameras and camcorders.

Gb Gigabyte. A measurement of hard disk storage capacity.

Mb Megabyte. A measurement of memory storage capacity.

Mbit/s Megabit per second. A measure of data-transfer speed.

Megapixel A measure of the level of detail recorded by digital cameras – one megapixel means an image made from one million tiny dots (pixels).

For more on Jargon Buster visit: www.computeractive.co.uk

IN BRIEF...

Tune in

A new adapter from AVerMedia gives FM radio access to any desktop or notebook computer.

The receiver takes its power from the

USB

socket in the computer and has a headphone socket with an adapter for the aerial. It can be controlled

from Windows, where it scans for available stations. Audio from the radio can be recorded in WMA format. The AVerMedia USB Radio costs £17 and is available now.

www.avermedia.co.uk

Future visions

3D monitors have been the dream of science fiction writers for many years but now an American company claims to have developed a workable model. The Perspecta monitor is shaped like an upside down fish bowl and displays a 3D image that can be viewed from many angle without the need for special goggles. It is expected to be used for military and medical purposes, for example, allowing doctors to view scans from all angles. It is unlikely, though, that consumers will see a similar product for a number of years.

www.actuality-systems.com

No online bar for prisoners

All prisoners should be given access to the internet, a leading prisons charity has suggested. The Forum Prisoner Education said concerns over safety and security surrounding prisoners' access to the internet, which is limited at the moment, are 'not insurmountable'. It said internet usage could be monitored, just as prisoners' mail is already monitored. Earlier this year, a report from the Education and Skills committee of the House of Commons said that access to the internet is 'essential both as a learning tool and as a key skill for employment'. It added that lack of access to the internet is a 'significant barrier to learning'.

www.fpe.org.uk

<Remote access>

Use your PC anywhere

A NEW service called MyWebExPC gives free remote access to home PCs from anywhere in the world.

As long as the both PCs use a Windows operating system and Internet Explorer or Firefox, people can access their files and applications on their home PC using the internet connection of another computer. It will work even if the home PC is protected by a **firewall**.

To use MyWebExPC a small program is installed onto the computer to be accessed. Then, as long as this home PC is left on, the owner can gain access to it from any computer by logging on to the MyWebExPC website and typing in a password and email address.

MyWebExPC uses security software to scramble and protect the information as it travels over the internet. There are also several options to avoid the possibility of the home PC or remote computer being spied on.

Also, if a user is remotely accessing files on the home PC from a remote location and needs to leave the room, the home PC can be locked so it can't be interfered with.

It is also possible to restrict access to

particular programs.

For example, a parent could allow a child to access their home PC to read personal emails while away from home but not allow them to use this access to change security settings.

It is not possible to transfer files but text can be moved from one computer to another by using copy and paste. The software can be installed on up to five computers. There will be a review of MyWebExPC in issue 193. ■

www.mywebexpc.com



◀ This service provides secure access to a PC from any location



<Mobile phones>

Ofcom 'fails to support consumers'

CONSUMER GROUPS

have bitterly criticised the decision by Ofcom not to bring in stronger measures next year to cut the cost of mobile phone calls.

The telecommunications regulator announced earlier this month that the current regulatory framework, which was scheduled to end in March of next year, would now be extended for another year.

Consumer groups fear that this effectively allows mobile operators to continue charging what it believes are excessive amounts for making calls to other mobile phone networks and fixed-line telephones.

Under Ofcom, the original

telecommunications watchdog, mobile operators were forced to cut their charges under rules which still apply.

For example, now calls to Vodafone and O2 phones will be cut from an average amount of 8p per minute to 5.63p, while calls to T-Mobile and Orange phones will fall from 9.5p per minute to 6.31p.

However, consumer groups believe that these charges are still too high. The argument is that the average mobile phone user is being overcharged by up to £10 a month and that charges on calls to other phone networks should be slashed to 3p a minute.

Consumer groups had been hoping that when the current price controls ended in March 2006, Ofcom would impose further price cuts on the industry.

However, mobile operators said they believe that the extension to the framework is fair, claiming that they continue to invest heavily in new services and deals for their customers and that fierce competition between service providers is already bringing prices down.

www.ofcom.gov.uk

<Mobile services>

Mobile office

Documents to Go is a new program that allows some mobile phones to view and edit Microsoft Office documents.

Currently only available for the Sony Ericsson P800, P900 and P910, which use the Symbian UIQ mobile device operating system, users can make changes to Word and Excel documents stored on their phones. A special technology called InTact ensures the formatting in the documents is retained when viewed on the small screens.

The Word editor can create and edit tables, footnotes and comments as well as the standard formatting. Documents can either be received in emails or copied onto the mobile phone using **Bluetooth**, infrared or text messaging. The software can also view PowerPoint documents.

Documents to Go is available now for \$50 (about £28).

www.dataviz.co.uk



◀ Consumer groups believe mobile phone charges are still too high

IN BRIEF...

Power base

PCWorld has launched a PC that incorporates the Intel Pentium D 820 **processor**. This processor packs more power into a smaller space. The Advent T8 uses Windows XP Media Center Edition 2005 and has a 200Gb **hard disk**, DVD rewriter drive, built-in wireless networking and a TV tuner. It comes with a 17in TFT monitor and is priced at £999. www.pcworld.co.uk

Total privacy

Acronis PrivacyExpert Suite 8 offers protection from spyware and other prying eyes. It improves the security of a PC by removing files left after internet browsing that can contain sensitive information. Normal files can be securely deleted too. The price (£30) includes a one-year subscription to updates and email and phone support. www.computrolley.co.uk

«Downloads»

US sound reaches the UK

A US website that offers audio downloads has launched a site tailored for UK users of audio books and content.

Although audio content is vital to many disabled and visually impaired people, audio books, magazines and other content are becoming increasingly popular with commuters stuck in heavy traffic or on long journeys.

At the moment the Audio UK site offers around 10,000 items, including many of the most popular audio books on offer, as well as radio programmes and news downloads, and the developers said new content is being added all the time. The site will offer allow downloads from a UK national newspaper, but at the time of going to press more information was not available.

Content is downloaded with no restrictions on how it can be used. It can be played back on the PC, burned to CD and downloaded to an MP3 player at no extra cost. Most, but not all, MP3 players will be compatible and the website has a list of all the compatible models.



▲ A US site is offering audio book, radio and news downloads in the UK

The developer has also made it possible to use the downloaded content in bite sized pieces if people prefer. After downloading the entire content on to the PC, the user can choose how much to **stream** to an MP3 player or other device.

The company has two price plans: £15 a month for two audio books of any length, or £10 per item. It is also offering a free gift to anyone who signs up for a year's subscription – most probably an iPod shuffle portable music player. ■ www.audi.co.uk

«Auctions»

Ebay is on the move

People will be able to access and manage their eBay accounts on their mobile phones from July onwards. The new application from Moonlight Mobile allows users to receive real-time information on their handset so they can bid, buy and sell while on the move.

Mobile Auctions services include a scrolling ticker bar, showing the user's transaction status and live alarm and alert settings providing notification of bids being beaten, auctions closing and items won.

Mobile Auctions intends to offer a low-cost monthly subscription, regardless of the mobile network used. It is negotiating with a number of Europe's leading mobile network operators and independent portals to ensure Mobile Auctions is available to all mobile phone owners. The service will be launched in July. www.moonlightmobile.com

AOL to broadcast Live8 on the web



Live8 organisers hope to raise awareness of Africa's plight

AOL is to stream all the Live8 concerts live over the internet and make them available to watch afterwards. Live8 will take place in Paris, London, Berlin, Philadelphia and Rome simultaneously on 2 July to raise awareness of the plight of people in Africa because of outstanding debt and unfair trade taxes.

The BBC will also be covering events on BBC One,

Two and Three but will not broadcast every concert.

An AOL representative said it did not know how many people were going to listen online and that they are not in competition with the TV broadcasts.

All the AOL coverage will also be available on its archives for at least a month after the concerts. www.aol.co.uk

«Technology»

Come dancing with a robot

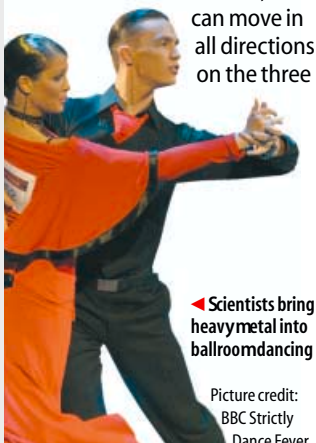
JAPANESE SCIENTISTS have unveiled a ballroom-dancing robot. The Partner Ballroom Dance Robot, developed by researchers at Tohoku University in Japan, stands at 5ft 4in and has been designed with a woman's figure.

It may not be exactly light on its feet at almost 16st, but it can move in all directions on the three

wheels tucked under its eye-catching ballgown.

The robot has a sensor on the waist and as the partner moves, it analyses the steps and works out how to accompany them with its shoulder, elbows, waist and neck. While it can match the movements of a human's upper body, Dr Kazuhiro Kosuge, who led the development team, said it could not yet perform dance steps.

It is part of a programme to create robotic companions to help look after Japan's aging population. Dr Kazuhiro Kosuge said although the robot was a major development, the arrival of one capable of looking after someone was still some time away. www.expo2005.com



◀ Scientists bring heavy metal into ballroom dancing

Picture credit: BBC Strictly Dance Fever

Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

► **Bluetooth** A technology that allows devices to communicate wirelessly.

► **Firewall** A system that prevents unauthorised access to a computer over a network, such as the net.

► **Gb** A measurement of storage capacity – usually for hard disks.

► **Hard disk** A high-capacity disk drive fitted in almost all PCs and used to store applications and files.

► **Processor** The chip that is the 'brain' of the computer.

► **Stream** When data flows to your PC as needed.

► **USB** A standard that allows easy connection of peripherals to your PC.

For more on Jargon Buster visit: www.computeractive.co.uk



Get Some Answers!

Consumeractive sticks up for your rights.
If there's an issue you want investigated, get in touch



PROBLEM Notebook not making the grade

In May 2003 I bought a Hi-Grade notebook PC through the TV shopping channel QVC. The notebook came with a two-year warranty and I was told the battery should last around two hours before needing a recharge. I used it about twice a week, each time for less than two hours and always fully recharged it. After a few months the battery life started to shorten, the warning light would not come on, and after nine months of use, the computer would crash if the power cable came adrift. Now I can't use it unless it is connected to the mains.

A friend contacted Hi-Grade and was told the battery was only covered for six months. I contacted QVC for assistance, and it got onto Hi-Grade to try and resolve the problem. A man from Hi-Grade contacted me, but seemed to wash his hands of the whole thing and said I could buy another battery for over £100. Now the two-year warranty is finished.

AW Reeves, Reigate



While components do eventually wear out and batteries can be notoriously fickle this way, it

did appear that Mrs Reeves' notebook suffered from some kind of inherent fault. This could have been with the battery or the notebook itself. Reasonable wear and tear was unlikely as she told us she only used it a couple of times a week.

We contacted Hi-Grade. The Hi-Grade representative was concerned about two things in



PROBLEM Driven to distraction

I advertised and sold my son's Ford Fiesta on eBay. There didn't seem to be a problem at first as the person who won the auction emailed me to tell me he was collecting the car two days later.

He bought the car for £541 and said he would pay cash on collection. He didn't turn up so I contacted him. He said he could not get the cash until the next day and he would come for the car the day after that. But again he didn't turn up. Instead, he went and bid on a similar car, after winning my auction, which was cheaper at £410.

I filed an unpaid item dispute but the buyer only contacted me once and after a while, eBay closed the dispute saying the time had run out. I have been trying to reclaim my seller's fee and to have his horrible feedback removed for over five weeks now.

His bad feedback looks awful on my auction site and is totally unwarranted.

Steven T Craig, Stevenage

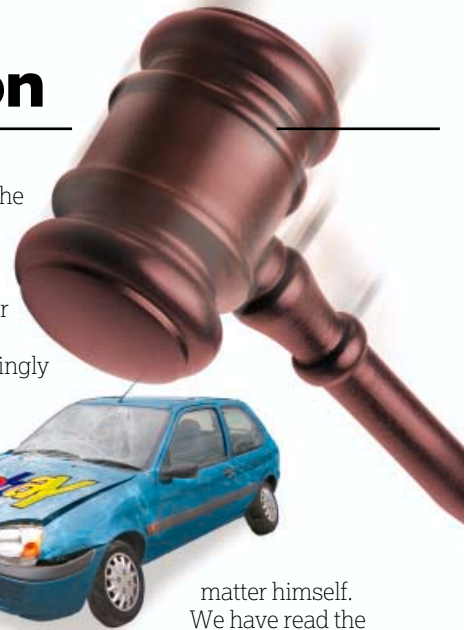


Mr Craig thought that he had followed eBay's dispute

resolution process to the letter so he was understandably annoyed that eBay had seemingly ignored his dispute.

The problem is that Mr Craig misinterpreted the terms and conditions of the process. He thought eBay was monitoring the process and while he saw that he could close the dispute, he was unwilling to do so because this would mean him giving up his rights. "I thought if I closed it I would end the dispute and the buyer would get away with it," Mr Craig told us.

But Mr Craig could have closed the dispute without penalty, especially as the buyer made it plain no payment was going to be made. So he was left out of pocket because he didn't deal with the



matter himself. We have read the instructions on the site and they are quite clear. Click on the link marked Transaction Problems at <http://pages.ebay.co.uk/help> for full details. We understand why Mr Craig was furious about the feedback the buyer left for him but generally this isn't covered by this dispute process. We have asked eBay to look into this particular case and will keep readers informed of developments. ■

Resolving a dispute on eBay

ALTHOUGH BUYERS AUTOMATICALLY enter into a legally binding contract to purchase the item from the seller if they win an online auction or use the Buy It Now feature, it is not uncommon for people to renege on this. This is where eBay's Unpaid Item policy kicks in. Sellers can report an unpaid item up to 45 days after the transaction date (the date when the buyer commits to buying

the item and the seller commits to selling it). Usually a seller must wait seven days after the auction closes to file a dispute. Once this is done, eBay sends the buyer an email notification and a pop-up message.

If the buyer responds and agrees to pay, the seller will receive a Final Value Fee credit and the buyer's eBay rating will not be affected. If the buyer refuses to pay, the seller

can close the dispute after eight days of lodging the complaint. The seller will then receive a Final Value Fee credit, but the buyer will receive an Unpaid Item strike. A dispute can only be open for 60 days after the transaction date. If the seller doesn't act during that time eBay will automatically close the dispute and the seller will not get a Final Value Fee credit. ■

particular; that Mrs Reeves had been told the battery only came with a six-month guarantee and the obvious technical problems. Hi-Grade said most of the components in its notebooks were covered for at least a year and, in many cases, two years and thought that there could be an inherent fault either with the battery or notebook.

Hi-Grade is looking into the matter and will get back to us about the steps it plans to take. ■

PROBLEM **Tiny is taking its time delivering**

I ordered a computer from Tiny in November last year, paying £1,500 cash, and was promised delivery in two to three weeks. In fact it took over eight weeks to arrive. I ordered a further two computers – a notebook and a desktop – from Tiny on 1 April this year.

I told them about my delivery problems the last time and was assured that it was a one-off, and that delivery would be two to four weeks. I have now waited 10 weeks, phoning Tiny virtually every other day and being given every excuse under the sun. Right now I am not sure if I even want the computers as they are probably obsolete by now.

Grant Robertson, Glasgow



Customer care appears to have been somewhat lacking here so we gave Tiny a call.

We were told that Mr Robertson's order had now been dispatched and the delay was because the finance he had arranged to buy the latest PCs had initially been granted and then put on hold for an unspecified reason. Tiny had to wait until the finance company gave the final go ahead

before starting to build the PCs he had ordered.

But it is not clear if Tiny informed Mr Robertson of these delays. He disputes this version of events, and he is annoyed that the original notebook he ordered has been replaced by another model, although Tiny did inform him of this. We have contacted Tiny about Mr Robertson's concern that the notebook is not the one he ordered.

We told Mr Robertson he can reject the order under the Distance Selling Regulations, but he is reluctant to have to wait for another Tiny order. Now this becomes one of those cases where only the two parties involved can decide on the best way to move forward. ■

PROBLEM **Download site taking more than its share**

I was looking for a music download site and after some searching found 360share. I signed up for the 49p per month deal, only to find when I checked my statement that they had taken £42.71 from my account.

I immediately contacted 360share through the instant messaging tech support and was asked to email my statement. After several attempts they said they did not receive it. I have been in touch through the messaging service three times and the last time was told to email the accounts department. I did this twice and have still not heard anything. What can I do to get my money back?

Arta Wright, Hale Barns



We are really concerned about the number of readers who are contacting us about these sites. We covered the case of Mrs Smith in issue

190 about a similar site, Ultimate Movie Downloads.

We did manage to get through to a US number given to Mrs Wright but were told they only acted as a call centre and couldn't give us the company's address. We have looked up 360share on the internet and feedback is bad. This company may well be bona fide but to our mind they are sailing close to the wind. It acts as a directory of file-sharing sites, which is not illegal, but people downloading any copyrighted material from them are running the risk of legal action from bodies such as the British Phonographic Industry and the Motion Picture Association.

Even the file-sharing community is concerned about these sites. No one should pay to be directed to sites that are free. The sites claim it is for support but as Mrs Wright and Mrs Smith will agree, the support is of no use if requests are routinely ignored. It also seems that people think they are paying for a month but are being billed for a year or more.

As most of these sites appear to be US based we have contacted the US Federal Trade Commission as well as the Office of Fair Trading.

We will be investigating this issue further but unless we can get hold of the companies, don't hold out much hope of redress. ■

10 Tips for Buying Safely

- 1 Keep copies of the original Computeractive advert and all further correspondence. If you speak on the phone, make a note of whom you spoke to.
- 2 On large orders, obtain a written quotation.
- 3 If possible, pay with a personal credit card – all transactions over £100 should be covered by the card company's insurance scheme.
- 4 Does the price quoted include everything discussed? Is VAT extra?
- 5 Check how the supplier will deliver, whether or not delivery times are guaranteed and whether there is a delivery charge.
- 6 Is free telephone technical support included in the price? Some suppliers offer support only on premium-rate numbers. Is it easy to get through? Try dialling the number to test it.
- 7 Is the warranty return-to-base or on-site? Return-to-base means you will have to pay to ship the product back to the supplier.
- 8 If you are paying extra for on-site support, does the manufacturer offer guaranteed response times? If you rely on your PC for your business, you will need it fixed, pronto.
- 9 Is the supplier reputable? Does it comply with BS5750 or ISO9001? If in doubt, ask to see customer testimonials.
- 10 When your PC arrives, check that all branded components are genuine.

Got a Gripe? Need some free advice?

CONTACT US VIA EMAIL:
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Please include both your phone number and address.
Unfortunately, we can't reply to all your letters.

Mail-Order Protection

Julie Pickess, our Customer Services Co-ordinator, is here to help you if things go wrong or if you have a complaint about advertisements that have appeared in Computeractive. Write to her directly with details of the complaint and she will contact you:

Julie Pickess, VNU House, 32-34 Broadwick Street, London, W1A 2HG or telephone 020 7316 9614.

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When you purchase goods as a private individual from an advertisement appearing in this magazine, you pay in advance of delivery. If that supplier then ceases to trade

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- 2) Followed all our guidelines when placing your order.
- 3) Retained the magazine's original advertisement, together with comprehensive proof of payment.
- 4) Submitted a detailed claim, in writing, to the magazine's customer services manager, not earlier than 28 days and not later than three months from the official on-sale date of the issue from which the goods were ordered.

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- 2) The Buyer's Charter only applies to goods advertised in this magazine. It does not cover goods depicted in classified advertisements, inserts, catalogues or any other sales material obtained from any relevant advertiser, or products that have not been advertised, even if they are

from the same supplier.

- 3) The Buyer's Charter will not safeguard any commercially orientated outlet regardless, neither will it cover goods purchased outside Great Britain or any goods that are obtained for resale.

Readers are reminded that the Mail-Order Protection Scheme was solely implemented to provide protection to the private individual when goods are ordered 'off the page' and paid for by post. It was not designed for, nor will it offer any protection, where goods are purchased via the internet. Full terms and conditions are available on request.

Weed out viruses

Cover story

Anti-virus software is essential for PC security but are you paying more than you need to? We give you the answers as we investigate anti-virus programs

All responsible PC users know the importance of having up-to-date anti-virus and security software installed on their PC. Without it you could lose data, risk having personal details snooped on and your computer could even be used by junk emailers to distribute spam. Just as the number of potential threats to PC security has increased, so too has the number of anti-virus software products on the market, making it harder than ever to choose the right solution.

For many people, the most straightforward way of tackling anti-virus protection is simply to carry on using whatever security software came with their PC when it was purchased and stump up for a subscription at the end of the trial period. This isn't necessarily the best solution, though. Certain anti-virus programs may not work with certain email programs, for instance, and may even slow down a PC. And with some internet service providers (**ISPs**) automatically scanning email for you as well as the availability of free software online, is it even worth paying for anti-virus software at all?

What it does

There's little doubt that anti-virus protection is an important part of staying safe online but what exactly does anti-virus software do, and how does it work? Essentially, an anti-virus program monitors a PC's activity for two things: actions and patterns that may denote the presence of a virus. The actions that it scans for are things such as unexpected changes to programs on the computer, changes to the contents of the **hard disk** or an unusually high number of emails being sent. These are all things that could indicate a virus at work. Patterns, on the other hand, could be contained in files that have been infected with a virus. It might be the message that a virus displays, or a piece of the virus' code. Each virus has one or more of these, and anti-virus tools detect them like fingerprints at the scene of a crime.

Spotting computer behaviour that indicates the presence of a virus is only possible once a computer is already infected. While this is better than nothing, it's far preferable to be able to intervene before things reach this stage. That means intercepting viruses before they install themselves on your computer. To do

that, you need to look for the tell-tale patterns, and since new viruses are being created all the time, anti-virus software needs to keep the patterns it recognises, called 'virus definitions', up to date.

This means downloading the latest virus definition updates from a database of updates maintained by the software developer. It's that service that you're ultimately paying for when you buy an anti-virus program: the updated files, and the work involved in creating and distributing them.

Choosing your approach

When it comes to actually spotting viruses, anti-virus programs employ several different methods and most





Illustration: Ian Naylor

software will give you the option of choosing what sort of scan to run. For example, since most viruses tend to arrive by email, scanning incoming emails is an important first line of defence, allowing a program to stop a virus before it even ends up in your mailbox.

You can also run a scan of the computer itself, checking every file on the hard disk. Generally, an anti-virus program will do this when it's installed and you can then schedule this to happen automatically at set intervals. As many thousands of files are stored on most PCs, though, this can be time-consuming, so many programs provide a range of 'smart' options that will scan higher risk files only, for example. If you've ever set an anti-virus program to scan an entire hard disk, and

then tried to carry on with work while it happens, you'll know how much the computer's performance is affected by the scan. A virus scan is certainly not something that should be running when you're trying to get on with something else. Some packages do offer a background scanning option, however, which takes longer but won't have such an impact on performance.

Another line of defence is 'on access' virus scanning, which simply checks each file as it's opened, to make sure that it's not infected – so if a file has found its way on to your computer somehow, it'll still be spotted when you try to access it.

Most of the time, all this happens without you realising it, but even if you don't see a serious



▲ The Free Edition of AVG does all that most home users will need – except for manually scheduled tasks
 ► AVG's Professional Edition allows reasonable control over what is scanned in the background

slowdown of your PC, there's still a penalty associated with keeping an eye on what's happening all the time, as our lab tests revealed. So, if you thought your PC was running slowly, the culprit could well be the anti-virus program that you're relying on for security.

Free protection

Buy a new PC these days and it will most likely come with anti-virus software installed, or ready to install, usually in the form of a trial for one of the big name products, such as Symantec's Norton Anti-Virus. The simplest option, and the one many PC users opt for, is to pay up to continue receiving protection at the end of the trial period.

But with free anti-virus software available online, do you really need to pay to get good anti-virus

protection? When it comes to good quality, free anti-virus software, one of the most well known is AVG Free Edition from Grisoft (you can download it from the Downloads section of the Computeractive website at www.computeractive.co.uk/downloads/1123822). Not only is it free for personal use, but it also stands up very well against the paid-for competition.

Among its most important features, AVG provides on-access scanning to make sure you don't accidentally open an infected file that's found its way on to the PC, scheduled scanning of the computer system (so you can arrange for a full scan to be done when you're away from the computer) and checking of incoming and outgoing emails. There's even a feature

that works with Windows Explorer and lets you right-click on a file and choose to scan it. And to make sure you don't forget to keep the software up to date, new virus definitions can be downloaded automatically, taking just a few seconds over a **broadband** internet connection. The program download is only 12Mb in size so it's worth it even if you use a **dial-up** connection.

The program itself is fairly compact, and won't use up too many of a PC's resources. Installation is very straightforward and the program will automatically configure itself to scan your emails

and download automatic updates to both the program and its virus definitions. You'll even be prompted to create a rescue disk to help restore the PC to working order if disaster strikes. Once installed the software can be kept up to date with little effort.

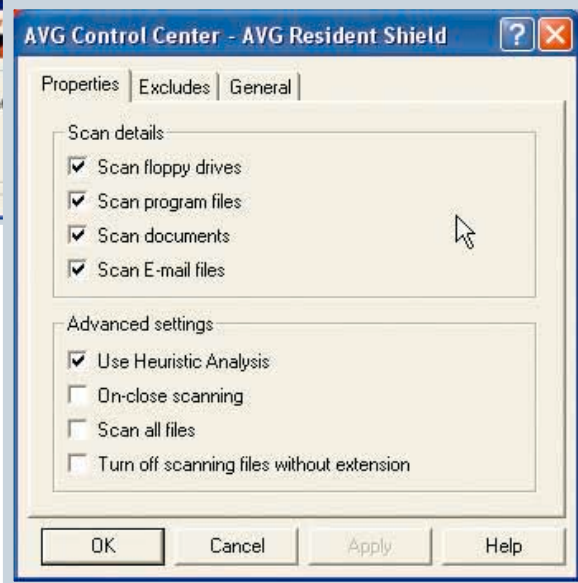
Counting the cost

If AVG offers such a good level of protection against viruses free of charge, why would you want to pay for anti-virus protection?

There are, as you might expect, some limitations to the free edition of AVG. The most significant for many people is that there's no formal technical support, though there is a website with frequently asked questions and a forum where you can discuss issues with other users. Another limitation is that you can't customise the scan scheduler with specific tasks, such as only scanning certain folders at a particular time, for instance. At £23 for a 24-month subscription, the paid-for version, AVG Professional, offers these features plus faster access to online updates and multiple language support – that's excellent value when compared with most commercial rivals. But if you're happy to live with its limitations, AVG Free Edition is a great choice for home users.

But what about people who've already got anti-virus software installed? Is it worth switching or should you stick with what you've got? And how much do you really gain by buying anti-virus protection?

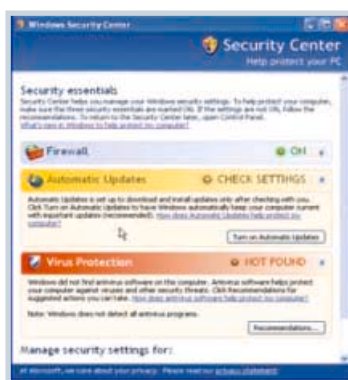
Broadly speaking, paid-for anti-virus protection breaks down into two main types these days. There's the straightforward anti-virus package that provides



Windows Security Center

AMONG THE MANY changes added to Windows XP with Service Pack 2 last year was the Security Center, which is listed with the other control panels in the Start menu. But what exactly does it offer in terms of protection from viruses?

In itself, the answer is not much. What it does do, however, is monitor your anti-virus software, checking that it's working and up to date, so you can see at a glance if you need to take any action, such as updating virus definitions – though it



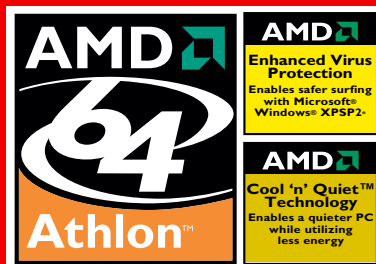
▲ Windows Security Center gives a security overview

sometimes fails to spot changes until after a reboot, especially if the anti-virus software is updating itself.

The other useful aspect of Security Center concerning viruses is that it provides links to Microsoft information about viruses, as well as other security updates. Essentially, though, it's simply an information resource – you still need

to use anti-virus software to make sure you're properly protected.

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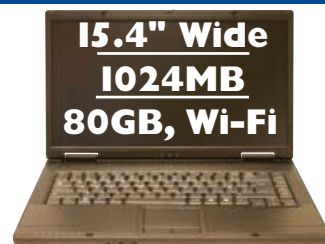
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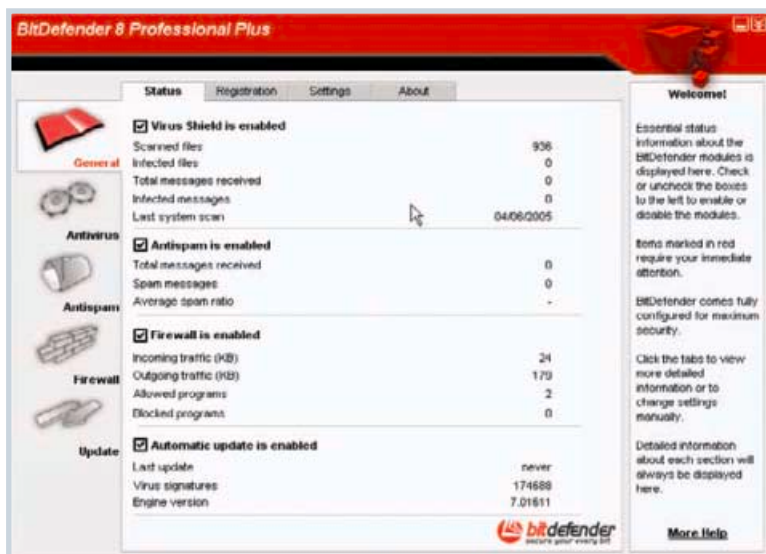
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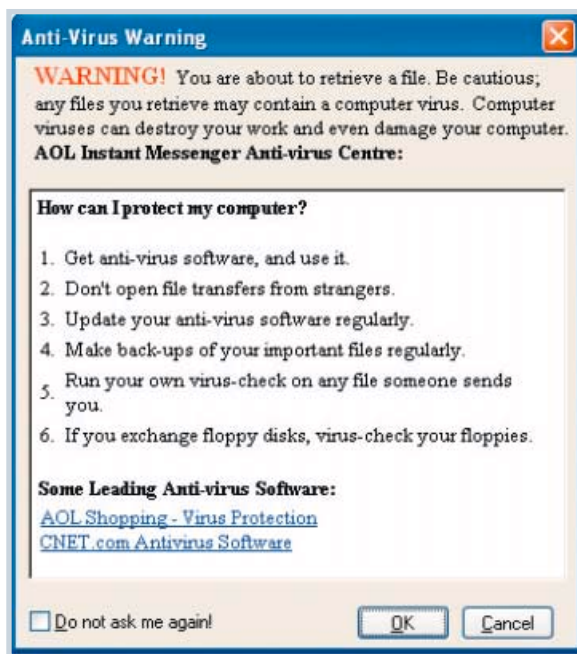




▲ Most packages have a similar interface, divided into sections with an overall on/off control

the sort of features we've already talked about and then there are more comprehensive internet security packages. These are often based on the same anti-virus program as the basic product but add other software designed to keep you safe online. A common extra is a firewall, which prevents unauthorised access to your computer and stops malicious programs like viruses or **spyware** from contacting other computers.

Other components of security packages typically include pop-up advert blocking, privacy controls and parental controls, allowing you to prevent your children from using certain programs or visiting certain websites. Although the focus of parental control software will usually be on child safety, these programs can help the fight against viruses by preventing children from using chatrooms, for example, or blocking the receipt of files through **instant messaging** applications.



▲ Be wary of viruses reaching your PC through an Instant Messaging application

It may seem obvious that you should never accept files from instant messaging users you don't know but it's often other users of your computer, such as children, who need to be educated to ensure the PC stays virus-free.

Helping hand

The most obvious addition that you get when paying for a product is technical support, both via email and telephone. Many products now offer live chat with a technical support adviser, usually via instant messaging. It's a good idea to check the small print first. In most cases, the technical support on offer is related strictly to questions about product use, like how to ensure the latest updates are applied, or how to change program settings. What it won't get you is access to someone who can

help if your PC is actually infected by a virus. If you find that the removal instructions on the software company's website aren't good enough to help out, some extra advice may be available but it usually comes at a price. Symantec's virus removal service, for example, which provides step-by-step assistance, costs €70, or around £47.

Technical support, then, is likely to be of limited use once the software is installed and working, although sometimes you may run into problems making things work – if you change to a different email program, for example. By and large anti-virus software tends to do its job quietly and you're more likely to need hand-holding using an internet security package, since configuring all the controls here can be quite tricky to get right. All the companies whose products we've looked at here have websites and email support, with Bitdefender, McAfee and Symantec also offering instant online support.

All the security companies provide regular updates to virus definitions but with even AVG's Free edition checking for updates every day it's hard to say how much of a benefit you really receive from using a paid-for anti-virus product.

When considering each anti-virus product, we looked at the cost of the full boxed product for each of the packages we tested – in some cases a downloadable version is

Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

- ▶ **Broadband** Refers to high-bandwidth internet connections, such as ADSL.
- ▶ **Dial-up** A component of Windows that allows PCs to connect to the internet using a modem and a telephone line.
- ▶ **Hard disk** A high-capacity disk drive used to store applications and files. Capacity is measured in gigabytes.
- ▶ **Instant messaging** Real-time text-based communication over the internet.
- ▶ **ISP** A company which provides you with an internet connection, either for a fixed monthly fee or for the cost of calls.
- ▶ **Mb** Megabyte. A measurement of storage capacity, usually for memory. 1Mb is equal to 1,024Kb (kilobytes).
- ▶ **Router** A device which is used to connect computers together or to the internet as an alternative to a modem.
- ▶ **Spyware** Software installed (usually surreptitiously) as part of another application installation specifically to monitor and report back on a computer's use.
- ▶ **ZIP files** Files that have been compressed using a program like WinZip to save disk space or to make them quicker to email.

For more on Jargon Buster visit:
www.computeractive.co.uk

PRICES

PRODUCT	PURCHASE COST	SUBSCRIPTION RENEWAL (1 YR)	COST OVER 2 YEARS
AVG Anti-Virus (Free Edition)	Free	n/a	Free
AVG Professional Edition	£23	n/a	£23
Bitdefender 8 Standard	£27	£13	£39*
McAfee Internet Suite 2005 v7	£50	£35	£85
McAfee Virus Scan 2005 v9	£35	£33	£68
Norton AntiVirus 2005	£40	£20	£60
Norton Internet Security Suite 2005	£55	£25	£80
Panda Titanium AV 2005	£30	£24	£54
Trend Internet Security Suite 2005	£40	£20	£60

*Bit Defender can be bought as a 2 year package at this reduced price

available for a few pounds less. All of the products come with a 12-month subscription for updates and technical support, after which you'll have to renew. But watch out if you're installing anti-virus packages that came with a computer, as often these versions have a shorter trial period, after which you may also have to upgrade to a newer version.

We also calculated the cost of the program over two years – that's the first year after you buy it and the updates for the subsequent year. In some cases you can buy longer subscriptions, but it's probably worth

looking around again after you've had a program for that long – there may have been Windows updates or other factors that mean a change could be called for. For pricing information, see the table on page 19.

package, it may be doing a lot more, depending on the settings you've chosen. For example, it could be intercepting every bit of internet traffic to check that your PC is not headed for an 'unsuitable' site, or it may be watching out for banned words in chats, and scanning web requests.

It's hardly surprising that all of this will have an effect on a computer's performance. We tested several of the leading anti-virus and internet security packages to see how well a PC performed without the software and then again with it. While we expected to see a slow-down, we weren't prepared for quite how significant it would be. In the overall scores, every piece of software we tested reduced system performance by at least 10 per cent, and in some cases by over 20 per cent (see the graph on the bottom of the page for more details).

When it comes to hard disk performance, things can be even worse – this is the area where anti-virus programs have to do the most work, checking files as they're opened, to ensure that they're not infected with a virus. While the best performers managed to reduce disk performance by only a few percent, the worst resulted in a hard disk performance more than 50 per cent slower than that of the same PC without

the anti-virus software running. Poor hard disk performance will affect just about every computer activity, particularly when it comes to opening files or browsing through files and folders with Windows Explorer.

Tweaks

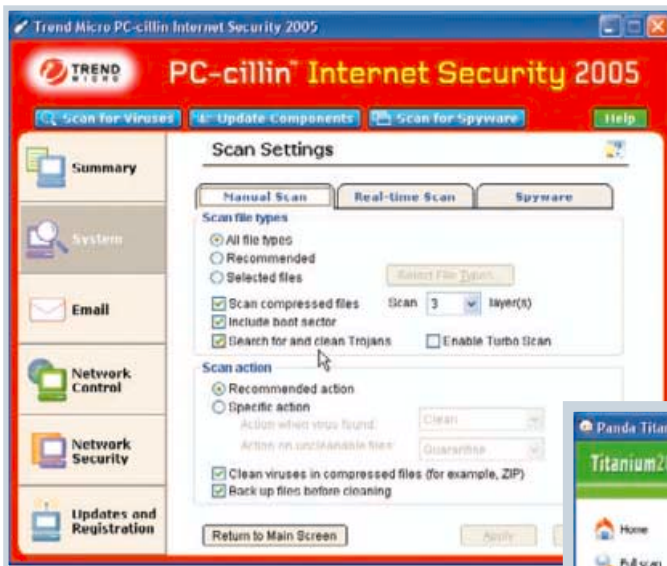
If you are worried about the impact that anti-virus software is having on your computer's performance, all is not lost. In most cases it's possible to change the software's settings to improve performance as long as you remember how the changes you make

might affect the security of the computer.

All the packages that we looked at had a broadly similar range of functions, including a control panel that allows you to configure scanning options and schedule tasks. But how much can you do with the control panels, and will it make any real difference?

First off, there's one area where you can make some difference, and that's by using the scheduling options to set the anti-virus program to scan the whole computer at a time when you won't be doing any work but when the computer is still switched on. Set a schedule for lunch hours or the end of the day or any time when you'll have other things to do that don't involve using the PC.

Another function performed by anti-virus programs that will have one of the biggest potential impacts on a computer is background virus scanning and on-access file scanning. Alter these options with caution, however. If, for example, you don't use internet chat sites, and tend only to browse a few trusted websites, then perhaps you don't need on-access scanning – simply scanning email, coupled with a scheduled scan of your computer



▲ Trend's PC-cillin Internet Security control panel can even be used to control other computers on a network with the same software

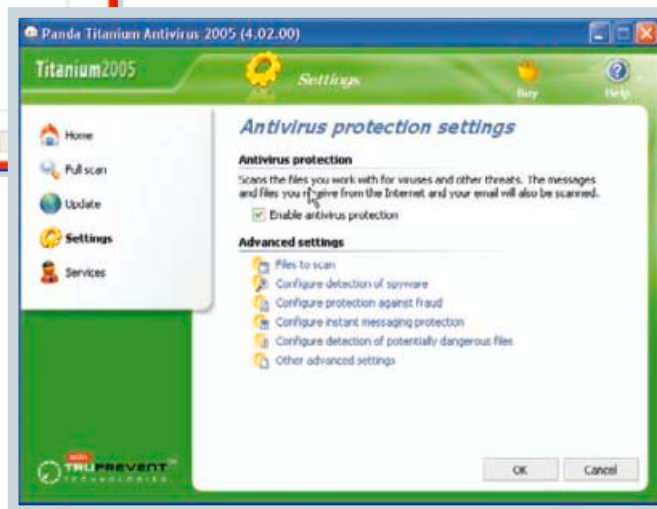
Performance hits

While there's little doubt that all the anti-virus programs we've looked at here are very effective and all the internet security packages offer broadly similar features, when it comes to

performance, our lab tests revealed a surprising difference in the impact that they can have on a computer system's activities.

We have had many complaints from readers about PC performance dropping after installing anti-virus or internet security software.

The reasons for it are quite straightforward. To provide adequate computer protection, the software has to work constantly in the background, checking every file that's accessed to make sure it's not infected, scanning each piece of email that's sent and received, and running a scheduler to retrieve new virus definitions or software updates, or scan the whole hard disk. If you're using an internet security



▲ Panda's configuration screens offers a versatile range of useful settings

NEGATIVE EFFECT ON PC PERFORMANCE CAUSED BY...

ANTI-VIRUS SUITES	HARD DISK	OVERALL
Panda Titanium AV 2005	33%	12%
Norton Anti-Virus 2005	36%	12%
AVG Anti-Virus Free Edition	37%	12%
Bitdefender 8 Standard	31%	18%
McAfee VirusScan 2005 v9	24%	21%
INTERNET SECURITY SUITES	HARD DISK	OVERALL
Norton Internet Security Suite 2005	36%	16%
Trend Internet Security Suite 12	57%	18%
McAfee Internet Suite 2005 v7	37%	21%

NOTE: Lower figures indicate better PC performance



▲ Some ISPs come with their own email screening and firewall protection, such as AOL's Safety and Security Centre

when you're not usually using it, may be enough to keep you safe and secure. But for a more prolific web surfer who regularly downloads files from the internet, turning off on-access scanning will increase the risk of infection. Turning off scheduled updates to anti-virus software may give a small performance boost, but in our opinion, it's not worth the potential risk if you forget to check for updates regularly yourself.

The most obvious way to help along the performance of a system struggling under the load of anti-virus software is by asking it to scan fewer files, and all the packages offer options allowing you to do this; you can choose to scan only some directories or drives on your system, or not to scan files with particular extensions. You can also choose whether or not to scan inside ZIP files, which normally contain several files and can be time-consuming to check for viruses. Unfortunately, though, it's becoming more common for viruses to arrive in **ZIP files**, too. Novice users should probably leave such settings alone.

Instead of tinkering with the controls within an anti-virus program, though, there are other steps you can take to limit the impact on system performance. As we've already said, internet security packages may include firewalls and parental control options. If you use a broadband **router**, it may include a firewall too, which means you can dispense with the one on the PC. And if your ISP offers parental controls, as AOL

you want to make sure it's used as little as possible. Adding memory is relatively cheap, and it's a cost-effective way of boosting system performance.

Best defence

There's no doubt that anti-virus software should be installed on every PC – without it you're easy prey for viruses and other net nasties. While internet security software suites may offer extra features and functions, however, in our view they also often have too much of a negative impact on PC performance. You can often duplicate at least some of the features using options from your ISP or broadband router.

From our tests, if you want reliable anti-virus software that doesn't affect PC performance too much and offers the best value for money, AVG is the best all-round choice. If you are unwilling to spend any money the Free Edition is a great option but the additional email support included with the Professional version makes the £23 you'll spend on a two-year subscription an amazingly good deal and much better value than the competition.

If you're already subscribing to another package, it's probably not worth making the switch

until the end of your subscription – but we recommend turning off non-essential elements to minimise the performance hit and possibly adding more memory to your PC.

Where do viruses come from?

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE to say exactly where viruses come from – some are created by spammers seeking to hijack your computer to send mail from; some come from those with a knowledge of computer code who just want to show off or wreak havoc. What's more important is how they end up on your PC.

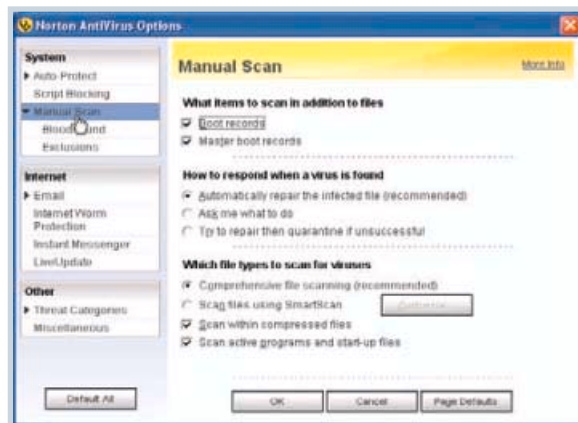
One of the main ways that a virus may reach your PC is via email, and most anti-virus software – and some ISPs – will scan all incoming and outgoing messages. But as an additional precaution, you should never open email attachments from strangers.

There are lots of other ways that viruses are distributed, including malicious downloads from websites and even instant messaging; it may be convenient to receive files during a chat, but you should always scan them before opening. A good on-access scanner should keep you safe, but accepting files from strangers is best avoided.

And, though they're much more rare than they used to be, remember that floppy disks can be infected, and starting your PC with a floppy in the drive can infect your system in seconds.



▲ McAfee VirusScan is available as a free trial to AOL subscribers



▲ Most programs allow you to choose how extensive you want the virus scan to be

Nigel Whitfield

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Our Star Ratings

With every review we do, we tell it like it is and give it Computeractive's authoritative star rating. Here's what those stars mean:

Excellent ★★★★★

Worth it ★★★★

OK by us ★★★

Poor ★★

Awful ★

HOME ENTERTAINMENT PC >> £699

Tiny Slimline Media Center

A Media Center PC designed for the living room and aimed at the budget-conscious buyer

The majority of the home-entertainment PCs we have looked at have hovered around the £1,000 mark, so Tiny's Slimline Media Center caught our eye with its budget price tag.

The PC looks reasonably good value on paper. It has an AMD Athlon 64 3500 processor and 512Mb of memory, and there are empty slots inside the case to boost this up to 1Gb. The 200Gb hard disk is adequate storage for recording TV programmes with the single analogue tuner, but you won't be able to watch a different channel when recording. There is a multi-format dual-layer DVD writer so TV programmes and other files can be saved to disc too.

The problems started in our labs tests. There is no separate graphics card so we weren't surprised that it struggled with 3D games, although turning down quality settings will improve performance. But the PC's general performance was low too, leading us to wonder if this home entertainment PC was little more than a glorified TV tuner and DVD player.



The Tiny Slimline is not as big as most Media Center PCs on the market, and it won't look out of place in the living room. The DVD is slot-loading,

meaning that it does not eject a tray to hold discs, adding to the sleek look. What a shame then that you have to plug in a rather large infrared receiver in order to use the supplied remote control. It has a decent length cable to help move it to a convenient position, but in style terms it's like hanging a big set of furry dice from the rear-view mirror of a Jaguar.

Putting the price of this computer into context, it should be said that no monitor is included and there is no DVI port for digital quality output to monitors and LCD or plasma TVs. The higher-end S-Video connection, while still analogue, gives some options over the basic Composite TV connection. One benefit of Composite, in fairness, is that it will connect to just

▲ If you just want a no-frills home entertainment PC to record some TV, then the budget Tiny Slimline will meet minimum requirements

about every standard TV. There are four USB 2 ports hidden under a flap at the front with another four and a FireWire socket at the rear. The wireless mouse and keyboard are cheap and cheerful but functional.

This PC will perform the most common tasks associated with home entertainment PCs today, such as recording TV programmes and managing digital media, but we think its low price belies a false economy. The lack of support for digital video output is particularly disappointing, and the upgrade options are limited to attaching external hard disks for more storage. However, if all you want is an average PC that can sit in your living room and record TV for viewing on a normal telly, then the Tiny Slimline will suit. But don't be disappointed if you later feel the PC is out of date before its time, because you can't slate a budget PC for providing a budget experience. Also, bear in mind that a Windows XP recovery disc is not supplied unless you pay £80 for a collect and return warranty.

Paul Allen

We say...

GOOD POINTS Cheap with good styling

BAD POINTS No integrated infrared receiver; no DVI output; few upgrade options; lacks dual TV tuning options

A reasonable budget attempt at a Media Center PC but those serious about home entertainment should aim higher than this

Overall ★★

Contact Tiny.com 0870 830 3156

Info www.tiny.com

Retail Price £699

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ALSO CONSIDER...

EVESHAM EBOX 2. £999. A stylish Windows Media Center PC that doesn't skimp on features. ★★★★★ Issue 191

MEDIA STREAMING DEVICE >> £200



Pinnacle ShowCenter 200

Want to play digital media, but don't want a PC in your lounge? This set-top box may be ideal

If 2004 was the year of the small form factor PC, 2005 looks like being the year of the media-streaming device. Pinnacle's new ShowCenter 200 is a set-top box that doesn't have a **hard disk** to store files, instead it receives digital video, audio, photos and internet radio across a wireless link from a PC in another part of the house.

The ShowCenter 200 has a power button on its front; all other controls are on the supplied remote control. Once set up to communicate with a PC, either wirelessly or through a cabled **network** connection, the main screen shows options for Music, Movies and Photos. Selecting these plays them through a TV and hi-fi, via an extensive set of connections on its back panel.

There are sockets for **SCART**, **S-Video**, **Composite video**, **SPDIF** and analogue audio. It supports most media file formats, including High Definition video and copy-protected music downloaded from Napster or iTunes. A **USB** port on the front panel also allows you to attach a digital camera, USB key or external hard disk.

You can also set the ShowCenter to monitor specific folders on your PC, which means any new media (such as recorded TV programmes) are immediately accessible.

Although it looks bland, there are some nice touches to the on-screen display, such as showing album art and track titles with any music you play. You can select from an extensive list of internet radio stations if you have a **broadband** internet connection. The ShowCenter 200 also has features such as time-shifting and live TV pausing, but only if the PC is equipped with a Pinnacle PCTV tuner card.

We had a slight problem when using the ShowCenter in conjunction with our wireless **router** but this was fixed quite quickly after consulting the manual.

This is a clever piece of kit but it would be good to be able to stream live TV with other makes of TV tuner card, and getting the ShowCenter

200 talking to a PC can be fiddly. Otherwise, it's a neat and practical device, albeit a little lacklustre in its on-screen appearance. Bear in mind, though, that your PC will need to be on for the ShowCenter to access any files and it's not a standalone product for viewing digital media in your living room.

Simon Williams

We say...

GOOD POINTS Supports most media formats; USB port; lots of connection options

BAD POINTS Needs extra hardware for specific features; more expensive than its rivals; bland menu system

A wireless route to viewing digital media in the living room but quite pricey

Overall ★★

Contact Pinnacle 01895 442003
Info www.pinnaclesys.com
Retail Price £200
Buy www.computeractive.co.uk/activeprices

ALSO CONSIDER...

BUFFALO LINKTHEATER. £200. Similar media-streaming device but with a DVD player built in. ★★ *Issue 191*

HANDHELD COMPUTER >> £169

PalmOne Tungsten E2

Slim and easy to use: perfect for the casual user

While most of the PalmOne Tungsten range is aimed at business users, the new Tungsten E2 offers lots for the casual user too. It is cheaper than PalmOne's Zire 72, and includes nearly all its features, except for the camera and extended battery life.

The Tungsten E2 is slim for a handheld computer and comes with a flip over cover, which protects it when in a pocket. There are four shortcut buttons along the bottom to launch the diary, contacts, to-do list and notepad applications.

It's powered by Intel's 200MHz XScale **processor** and runs Palm's Garnet **operating system**. The 320 x 320 colour screen is very impressive – even small fonts are easy to read at arms length. The backlight is fantastic and is very bright.

The bottom third of the screen is taken up by the 'Graffiti' area for written text input. It's reasonably intuitive, although Pocket PC devices can recognise normal handwriting rather than PalmOne's Graffiti symbols. However, the E2 can also accept Graffiti when it's written on the main part of the screen. When doing this, the path of the stylus is highlighted, which makes it easier for learning how the input system works. An on-screen keyboard is also at hand if the Graffiti proves too fiddly.

The interface is hard to fault as it's simple without being limiting. The E2 is supplied with a copy of Documents to Go that can read and edit Word, Excel and PowerPoint documents. It's also possible to play **MP3s** using RealPlayer but as



there's only 26Mb of storage memory, you'll need to use a **memory card** to store more music on.

Synchronisation with a computer is very simple, just plug in the **USB** cable and press a button to start the process.

The Tungsten E2 is supplied with the PalmOne Desktop software and will share information with Microsoft Outlook.

Bluetooth is built in, which enables the Tungsten E2 to connect to the internet via a mobile phone or synchronise with a computer without a cable. PalmOne claims it will run for eight days before needing a recharge,

although this figure will be reduced if you play lots of music.

Tim Smith

We say...

GOOD POINTS Slim design; good screen; reasonably priced; good battery life

BAD POINTS No cradle supplied; needs an extra memory card to play music

An excellent handheld PC but some aspects are dated when compared with others

Overall ★★

Contact PalmOne, no UK number
Info www.palmone.com/uk
Retail Price £169
Buy www.palmone.com/uk

ALSO CONSIDER...

FUJITSU SIEMENS POCKET LOOX 720. £376. Based on Pocket PC and includes a camera but much pricier. ★★ *Issue 184*

Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

▶ **Bluetooth** A technology that allows devices to communicate with each other wirelessly.

▶ **Broadband** Refers to high-bandwidth internet connections, such as ADSL.

▶ **Composite video** A type of video signal used by some camcorders and TVs in which the red, green and blue signals are mixed.

▶ **Dual-layer** A DVD that holds twice as much data as a normal DVD by adding an extra layer.

▶ **DVI** A purely digital video connection used on some TFT monitors and graphics cards.

▶ **FireWire** A super-fast data link between your PC and devices such as digital camcorders.

▶ **FTP** File Transfer Protocol: a way of transferring files over the internet, particularly when maintaining websites.

▶ **Gb** A measurement of storage capacity – usually for hard disks.

▶ **GHz** A thousand megahertz – a measure of PC processor speed.

▶ **Hard disk** A high-capacity disk drive fitted in almost all PCs and used to store applications and files.

▶ **Instant messaging** Real-time text-based communication over the internet.

▶ **Mb** A measurement of storage capacity, usually for memory.

▶ **Megapixel** A measure of the level of detail recorded by digital cameras.

▶ **Memory card** Small cards that can store many megabytes (Mb) of computer data or documents.

▶ **MHz** Megahertz. A measure of PC processor speed.

▶ **MP3** A standard for compressing digital audio. Sound quality is close to that of CD audio.

▶ **Network** A way of connecting several devices so that they can share data.

...Continues on page 26

For more on Jargon Buster visit:
www.computeractive.co.uk

NOTEBOOK COMPUTER » £2,548

Dell Inspiron XPS Generation 2

A powerful notebook designed for games enthusiasts

Dell's Inspiron XPS Generation 2 is quite an aggressive-looking notebook, in keeping with its emphasis on gaming. The two lights at the front of the case stare out like a pair of headlights on a car about to rev up, and the general design is sturdy and uncompromising. This is clearly a computer designed with a purpose, and that purpose is playing games.

With a 2.13 **GHz** Pentium M **processor** and 1 **Gb** of memory, the Inspiron XPS Generation 2 is at the top end of what is available in a notebook computer at the moment. The inclusion of an nVidia GeForce 6800 Go graphics card reinforces this, being the most powerful graphics option available for a notebook.

It scored extremely well in our graphics tests, which look at 3D performance – again, ideal for playing the latest games – and did reasonably well in the general testing. Because it uses a Pentium M processor, it's fast but does not get too hot, as Pentium 4-based notebooks tend to. It's a very heavy notebook, coming in at 4kg, even with an eye to function rather than form, it isn't an ugly computer. Even though the XPS Generation 2 is a Centrino-based notebook, it's heavy power consumption means battery life wasn't great – just under two hours before needing a recharge.

The colours of the two front lights – as well as the ones on each side, and the two 'XPS'-shaped lights on the back of the screen – can be changed using a supplied utility, and they can be switched off altogether if you find them distracting. You can even customise the back of the screen by slotting in a piece of paper or card, one of which is supplied, but this is a bit of a gimmick. Although it has quite a large case, the keyboard only takes up a small part of the notebook's body – it could have done with being a



◀ Game for anything: the Inspiron XPS is the perfect notebook for playing anywhere

bit bigger. However, Dell has made use of the large case to offer a selection of ports – two **USB 2** ports on one side, along with a recordable DVD drive that supports all formats apart from DVD-RAM, an SD **memory card** slot, headphone and microphone sockets, a mini-**FireWire** port and a **PC card** slot. On the back there are four more USB 2 ports, network, modem, **S-Video** out, power, and both **DVI** and **VGA** ports. The 17in widescreen display is good quality too. The computer comes with Windows XP Home and a three-year warranty.

The only real sticking point is the price – our review model came in at a little over £2,500, around double what you would expect to pay for an equivalent desktop computer. Because Dell build their PCs to order, however, you can reduce the cost by downgrading some of the options.

Anthony Dhanendran

We say...

GOOD POINTS Superb games performance; sturdy build

BAD POINTS Customisable case is a little silly; general performance was reasonable but unspectacular

Among the best notebooks available for serious gaming but with power comes a price

Overall ★★ ★

Contact Dell 0870 907 5818

Info www.dell.com/uk

Retail Price £2,548

Buy www.dell.com/uk

ALSO CONSIDER...

ROCK QUADDRA 64. £1,410. Not as powerful as the Dell, but a lot cheaper. ★★ ★★ Issue 186

Belkin Wireless Pre-N Router

Give your wireless network a boost with this super fast router

The 'Pre-N' of this router refers to the next-generation of wireless products, which will be based on a technology known as 802.11n. 802.11 is the radio standard behind Wi-Fi and the figures that follow it ('n' in this case) denote its speed and features. The official 802.11n standard is still being finalised, but Belkin is one of several companies releasing products with some features from the proposed standard.

The main 'Pre-N' feature that Belkin has included is known as MIMO (multiple input/multiple output). This simply means that the **router** has multiple aerials that allow it to provide a wider area of coverage than ordinary wireless routers. It's also better at beaming wireless signals past obstructions such as partition walls. We've had trouble setting up a wireless network in the past, but using a Pre-N router gave us a more stable signal so our PC didn't keep



▲ Improved speed and signal strength

losing its wireless internet connection.

Belkin's Pre-N Wireless Router also offers better data transfer speeds – up to six times faster than 802.11g wireless products. Few home users have internet connections that run that fast, though, so the increased speed won't be noticed until

broadband connections get faster. Even so, the improved signal coverage alone is enough to keep us happy.

Ideally, each computer on your **network** will also be equipped with a matching 'Pre-N' wireless adapter. However, this isn't absolutely necessary and we found that the

Wireless Pre-N Router still provided a stronger signal even though our PC was using an older 802.11b wireless adapter. Of course, if you do want a Pre-N wireless adapter for your PC, Belkin has one of those too, costing about £58.

Pre-N routers are more expensive than existing wireless products, but if you want to set up a wireless network where existing wireless products don't provide adequate coverage, it's well worth it.

Cliff Joseph

We say...

GOOD POINTS Greater area of coverage and more stability of signal than existing wireless products

BAD POINTS More expensive than existing wireless products

It's not vital for everyone, but useful for home or offices that need improved wireless coverage

Overall ★★★★★

Contact Belkin Limited 01933 352000

Info www.belkin.com/uk

Retail Price £95

Buy www.computeractive.co.uk/activeprices

ALSO CONSIDER...

OZENDA 11G WIRELESS ROUTER. £71.

Not as fast but cheap, simple to set up and great in practice. ★★★★★ Issue 171

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ONE MEMORY.



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Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

Continued from page 24...

- Operating system** A crucial piece of software that governs the way hardware and software work together. Microsoft Windows is the most common operating system.
- PC card** A credit card-size device for adding anything from a modem to a hard drive to a notebook PC.
- PictBridge** Technology that allows digital cameras to print directly to a printer, without the need for a computer.
- Processor** The chip that is the 'brain' of the computer. The faster the processor, the better a computer will perform.
- Router** A device which is used to connect computers together or to the internet as an alternative to a modem.
- Server** A computer on a network (such as the internet) that stores shared information.
- S-Video** A higher-quality video connection that carries brightness and colour information separately.
- SCART** A standardised 21-pin connector used in Europe for two-way traffic of video and audio signals.
- SPDIF** Sony/Philips Digital InterFace. A standard for transferring digital audio information between devices.
- USB** Universal Serial Bus. A standard which allows quick and easy connection of external peripherals to your PC.
- USB 2** Faster but backwardly-compatible successor to USB that's used by such things as MP3 players.
- VGA** Video Graphics Array. A very basic standard for graphics output.
- Wi-Fi** A catchier name for the 802.11b or 802.11g standards used for wireless networking devices.
- WMA** Windows Media Audio. A compressed digital music format developed by Microsoft and played back through Windows Media Player.

For more on Jargon Buster visit:
www.computeractive.co.uk

PHOTO PRINTER >> £200

Canon Selphy CP600

Print high-quality, low-cost digital photos on the move, without a PC

Over the last year we've seen all the major home printing manufacturers produce their own compact 6 x 4 in photo printer. Canon offers the widest range of photo printers, which are priced from £119 to £200. The Selphy CP600 is at the top end of the price bracket and replaces the older CP330. The major upgrade here is the onboard 'DIGIC II' processor, which allows digital cameras to talk to the printer faster, thus enabling quicker printing.

The Selphy CP600 is a dye-sublimation printer, which means it uses a special film rather

than ink to put colour onto paper. The good thing about dye-sublimation printing is that photos dry instantly. They're also more resistant to weathering and colour fading, something that cannot always be said of ink-based printers.

It also comes with a rechargeable battery pack that allows you to easily take it on the move and print independently of a plug socket. This is a great idea and good for those who don't have much memory capacity in their digital cameras – just print the pictures you want and format your memory card. It's about the size of a tupperware sandwich box, making it truly portable.

Compared to other photo printers we've seen (Epson Picturemate, HP Photosmart 375, Lexmark P315, Dell Photo Printer 540 and Sony DPP-FP30), we think the Canon produces the best prints in terms of image quality. Colours strike the right balance, skin tones are very accurate and black areas are deep in tone, rather than looking grey. There is no 'speckling,' as seen with inkjet models, and the glossy finish gives your photos a professional edge.



▲ If your digital camera has PictBridge, this is a fast, easy way to get great prints

It's also extremely easy to print pictures. Either connect your PictBridge-enabled camera and press print, or attach the CP600 to a computer via USB2 (cable not included) and use the supplied printing software. There's also an infrared port for printing from mobile phones with cameras.

It takes 90 seconds to print a photo, which is average for a printer of this type but nowhere near the one-minute speeds achieved by the Dell Photo Printer 540 (issue 182).

However, its price per print is excellent – just 23p if you buy a cartridge and glossy paper triple pack.

The downsides are no inputs for memory cards, which isn't much of a problem if your digital camera is PictBridge-compatible, and a high initial cost of £200, which is among the most expensive we've seen. The bundled PC software also tries to be a bit too clever by guessing what orientation your photos should be printed at. You can change this manually but you can't mix and match – all prints have to be in the same orientation to print correctly.

Nevertheless, when you consider how economical it is to run, the quality of the prints and the portability aspect, we think it's the best product in its category.

Luke Peters

We say...

GOOD POINTS Excellent printing quality; portable; cheapest cost per print we've seen

BAD POINTS Average printing speed; printing software slightly overlooked; no memory card reader

High initial outlay but very economical printing with good features and quality

Overall ★★★★★

Contact Canon 01737 220000

Info www.canon.co.uk

Retail Price £200

Buy www.computeractive.co.uk/activeprices

ALSO CONSIDER...

SONY DIGITAL PHOTO PRINTER DPP-FP30. £150. Cheaper to buy but more costly to run. Print quality is excellent. ★★★★★ Issue 186

SECURITY SOFTWARE >> £50 PER YEAR OR £5 PER MONTH

NetIntelligence

Keeps tabs on how your PC is being used and even record instant messenger conversations

Netintelligence enables one person to monitor, record and analyse how other people have been using a PC or other computers attached to it by a **network**.

One of the main attractions of is that it is a web-based service, which means the information can be accessed from any computer connected to the internet with a username and password.

Parents that work in offices during the day may find this useful if teenagers are home alone during the holidays.

The 2Mb download takes just a few minutes, even on a dial-up connection. The program then searches the PC for recognised Windows XP user accounts so it can record who is responsible for PC activity. A guide to setting up accounts is included.

Once installed, boundaries for each user can

be set and access to certain types of websites blocked, such as those containing references to sexual content or drugs. Internet access can also be forbidden at certain times of the day and the administrator can create a list of banned websites. Conversely, a list of suitable sites can also be created for each user.

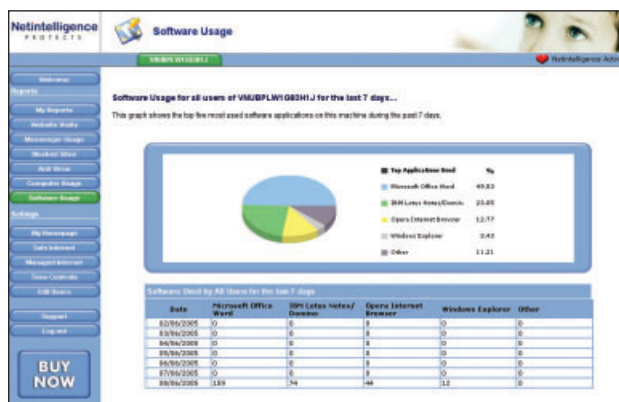
The strength of this product is its

recording feature, which provides reports for each user, showing where they have visited and how long they have spent using specific applications, although it groups lesser-known applications under the unhelpful category of 'other'. It also keeps a record of what has been typed in **instant messaging** applications, such as AOL Instant Messenger and MSN

Messenger. But it is possible to grant users some privacy by adding approved chat friends to a list so the administrator can't view their conversations.

NetIntelligence is powerful and easy to use but as with all control tools, restrictions should be discussed. A free trial is available and the full subscription package includes Kaspersky Anti-Virus Personal.

Paul Allen



▲ A simple but effective way to keep an eye on internet usage in your household

We say...

GOOD POINTS Comprehensive controls; easy to use; can monitor home use from any web-connected PC

BAD POINTS A little pricey; erratic support for Opera and Firefox; fails to log the identity of every PC application

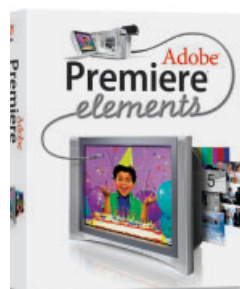
A powerful package that can be used from any PC with an internet connection

Overall ★★★★★

Contact NetIntelligence, 0870 050 0121
Info www.netintelligence.com
Retail Price £50 per year or £5 per month
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ALSO CONSIDER...
CYBERPATROL. £22. Good controls, but no remote access. *Issue 161*

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Hot New Products▶

DIGITAL CAMERA » £150



Fujifilm FinePix A345

A no-frills 4-megapixel camera with a zoom lens

Fujifilm's FinePix A345 doesn't feel like a particularly serious camera. It's light, and the plastic case makes it feel cheap. But don't let that put you off – once you switch it on and start snapping, it quickly becomes apparent that this camera is excellent value.

It's a 4-megapixel camera, and despite the lens being fairly small physically, the pictures it produces are very impressive. The lens is a 3x optical zoom model, and there is a 1.7in LCD screen, which is more than adequate.

The camera takes xD memory cards and is supplied with a 16Mb card. This is only enough for around eight pictures at the highest quality setting, so it's definitely worth investing in a larger card (see our feature on page 60). It takes two AA batteries, which can be annoying because it's not possible to just plug the camera into a charger. On the other hand, if they run out, it's easy to just slip in another pair of batteries and carry on shooting.

Image quality is very good, with above par colour response and detail levels. The FinePix A345 is, for the most part, easy to use – shooting and zooming are simple, for example – but the on-screen menus can be a little hard to navigate, so finding and changing the settings can be a bit fiddly.

Anthony Dhanendran

We say...

A very cheap and very good camera, but you will need to buy more memory

Overall ★★★★★

Contact Fujifilm 020 7586 1477

Info www.fujifilm.co.uk

Buy www.computeractive.co.uk/activeprices

WEBCAM » £80

Creative Live! Ultra

A webcam that can double as a security camera for your house

There are many uses to which you could put a webcam. In addition to using it for video-calling people over the internet, it could be put to good use as a security camera, for example.

One householder recently helped the police capture a burglar who stole his computer, because the attached webcam was watching and recording the whole thing. (Although the thief took the PC, the camera was saving images on the internet, so they were all there for the police to see.)

The Live! Ultra webcam includes just such a feature – the software enables you to set up time-delayed capture, and specify an **FTP server** to which to send the pictures. Of course, you need to have an FTP server set up, but your internet service provider may be able to do that for you. If not, images can simply be saved to the hard disk.

Picture quality is very good, and the camera comes with face-tracking software, which will attempt to zoom



We say...

It's a little pricey but quality is good and there are some useful features

Overall ★★★★★

Contact Creative 0800 376 7954

Info <http://uk.europe.creative.com/>

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in on your face as you move around during a conversation. It is also supplied with motion-detection software, so it will only record when it sees movement, which is obviously useful for a security camera.

Unfortunately, this didn't work very well – it often only picks up on movement when the object in question is half-way across the screen, which isn't a lot of use.

The camera itself is a small and neat device, with a built-in stand that will allow it to sit on top of a screen or just on a flat surface.

Anthony Dhanendran

PERIPHERAL » £30

Trust 200-V2 Wireless Tablet

The mouse is the standard way of moving the cursor on a PC, but a graphics tablet is an alternative, either for artistic work or to ease wrist strain. The Trust 200-V2 offers the best of both worlds as it supports both a mouse and stylus.

Installation is easy and there's just one **USB** cable to plug in. The setup utility allows you to set the buttons on the pen and mouse and change more advanced features.

The pen is comfortable to hold and responds to either pressing the tip on the pad or the two buttons located under the thumb. The right-click button needs a firm push, which can be enough to move the pen and can cause accuracy problems. The mouse does not have a scroll



wheel, although it is possible to keep an ordinary mouse connected at the same time. A basic art program is also included, on which to try the pen out.

Tim Smith

We say...

A good alternative to a mouse but buttons are not reliable enough for constant use

Overall ★★★★★

Contact Trust 0845 60900 36

Info www.trust.com

Buy www.trust.com

SCANNER » £160

IrisPen Translator Executive



The IrisPen Translator is a small, handheld scanner that can scan lines of text in printed documents. It connects to a PC via a **USB** port, and inserts the scanned text into a word-processing or email program, so it can be sent to friends or colleagues.

This version of the IrisPen adds a translation facility. Text scanned in one language can be translated – in a fairly literal fashion – into another. The pen can recognise English, French, German, Spanish, Russian and Portuguese. However, it can only work with two languages at a time, so if you want to switch from, say, English/German translation to English/French you'll need to reinstall the supplied language software.

This Executive model is aimed at business users, and has

the ability to scan barcodes and read handwritten numbers. There's an 'Express' model that lacks these last two features and costs £125.

Cliff Joseph

We say...

It works well but this is a lot to pay for a text scanner

Overall ★★★★★

Contact Widget UK 0870 755 3302

Info www.irislink.com

Buy www.widget.co.uk

DIGITAL MEDIA PLAYER >> £100

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Philips ShoqBox PSS110

This little box will have you dancing in the street

Now that so many computer users have large collections of music in **MP3** form, the variety of devices with which you can use them has also grown.

One recent gadget to catch our eye is the Philips ShoqBox: a portable speaker system that can be connected to a portable music player, such as an iPod, but which also has internal memory to store MP3 and **WMA** files.

The ShoqBox comes with **256Mb** of storage, which is enough for about four hours of near-CD quality audio. After transferring music from your computer to the device using a **USB2** connection, you can browse your tracks by artist, album or genre. As well as using the built-in radio, you can also set the player's alarm to wake you up with some of the music you've put on the ShoqBox.



Sound quality is very good for speakers of this size and we found no distortion, even when the bass boost option was switched on. Battery life stretched to about seven hours of continuous MP3 playback in our tests and recharging the integrated battery from a mains socket took just about an hour.

The Philips ShoqBox may be more expensive than speaker-only systems, but its support for MP3

We say...

Great sound and fantastic audio options for the music lover on the move

Overall ★★★★★

Contact Philips 0870 900 9070

Info www.philips.co.uk

Buy www.computeractive.co.uk/activeprices

and WMA files, FM radio and external audio sources via a line-in socket makes it a very versatile choice for the coming holiday season and beyond.

Luke Peters

REMOVABLE STORAGE >> £49

NEC ND-3540A DVD writer

If you plan to save a lot of media, such as photos



and video, to DVD, a dual-layer recordable DVD drive is definitely worth the investment. The ND-3540A from NEC is the company's fastest ever, and can read and write to all major disc formats except DVD-ROM. It's easy to install and is available in silver, black and grey.

It may look like a standard DVD drive, but its speed is impressive. In our tests it copied a disc full of data to a dual-layer DVD-R at 4x speed in just over 27 minutes. CD performance is also good, burning CD-Rs at 48x and CD-RWs at 32x. It can fit up to **8.5Gb** of storage on to a single DVD, which works out at roughly 2,000 music files, for example. It automatically recognises which media you've inserted and selects the correct recording speed for it.

Its most likeable feature, though, is its price tag. Available from £49 (or around £35 without software included), this drive is attractive both in terms of its performance and price.

Anna Lagerkvist

We say...

Easy to install and affordable if you're looking to upgrade your storage facilities

Overall ★★★★★

Contact NEC 020 8752 3665

Info www.nec.co.uk

Buy www.computeractive.co.uk/activeprices

REMOVABLE STORAGE >> £60

Sony Micro Vault USM-F

Keeping files stored on a **USB** key secure has become an important issue now that so many of us these days use such devices instead of floppy disks and CDs.

Sony's answer is a USB drive with a built-in fingerprint reader; this secures any files put onto the drive and also acts as a fingerprint reader for the PC. You can, of course, opt not to install the software, in which case the drive will be recognised as normal by Windows XP (or a Mac) and can be used as an ordinary **256Mb** USB drive.

Once the fingerprint software is installed, it's fairly impressive. Once fingerprints are stored, it is simple to encrypt and decrypt files. You can also use it to log in to the computer or a website if the drive is plugged in – if the drive is unplugged, it will revert to using typed passwords. You can also save Internet Explorer favourites to the drive, and fingerprint-protect them. It's more expensive than a standard **256Mb** drive, but the extra features certainly add value.

Anthony Dhanendran

We say...

An interesting and useful twist on the standard USB pen drive

Overall ★★★★★

Contact Sony 01932 816000

Info www.sony.net/Products/Media/Microvault

Buy www.computeractive.co.uk/activeprices



PERIPHERAL >> £75



Selwyn Digimemo

Save handwritten notes on your computer

Unlike the Logitech and Nokia products we have looked at, the Digimemo uses a combination of pad and pen to record your notes digitally.

It is about the size of an A4 sheet of paper but is not very heavy, and it provides a firm writing surface. A pad of paper is included and there's a clip to attach more paper. The pen is comfortable to hold and is supplied with two ink refills. On the left-hand side of the Digimemo is a small screen that shows the current page number and warns if memory or battery power is getting low. The built-in memory should hold about 66 pages.

There are a couple of drawbacks using the Digimemo. The first is that the pen is easy to lose when it is in the holder on the bottom of the unit. As the pen is essential, a more secure form of storage would be good.

Software is supplied for creating e-books but there is no handwriting-recognition software included as standard. It is available as an extra for £40, but that brings the price close to that of the Logitech io Pen that will also send notes to Outlook automatically.

Tim Smith

We say...

A cheap digital writing product but let down by a lack of handwriting-recognition software

Overall ★★★

Contact Selwyn 01732 765100

Info www.selwyn.co.uk

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Axis 64 Dominator

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To catch a spy

Malicious software can make using your PC a pain and can even steal passwords and sensitive information. Fight back with our guide to combating spyware

There have been many high-profile news stories about computer **viruses** in the last few years and all responsible computer users will be aware that they need some sort of anti-virus software on their PCs to ward off the worst of these threats. Unfortunately, though, a new security threat has arisen over the past couple of years and grown so rapidly that it's now just as much of a concern as viruses to PC users.

We're talking about spyware, sometimes also known as malware, which is short for 'malicious software'. This is software that can install itself on your computer, or even trick you into installing it yourself by offering free goodies such as music or video downloads. Once installed, however, this software can turn into a serious threat. At its mildest it may swamp your computer screen with a barrage of unwanted adverts. At its worst it has the potential to steal important personal information such as the details of your credit card or online bank account. In this feature we will show you the measures you can take to prevent these irritating spies from disrupting your PC.

Know your enemy

Spyware is a general term that is often used to refer to a number of different types of nuisance software. The first one we'll look at here is known as adware. This is software that installs itself on a computer and then bombards the user indiscriminately with adverts. Most adware attaches itself to a **web browser** such as Microsoft's Internet Explorer, so adverts tend to appear while you're using the browser to access the internet.

However, some adware software runs in the background all the time an infected PC is switched on and may bombard you with ads even when the PC isn't connected to the web. Sometimes so many ads will pop up on the screen that they can prevent you from doing much else with the computer besides closing these ads down, which is obviously a real problem.

There's also a particular type of adware that 'hijacks' a web browser's home page, so that the browser displays a particular web page every time you launch the browser software, usually the web page of whichever company developed the adware. This will then bombard you with more ads. Sites that offer free

Illustration: David Whittle



▲ Ad-Aware quarantines suspect files so they can't be activated

software or pornography are common sources of adware, which may be hidden in the program that first caught your attention. If you notice your web browser's home page or toolbar has been changed in some way shortly after downloading a piece of software or if browsing the web becomes slower, it could well be a telltale sign that adware has been

Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

- ➔ **Broadband** Refers to high-bandwidth internet connections, such as ADSL.
- ➔ **Dial-up** A component of Windows that allows PCs to connect to the internet using a modem and a telephone line.
- ➔ **Shareware** Programs that you can try out free before deciding whether to buy them or not.
- ➔ **Registry** A database integrated into Windows which stores information on all hardware and software installed on a PC.
- ➔ **Taskbar** The bar that runs along the bottom of the screen in Windows from version 95 onwards.
- ➔ **Virus** A malicious program designed to cause at best annoyance and at worst, damage to computer data.
- ➔ **Web browser** An application, such as Internet Explorer, that lets you view pages on the internet.
- ➔ **Webmail** Internet-based email services that store your messages on their servers.

For more on Jargon Buster visit:
www.computeractive.co.uk



▲ Many big ISPs, such as AOL, provide their customers with anti-spyware tools as part of their service

Take a look at your ISP's website to see what help is available. Some of the bigger ISPs provide their own anti-spyware software free of charge – anti-spyware tools are included in the AOL Safety and Security Centre software package, for example.

I spy

It is important to make the distinction between adware and actual spyware, which we'll come on to now. Like adware, it's likely that you'll download spyware unintentionally, perhaps when using file-sharing services or downloading free software that often actually claims to protect a computer from viruses or block pop-up ads.

As the name implies, though, spyware will actually spy on your computer usage to gather information that can be sent to whoever created the software. Some spyware programs are more of a nuisance than a real threat. They may spy on you as you browse the web to see what sort of websites you're interested in, and use this information to target you with a few ads.

Accusations have been levelled at Google's Gmail **webmail** service about the way it monitors users' emails to target them with advertising. When you send emails via Gmail, you'll sometimes find small ads placed to one side of the main message. What has happened here is that the Gmail computers have read your messages and inserted what they consider to be 'relevant' advertising. A user sending digital photos to friends may, for example, find they are receiving ads for online photo-printing services. But, to be fair to Google, it is providing the Gmail service

for free, and it does tell people about its use of targeted advertising. It's up to you to decide whether you're prepared to tolerate this form of advertising in return for a useful and free email service. Provided you are made aware of this before you download software, you can make your own decisions about what you are prepared to put up with.

Some spyware programs, though, are more sinister in their activity. There's a particular type of spyware known as a 'keylogger' that can record every single key that is pressed on a computer keyboard and the order in which they are pressed. If you use an online banking service these keylogger programs could potentially be used to record your account number and password to gain access to your bank account.

That may sound a bit far-fetched but these programs are out there and, while they are thankfully still rare enough to pose a very remote risk to the majority of PC users, the threat should nonetheless be taken seriously.

Persistent pests

There's one particularly persistent type of spyware that is more common, however, and can be really hard to get rid of. Any software that is installed on your PC, whether spyware or something useful, adds information to the Windows **Registry**. The Registry contains information about all the software installed on your PC. Each time a PC is turned on it checks the Registry and uses that information to set itself up properly. If a spyware program has been added to the Registry the PC will automatically run the spyware software each time the PC is turned on.

Ordinarily, when a program is uninstalled, its entry is also removed from the Registry. However, some spyware programs cleverly install a secondary program that can monitor the Registry. If the main spyware program is uninstalled along with its entry in the Registry, that secondary program will detect this and reinstall the spyware again. The secondary program is also listed in the Registry, so a more thorough clean-out of this file can eliminate this problem as well.

Very experienced PC users may want to delve directly into the Registry themselves but this is very tricky and we don't recommend it for most.

Fortunately, there are a number of easier options. The simplest option for those using Windows XP is to use its System Restore function (listed under Help and Support in the Windows Start Menu). The System Restore command allows you to make a record of important settings on a PC, including the contents of the Registry, and save them in case anything ever goes wrong with the PC. So if you suspect spyware or adware has been installed on your PC you can use System Restore to quickly revert to an earlier version of the Registry and remove all the new software. Both Ad-Aware and Spybot create System Restore points automatically.

If you don't have Windows XP you can still use programs such as Spybot to try and clear out both the spyware and its associated secondary program. There



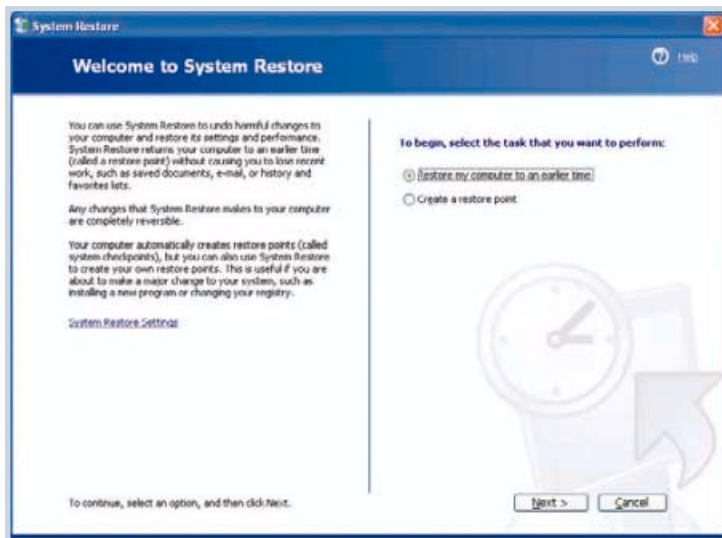
Hanging on the phone

There's a particularly unpleasant type of malware known as a dialler. If you're using a **dial-up** internet connection rather than a **broadband** connection, these programs can take over your PC and alter its internet settings without your knowledge. Instead of dialling the number of your normal internet service provider, the dialler will connect to the internet via a premium rate telephone line, which means you get landed with a huge phone bill.

There is an organisation called ICSTIS (Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services)

that acts as a watchdog over these sorts of telephone scams. Unfortunately, it can take months to investigate complaints about dialler programs, and even then you may not get your money back, even though this scam really is no better than outright theft.

The best way of dealing with diallers is to strike first. If you're using a dial-up internet service, should contact your telephone company and instruct it to block access to premium rate numbers. Microsoft's AntiSpyware program is also useful, as it warns if a dialler is about to try and install itself onto your PC.



▲ Use System Restore to create a safety net if you're planning on changing entries in the Registry

are also specialised programs, such as Registry Mechanic (www.pctools.com), that are designed to scan your Registry and detect potential problems. They can also help you to save a backup copy of the Registry. In the event of an emergency you can use the backup Registry to replace the current Registry.

As always, though, prevention is the best cure, so it's also worth looking at ways of preventing this software from getting onto your PC in the first place.

Update and protect

Our first piece of advice is to use the Windows Update feature built into Microsoft Windows to download all of Microsoft's recent security updates. Windows XP users will find a little Automatic Updates icon in the **Taskbar**, down in the lower right-hand side of the screen. Click on this to download all the latest updates automatically. Users of older versions of Windows should take a look at www.windowsupdate.microsoft.com for information on keeping PC security up to date. This website also includes general information on protecting your PC that will be useful to all PC users.

Anyone running Windows XP on their PC should also download Windows XP Service Pack 2 (or SP2 as it's also known). This adds a long overdue pop-up blocker feature to the Internet Explorer web browser, which detects adverts as they start to appear on screen and stops them in their tracks. If you're not using Windows XP there are alternative pop-up blockers that you can download for free, such as PopUp Stopper (www.computeractive.co.uk/downloads/1139480), which is available on the Computeractive website. If a pop-up window does appear, never click on it. To close it safely, hold down the Alt key and press F4.

Aside from Ad-Aware and SpyBot, which we mentioned earlier, there are other programs that can be used to fight back against spyware. Microsoft is currently testing Windows AntiSpyware, which is already free to download and try out from www.microsoft.com/athome/security. For more information on downloading and using this program, see our Workshop on the subject in issue 191.

All the anti-spyware tools that we've looked at so far are free but most of the companies that sell commercial anti-virus software have also added anti-spyware products to their range. Symantec sells the Norton Internet Security suite (£55 from www.symantec.com/uk), which combines anti-virus protection with spyware detection, and McAfee sells a dedicated anti-

spyware program – McAfee Anti-Spyware – for £25 (uk.mcafee.com). Our main piece of advice would be to make sure that you don't just rely on one single program to protect your PC.

There may be spyware programs that are missed by one program but will be picked up by another, so it's worth having at least two anti-spyware programs on your PC to make sure that you're safe.

Fight back

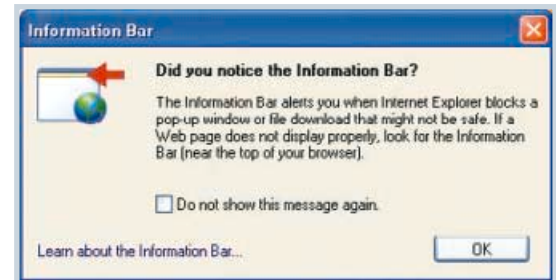
At best, spyware and adware pose a threat to your privacy and at worst to the safety of your personal or financial data. The chances of your PC becoming infected with spyware capable of capturing online bank account details or passwords and that information being used successfully to drain your account are slim.

Nonetheless, spyware poses a threat that most of us would rather live without and adware can cause enough of an irritation to hamper your use of the home PC.

Thankfully, though, there is a good range of tools available – many for free – that can scan for malware and remove it from your PC. Our first advice would be to download Ad-Aware, SpyBot or Microsoft AntiSpyware to help clear out the worst offenders. Secondly, make sure your PC is up to date with all the latest Microsoft security updates and get into the habit of scanning for spyware once or twice a week, depending on your internet usage. You could also try using a non-Microsoft browser such as Opera or Firefox. These aren't immune from spyware but most malware exploits flaws in Internet Explorer.

Like any other security threat, it's best to take spyware seriously but there's no reason to panic: with the information contained in this feature under your belt, you should be able to protect yourself effectively.

Cliff Joseph



▲ The Windows XP Service Pack 2 update adds a long-overdue 'pop-up blocker' to Internet Explorer



▲ Another long-awaited development from Microsoft is the Windows AntiSpyware program, currently free to try

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AMD and Microsoft strongly recommend that users continue to use third party anti-virus software as part of their security strategy.



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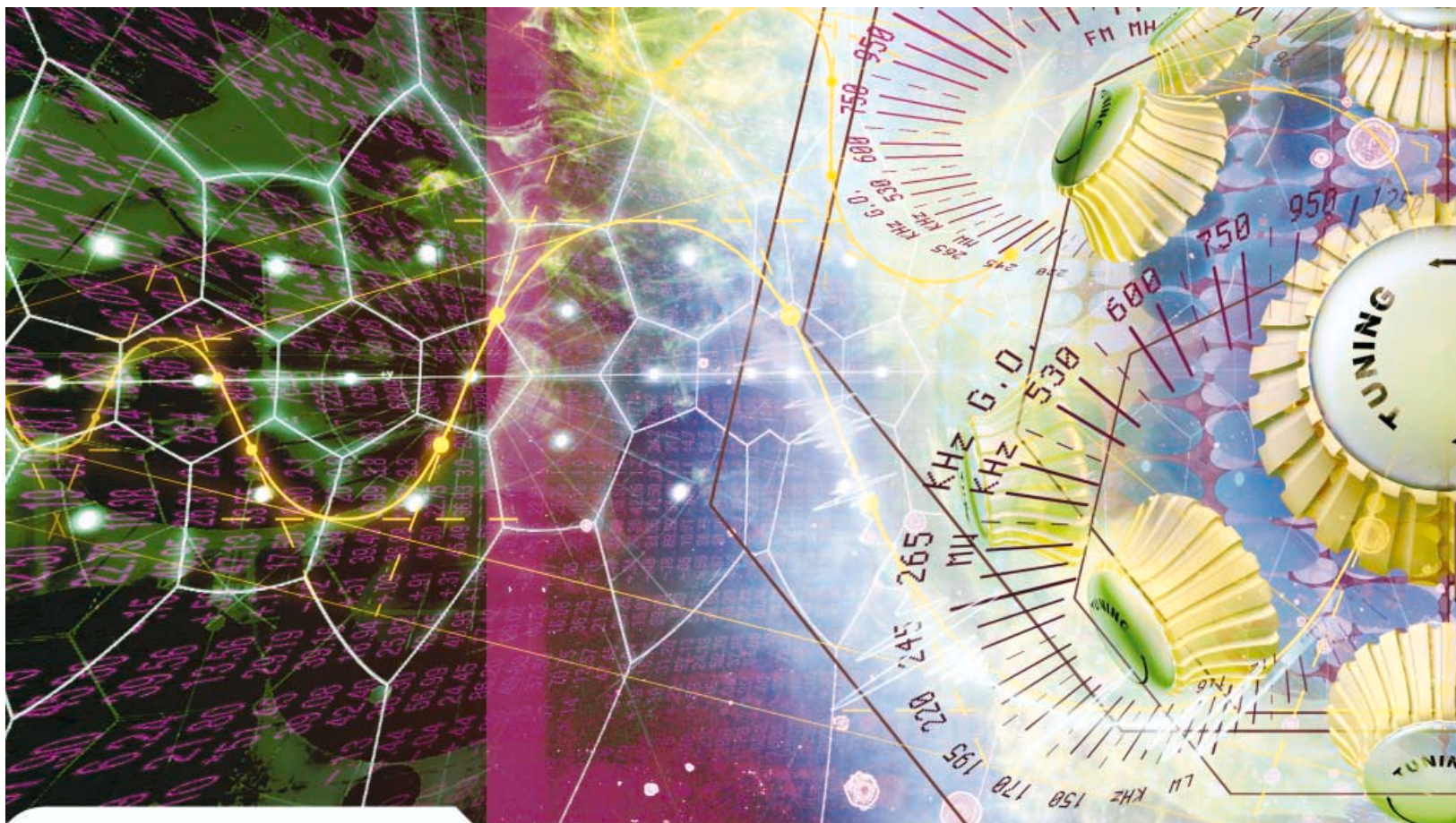
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Go with **the flow**

Sick of waiting for media content to download over a supposedly speedy connection? We show you how to enjoy the internet's best radio programmes without having to wait

Downloading services put a wealth of entertainment at your fingertips but they don't give you instant gratification. Lengthy download times, particularly for dial-up users, can leave you drumming your fingers rather than enjoying the beat. Waiting for the odd track to download isn't much of a bother but hanging on while whole albums and lengthy video clips make the long journey from the internet to your computer becomes tiresome, especially if you have invested in a **broadband** connection specifically to benefit from its speed.

There is an alternative to downloading that enables you to watch or listen to a wide range of entertainment and information on demand, particularly radio. It's called media streaming and in this feature we're going to explain how it works, what you need and where to go online to find free content.

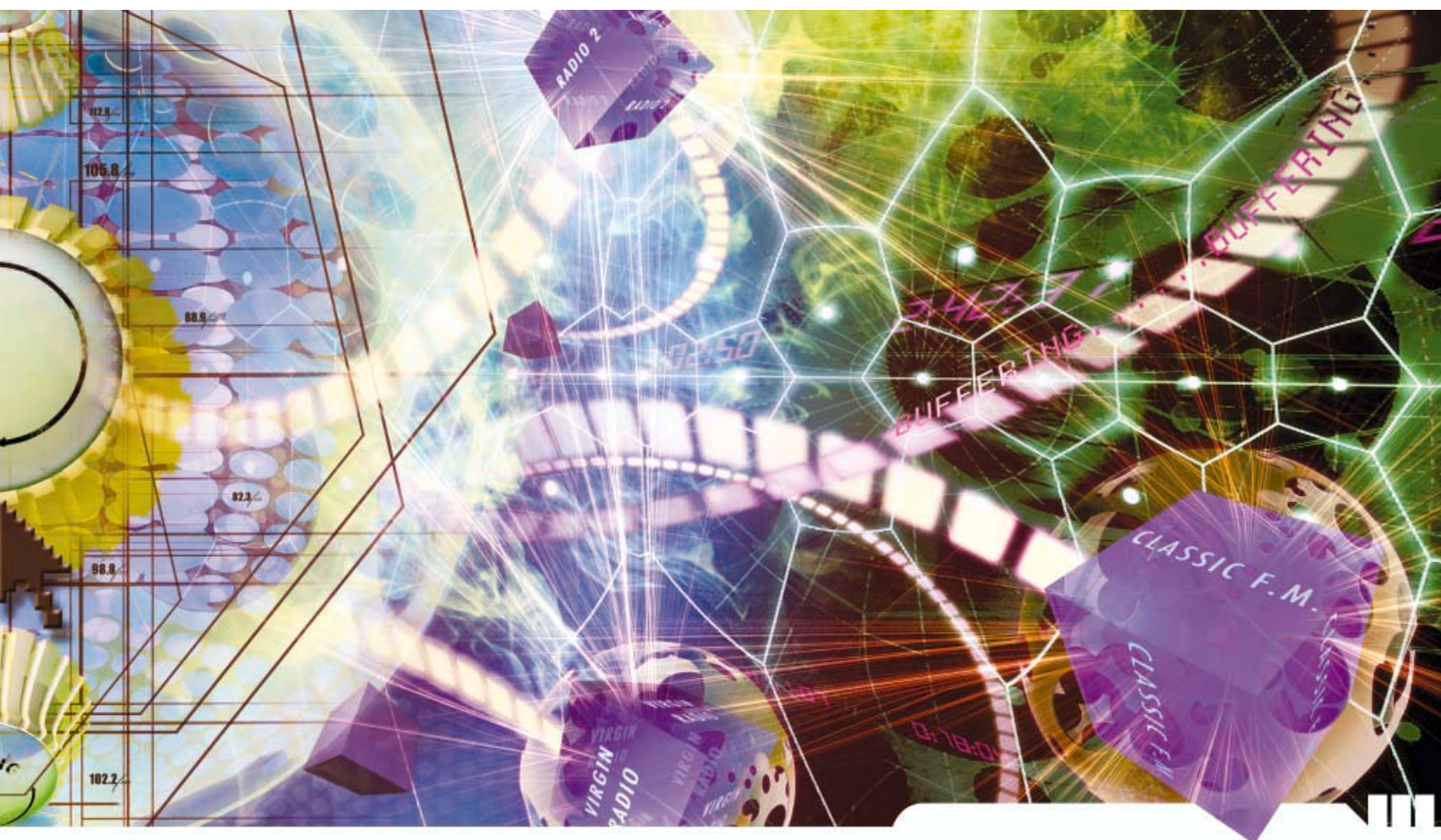
Streaming, as the name suggests, means that songs, video clips and broadcasts of all kinds – which we'll refer to simply as 'content' – flow to your computer through the internet connection. What sets it apart from ordinary downloading is the fact that your computer can begin to play content before all the data has arrived.

Tapping into the stream

Streaming works like this: first you select the transmission you want to listen to by choosing it from a media player or contacting a website directly (more on how to do this shortly). The website then begins to send the data to your computer in exactly the same way as it would with a normal download. The speed at which the data arrives depends on the speed of your internet connection.

Once the data arrives, the computer begins to collect it in a special part of its memory, called the buffer. Once it has saved a small amount of the total amount of data, the computer starts sending a stream of it to the application you use to watch or listen to content, such as Windows Media Player. At the same time, it continues to collect data from the website service, adding it to the buffer until it is needed by the media player. DAB digital radio works along the same lines, and that's why if you play the same station on digital and analogue radios, the digital broadcast will be a few seconds behind.

The computer buffer is used for many purposes where immediacy is a concern. Many applications, such as word processors, save data to the buffer because it is much quicker than writing to the **hard**



disk. The speeds we're talking about here are relative of course, and the difference between saving to the hard disk or buffer is actually quite small, but enough to notice if you're listening to a live broadcast.

What you need

Another advantage of streaming services is that you don't need to splash out on any software. All you need is a media player and the necessary hardware. Most PCs include the hardware required to play sound as standard but if you want the best quality you could upgrade your computer by plugging an external sound card such as the Philips PSC805 into a spare **USB** socket (see www.computeractive.co.uk/products/hardware/1152751). Trust.com offers a cheaper option (www.trust.com/products/product.aspx?artnr=14134) at about £30.

You also need an internet connection and while it's possible to receive streaming content over a **dial-up** link, as with an increasing number of attractions in

the online world, broadband is best. Radio stations will sound fine over a connection speed of **256Kbit/s** and upwards.

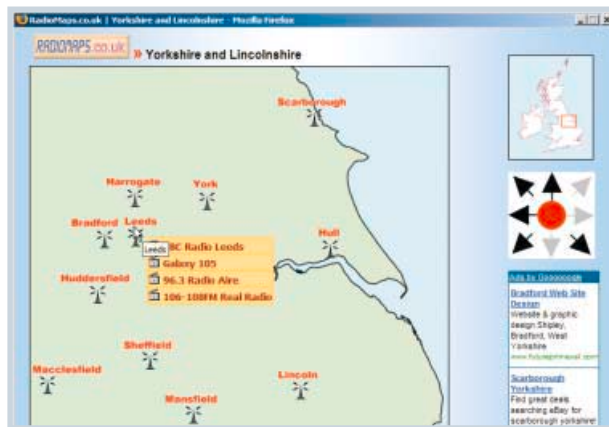
Now all you need is a media player application and you can download these free of charge. Most computers already have Windows Media Player installed, but you can get the latest version from www.windowsmedia.com/download. Rival players that can handle streaming include Quicktime (www.apple.com/quicktime/download), iTunes (www.apple.com/itunes), RealOne Player (www.realnetworks.com/products/media_players).

What's on in your area?

RADIOFEEDS CONTAINS A

link to a friendly little service called RadioMaps (www.radiomaps.co.uk).

Once launched, the site displays a list of regions and when you click on your chosen area, a map of the area is displayed with radio mast icons. Hold your mouse over each mast and a list of the available local services. You can use the arrows on the right hand side of the screen to move around the country. Remember that the magic of the internet means you don't have to be in the area to receive the



broadcast, so if you're far from home you can stay in touch with your favourite local station.

▲ RadioMaps allows you to locate digital radio feeds based on any geographic location in the UK



▲ Winamp gives you access to a wide variety of free digital radio stations

Feature **Streaming radio**



▲ The BBC gives you digital access to its full spectrum of radio channels

html) and Winamp (www.winamp.com). Some stations are designed to be listened to in one type of player only, while others can be opened in the media player of your choice. When you choose a source of content it will attempt to open its preferred player on your PC. If it is not present, it may suggest a site where you can download the player it wants or give you the choice of attempting to open the stream in another player. If you download a player and find that it sets itself as the default player for all content on your PC, it's easy to reset this. Choose Control Panel from the Start menu and double-click on Add or Remove Programs, then Set Program Access and Defaults from the panel on the left to choose your favourite player.

What we like about Winamp is that while other players are edging towards paid-for content, this service remains free. RealOne offers access to BBC stations, but you can access these directly from the BBC at www.bbc.co.uk/radio. RealOne also offers a free 14-day trial of its premium service, which offers access to more than 2,000 radio stations worldwide with superior quality audio, all for £8.50 per month. In Windows Media Player you have to register with a credit or debit card and pay 1p for each track you listen to as it streams. In fairness, the quality of content on the premium services is better and both services offer good value but Winamp offers

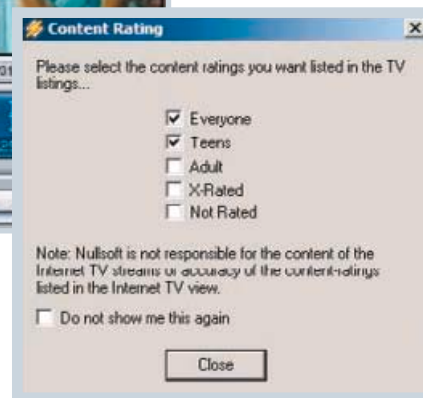
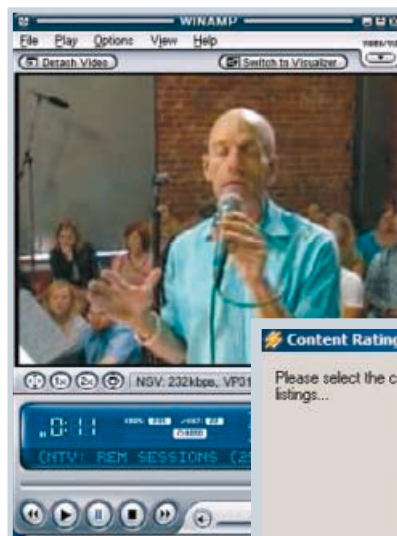
hundreds of completely free radio stations, making it a good way to sample streaming.

Winamp

Once you have downloaded the player, you are presented with the option to choose between two 'skins' – basically these are different displays, with one designed for fast computers and larger screens and the other best suited to slower PCs. When the player is launched, you will see three windows: the Winamp window, which displays information about the content being streamed; a Playlist Editor, which allows you to store favourite radio stations and tracks you have ripped from your own CDs; and a Media Library.

This is where you will find all the free content available. Click on the Internet Radio label in the panel on the left-hand side under Streaming Media and Winamp will load all the free stations currently available. Click on the labels at the top of the window marked Name or Genre to sort stations alphabetically by name or by the style of content they offer. When we looked there was something for everyone, from classical music to heavy metal, from electronic dance music to sport, current affairs and jazz. You simply highlight the station you want to listen to and click on the Play button at the bottom of the Media Library window. Much of the content comes from abroad and it's a good place to find niche content, such as folk, gospel, country and western and dedicated content from specific areas of the world, such as Korean and Chinese stations.

◀ Watch video through Winamp but beware of the content ratings



Winamp has its share of video – but we need to issue a warning. While there are plenty of news and music videos, there is also some adult content. The good news is that when you select Internet TV from the menu in Winamp (it's just beneath the link for Inter Radio) the programme asks you what kind of content you want

to display. Uncheck the Adult, X-Rated and Not Rated boxes to omit pornographic content.

So far so good: a wealth of free information at your fingertips and no frustrating wait. Well, that's not the whole story. Streaming does have its weaknesses, chief among them the fact that stations aren't always available. Websites that provide such services have a limited amount of **bandwidth** and this means that only a certain number of people can access the service simultaneously. Once the limit is reached, the door remains closed to other users until someone stops listening to that stream and frees up some space in the radio service provider's internet pipe.

Another problem, especially with free services, is that quality of broadcast varies like the weather. This is partly because users have little or, more often, no control over sound quality. This is measured by **bitrate** – the amount of and speed at which data is sent to the

Streaming at home

THE SAME TECHNOLOGY that enables you to watch or listen to streamed content from the internet is available to distribute music and video around your house. Wireless networks based on **Wi-Fi** can transmit music and video files from your computer's hard disk to receivers that you attach to hi-fi equipment or a television in other

parts of the house. Hauppauge's MediaMVP (www.webactivemagazine.co.uk/products/hardware/1153769) costs just under £100 and can handle sound and pictures, while Apple's Airport (www.webactivemagazine.co.uk/products/hardware/1160342) will stream music around your home for the same price.

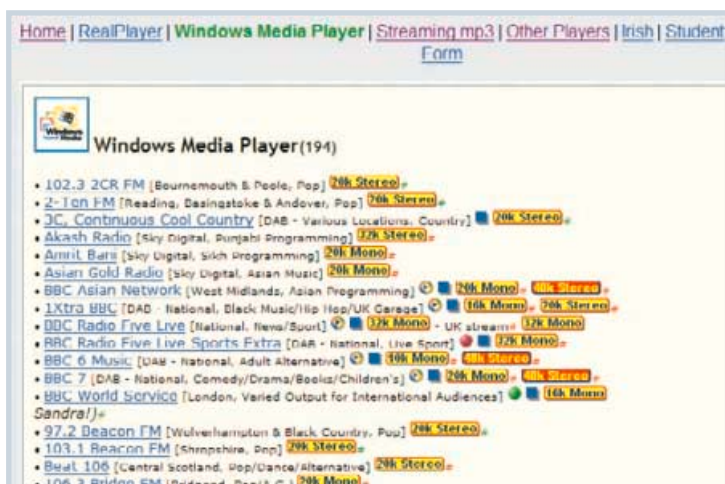
receiving computer. Having a very fast broadband connection, such as 1Mbit/s, makes no difference. If the flow of data from the source website is slow, because of problems on the server or when the site is close to its maximum number of users, the flow of data (the bit rate) slows or become erratic and the presentation of the data on the recipient PC is not smooth.

Radio stars

At the moment the best free streamed content available is undoubtedly radio. As well as the services available through players such as Winamp, the web throbs to the beat of completely free music, news and sport and the best place to head to is a radio portal. These websites group together links to available radio stations, making it easy to pick and choose. We're going to take a closer look at one radio portal to give an example of the diversity of content on offer.

Radiofeeds (www.radiofeeds.co.uk) provides links to stations broadcasting from the UK only, and helpfully groups stations according to which player they are designed for. It also includes news of the latest radio stations to distribute their content online.

Once the site has loaded, click on the Individual Player Pages link from the Quick Jump menu on the left-hand side of the page. The page will then display a choice of four types of player (you will have to scroll down the page a little to see them): Windows Media Player, RealPlayer, Streaming MP3 (suitable for Winamp) and other players such as QuickTime. Another useful feature is that Radiofeeds will display



▲ Radiofeeds contains links to radio stations across the UK grouped into the player they are designed for

a choice of bit rates and options for stereo or mono for stations where this is available, which is particularly handy for those using dial-up. Our advice would be to choose the rate closest to the speed of your internet connection and mono only for news programmes and sporting commentaries. Music is best heard in stereo. Also available are links that provide SureStream, an update for RealPlayer that supports the AAC audio format that gives better quality and can switch automatically to a lower bit rate when problems arise on the internet connection between your PC and the station in question.

Radio is also a fertile ground for drama and again the BBC leads the way. As well as catching up on events through live broadcasts, the BBC provides recordings of shows you may have missed or simply want to enjoy again. It's not currently possible to download the programmes because the BBC believes



▲ Windows Media Player provides access to streaming music for 1p per track

that many, such as the current performances of the final books in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* collection, would soon find their way onto illegal file-sharing sites if provided as free downloads. Streaming gives media companies the opportunity to give fans of the series a chance to listen when it suits them.

What people really want is to choose when and where it suits them to listen, and the BBC is now podcasting more content. Podcasting simply means providing material for portable music players free of charge. A 'podding' application notifies users whenever a programme they have signed up for is updated. The name comes from the hobby that turned into a bit of a craze for people to record their own radio 'programmes', featuring chat, humour, current events and music, and placing them on websites so that iPod owners could listen to them at leisure. Look out for a Computeractive feature on podcasting in the summer. The BBC trial of podcasting is not limited to iPods, and it is hoped that many programmes could be made available in a time-limited format, giving honest web users a way to enjoy content at their convenience without risking copyright abuse. For the best streaming and podcast content on the BBC, head to www.bbc.co.uk/radio.

The future of streaming

With broadband subscriptions growing in popularity, content providers are increasingly turning to the internet to distribute their wares. The online music market is now firmly established, with downloads and streaming content reasonably priced (or free) and plentiful. Video is constrained by bandwidth but that picture is changing. The BBC is now working on a scheme that would enable web users to view much of its programming online, while some internet service providers, such as Homechoice, now offer television broadcasts using super-fast ADSL connections.

These services remain limited by the distance constraints of ADSL but the advent of ADSL 2 and speedier cable services could herald the advent of television and film on demand. It seems certain that streaming will be at the vanguard on this new wave of entertainment on tap, as viewers may prove unwilling to wait for the huge files needed to display films to download. Future home entertainment could be just another island in the stream.

Paul Allen

Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

- ▶ **Bandwidth** A measure of the maximum amount of data that can be transferred over a connection.
- ▶ **Bit-rate** The speed at which data is transferred, usually described as Kbits/s.
- ▶ **Broadband** Refers to high-bandwidth internet connections such as ADSL.
- ▶ **Dial-up** Allows PCs to connect to the internet using a modem and a telephone line.
- ▶ **Hard disk** A high-capacity disk drive used to store both applications and the files they create.
- ▶ **Kbit/s** Short for kilobits per second. A measure of data transfer or modem speed.
- ▶ **Mbit/s** A measure of data-transfer speed. A megabit is 1,024 Kilobits.
- ▶ **USB** Universal Serial Bus. A standard that allows quick and easy connection of peripherals to your PC.
- ▶ **Wi-Fi** A catchier name for the 802.11b or 802.11g standards used for wireless networking devices.

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Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

➔ **Cell** A spreadsheet page uses rows and columns to divide a page into cells. Rows and columns are identified with unique labels.

➔ **CRT** The glass tube-based technology used to produce an image in most TV sets and many computer monitors.

➔ **Desktop** What you see when you first start up a computer.

➔ **Dial-up** Allows PCs to connect to the internet using a modem and a telephone line.

➔ **Dialogue box** A small window that pops up to display or request information.

➔ **GPS** Network of satellites orbiting the earth, and used to pinpoint an exact position on the planet.

➔ **HTML** The language used to create pages for a website.

➔ **Mb** Megabyte. A measurement of memory storage capacity.

➔ **Operating system** A crucial piece of software that governs the way the hardware and software components in a computer work together.

➔ **System Tray** Found on the far right of your Taskbar, it displays icons showing which programs are always running in Windows.

➔ **Taskbar** The bar that runs along the bottom of the screen in Windows.

➔ **TFT** Technology used to create thin, flat colour screens for monitors and handheld devices.

➔ **Toolbar** A strip of icons that runs across the top of most applications providing quick access to certain important features.

➔ **Web browser** A software program developed for navigating the internet.

➔ **Wizard** An online 'assistant' that guides you, step-by-step, through a potentially complex process.

For more on Jargon Buster visit:
www.computeractive.co.uk

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LEVEL 1 2 3

What the WORKSHOP LEVELS mean...

LEVEL 1 Suitable for the most anxious novice, Level 1 deals with simple tasks that every computer user can try.

LEVEL 2 More involved, but simple enough for all to complete, Level 2 may introduce you to new features in applications.

LEVEL 3 Will bolster your existing knowledge and help you to see how much your computer can do. Clear but demanding.

**PULL
OUT &
KEEP**

Create your own

bingo cards



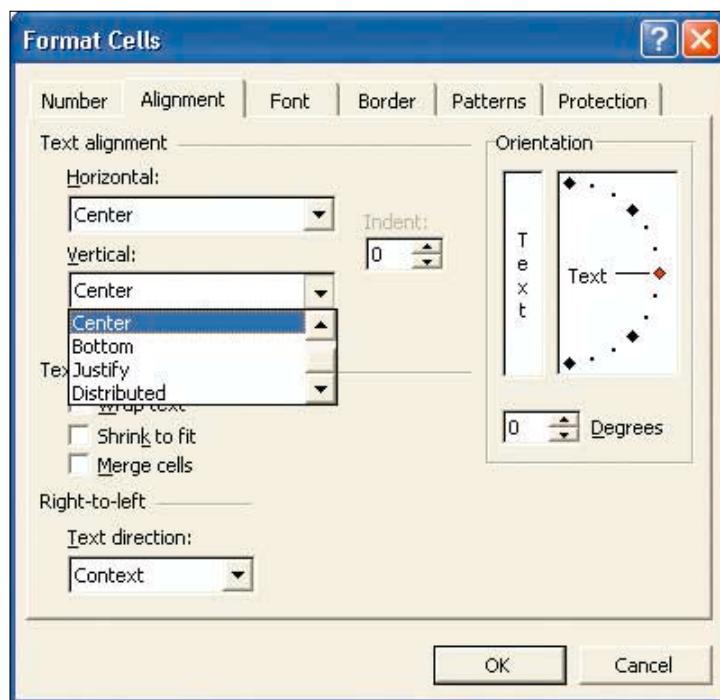
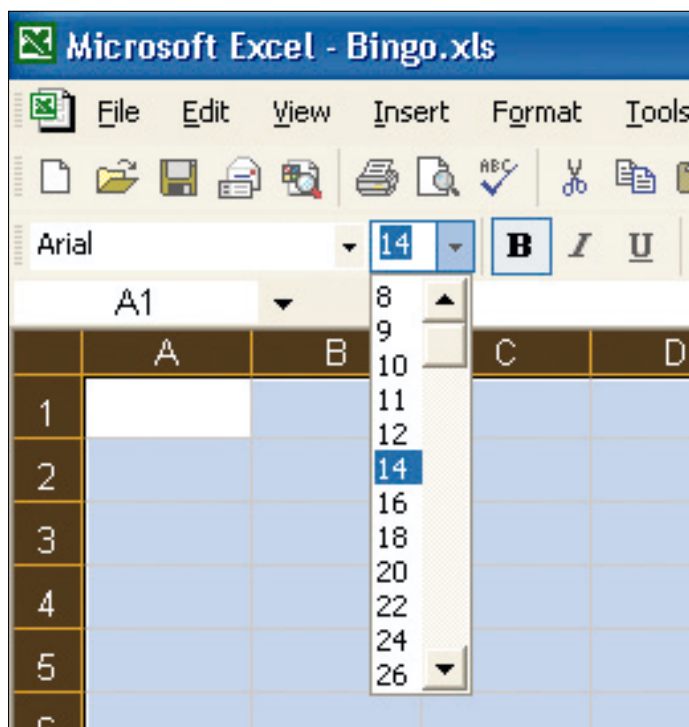
Use Microsoft Excel to make and print your own bingo cards in handy sheets of six

What do you do if you want to organise a one-off bingo session for a club event, party or family get-together and you haven't got a stock of game cards? Well, you can easily create your own in Microsoft Excel and print out as many as you need.

You then have a template you can use again and again, if the mood to

play bingo takes you another time. Best of all if you follow our simple step-by-step guide they'll look exactly like the real thing.

What's more, because Excel generates its own random numbers you don't have to spend ages typing in the numbers on each card, and nobody can accuse you of cheating!

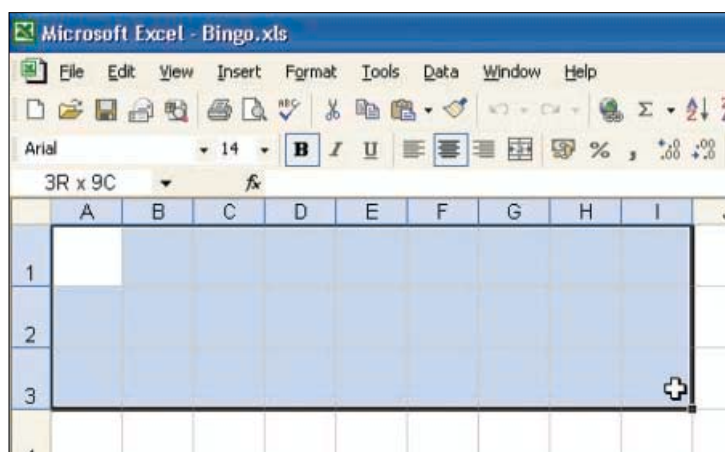


STEP 1...

WE'RE GOING TO CREATE a suitable grid that represents a single blank bingo card. Then we're going to fill it with random numbers and make five copies, so that six cards can be printed onto a single sheet of A4. Finally we're going to format each card. Start by opening a blank worksheet in Excel. Press Ctrl+A (hold down the Ctrl key and tap key A) to select the entire sheet, and then use the formatting **toolbar** to set the font to Arial, size 14 and bold. Don't forget to save your work at regular intervals: we've stored ours with the filename 'Bingo.xls'.

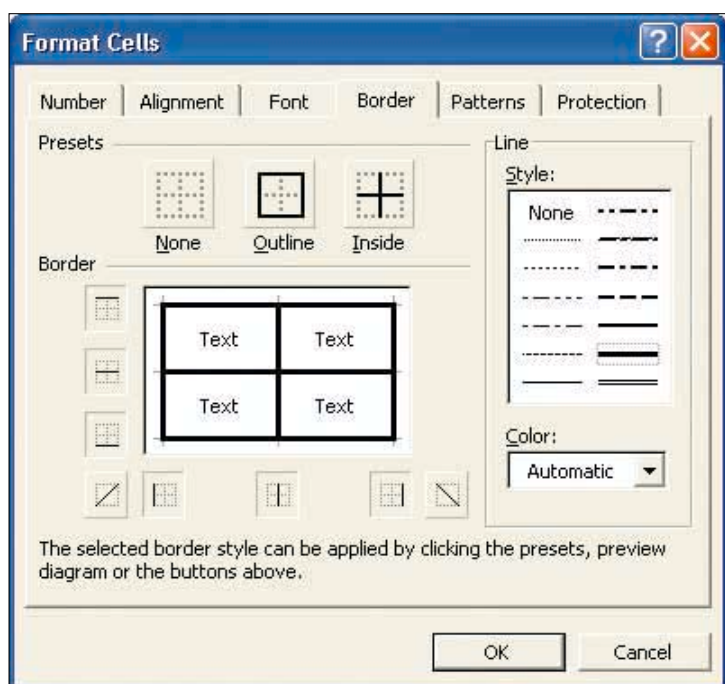
STEP 2...

STILL WITH THE ENTIRE sheet selected, click to open the Format menu and select Row, Height. Set the row height to 30 and click on OK. In the Format menu select Column, Width and set the column width to 6. Click on OK. In the Format menu click on Cells, and when the Format Cells **dialogue box** appears, select the Alignment tab. Set both the Horizontal and Vertical text-alignment options to Center, and then click on OK.



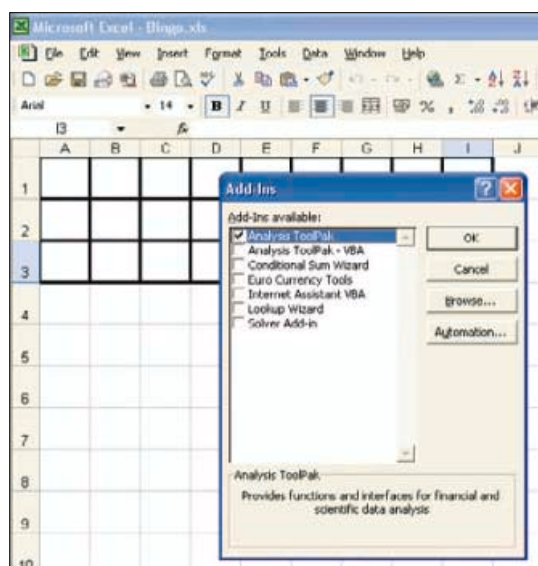
STEP 3...

YOU ARE NOW READY to draw the blank bingo card. To select the nine-column by three-row grid required for this purpose, click on cell A1 and hold down the left mouse button. Drag the plus-shaped screen pointer to cell I3 and release the mouse button.



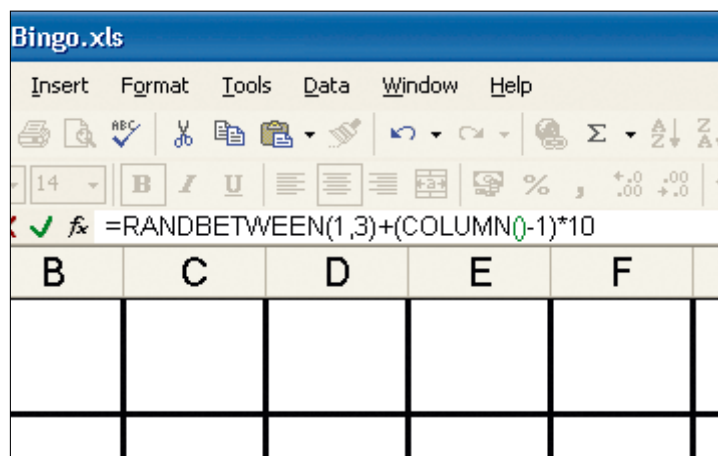
STEP 4...

CLICK TO OPEN THE Format menu and select Cells. In the Format Cells dialogue box select the Border tab. In the Line Style section, click to select the thickest type of solid line. In the Presets section click on both Outline and Inside. Click on OK and the dialogue box will close to reveal the grid you've specified drawn around the selected cells. Click anywhere outside the grid to deselect it and observe the effect.



STEP 5...

THERE ARE SEVERAL WAYS of generating random numbers in Excel. For our purposes, the easiest is a function called RANDBETWEEN. Before you can use RANDBETWEEN you must enable the Excel Analysis Toolpak, a free add-on supplied with Excel. Click to open the Tools menu and select Add-ins. In the Add-ins dialogue box, tick Analysis Toolpak, then click on OK. If you see a message that Excel cannot run the add-in because it has not been installed, you'll be invited to click Yes to install it. During the installation you may be prompted to insert the Excel or Office CD. Once the installation is complete you are ready to proceed.



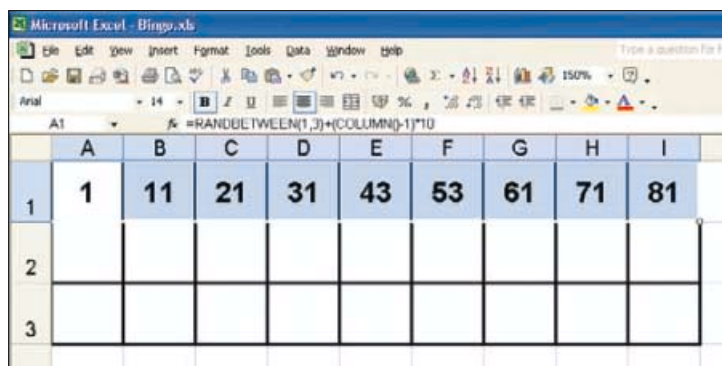
STEP 6...

CLICK TO SELECT CELL A1 and then click in the formula bar and type the following (without the quotes): '=RANDBETWEEN(1,3)+(COLUMN()-1)*10'. When you press Enter, a number between 1 and 3 will be inserted in cell A1. The first part of the formula uses the RANDBETWEEN function to pick a number between 1 and 3, and the function can be easily modified to pick random numbers between any lower and upper limits simply by changing the 1 and the 3. The second part of the formula uses the COLUMN function to add 10, 20, 30... (and so on) to the random number when it is copied into other columns.

NEXT STEP
turn over...

MAKE BINGO CARDS

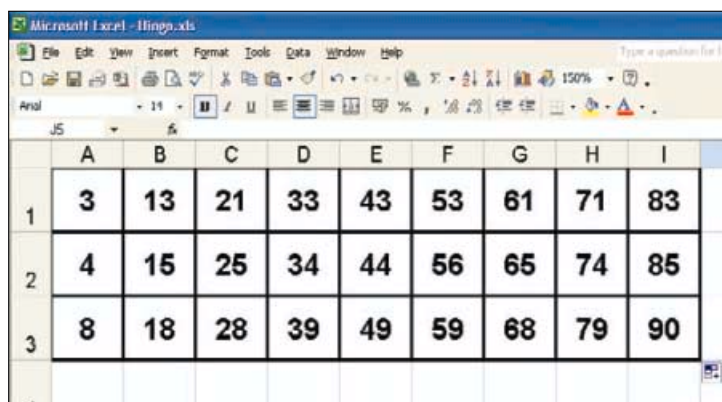
Create your own **bingo cards**



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	1	11	21	31	43	53	61	71	81
2									
3									

STEP 7...

TO COPY THE FORMULA that's in cell A1 into the other cells on the same row, click on cell A1. You'll notice a hollow circle at the bottom-right-hand corner of the cell. Click on this and hold down the left mouse button. Drag the screen pointer across to cell I1, and then release the mouse button.



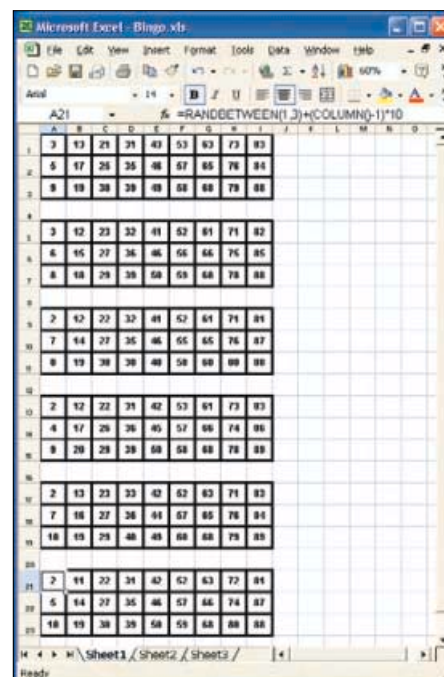
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	3	13	21	33	43	53	61	71	83
2	4	15	25	34	44	56	65	74	85
3	8	18	28	39	49	59	68	79	90

STEP 8...

CLICK TO SELECT CELL A2 and then click in the formula bar and type: `'=RANDBETWEEN(4,7)+(COLUMN()-1)*10'`. Press Enter to confirm the formula, and then copy it across to cell I2 in the same way as you copied the formula in step 7. Click to select cell A3 and then click in the formula bar and enter: `'=RANDBETWEEN(8,10)+(COLUMN()-1)*10'`. Press Enter to confirm the formula and then copy it across to cell I3. You should now have a complete grid of 27 random numbers.

Troubleshooting the formulas

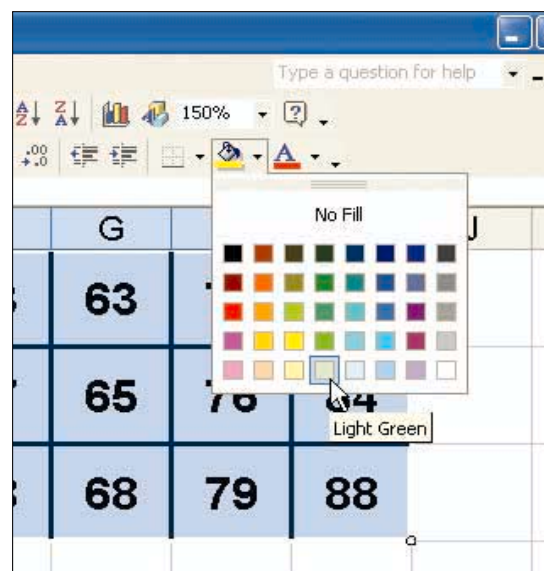
The formulas used here are short and if they don't work first time you can just retype them or press the F2 key to edit them. The formula for each cell in row 1 is: `'=RANDBETWEEN(1,3)+(COLUMN()-1)*10'`. There are only two ways you can go wrong with this. One is to omit the equals (=) sign, in which case you'll see the formula appear in the cell instead of a random number. The other is that you might misread what comes after COLUMN. It is not a zero (although it may look like this in print), but a left bracket followed by a right bracket with no characters or spaces in between. Finally, don't forget that we enclose such formulas in quotes to distinguish them from the rest of the text: you should not include these quotes when entering the formulas into the spreadsheet.



3	13	21	31	43	53	63	73	83
5	17	25	36	46	57	66	76	84
9	19	28	38	48	58	68	78	88
3	12	23	32	41	52	61	71	82
6	15	27	36	46	56	66	76	86
8	18	29	38	48	58	68	78	88
2	12	22	32	41	52	61	71	81
7	14	27	36	46	56	66	76	87
9	19	28	38	48	58	68	78	88
2	12	22	31	42	53	61	73	83
4	17	26	36	46	57	66	76	86
9	28	38	48	58	68	78	88	
2	13	23	33	43	53	63	73	83
7	16	27	36	46	57	66	76	86
18	19	29	39	49	59	69	79	89
2	11	22	31	42	52	63	72	81
5	14	27	36	46	57	66	76	87
18	19	28	38	48	58	68	78	88

STEP 9...

IT'S TIME NOW TO make five copies of this grid and insert them below the current one. Select the existing grid by dragging between cells A1 and I3, as you did in step 3, and then click on Copy in the Edit menu or use the keyboard shortcut of Ctrl+C. Place the cursor on cell A5 and click on Paste in the Edit menu, or use the keyboard shortcut of Ctrl+V. Click on cell A9 and paste again, and then paste three more times into cells A13, A17 and A21.



	G								
	63								
	65								
	68								

STEP 10...

TO ADD COLOUR TO the original bingo card, select cells A1 to I3 and then use the Fill Bucket on the formatting toolbar to shade it light green. Select each of the other grids in turn, and fill them with different pale colours taken from the bottom row of the Fill Bucket's palette.

Microsoft Excel - Bingo.xls

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Data Window Help

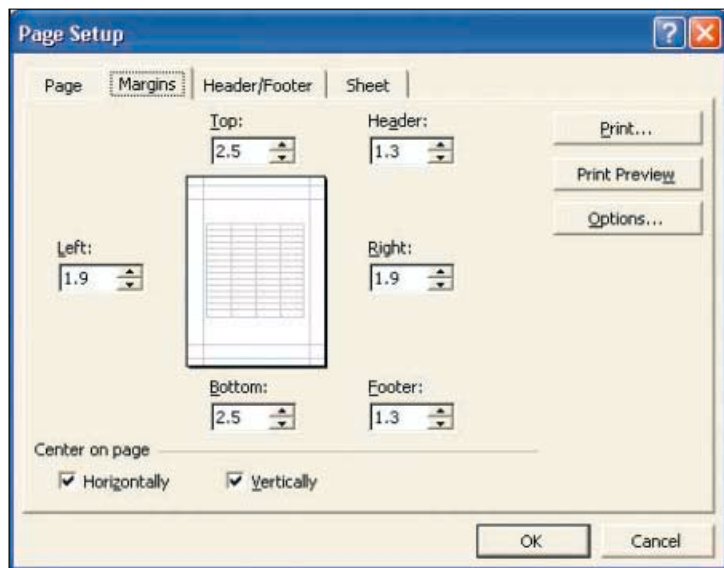
Arial 14 B I U

A1 =RANDBETWEEN(1,3)+(COLUMN()-1)*10

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
1	2		21			53	63		81	
2	7		26			55		77	87	
3	10	19			48		70	80		
4										
5	2	12		33		53		71		
6		15		36		55		77	86	
7	9		29				68	79	90	

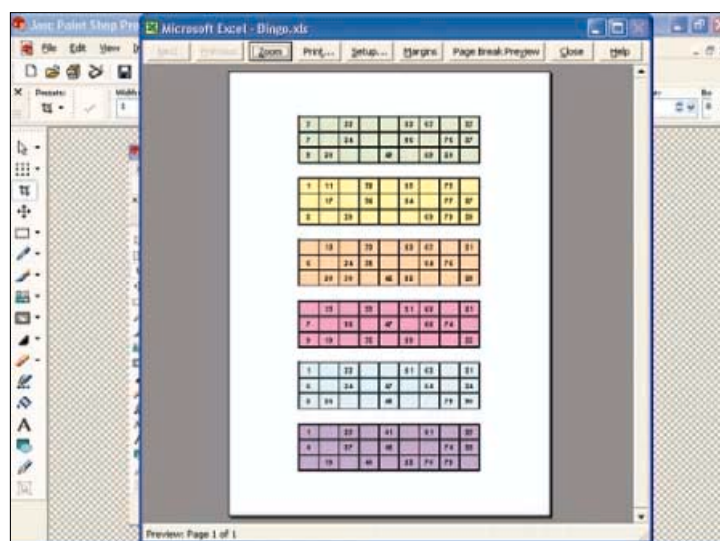
STEP 11...

YOUR BINGO CARDS CURRENTLY contain 27 random numbers in three rows of nine, when there should actually be only 15 numbers in three rows of five. To fix this you must now work through all six cards, removing four numbers from each row. The easiest way is to select each cell by clicking in it, and then to hit the Delete key. ▶



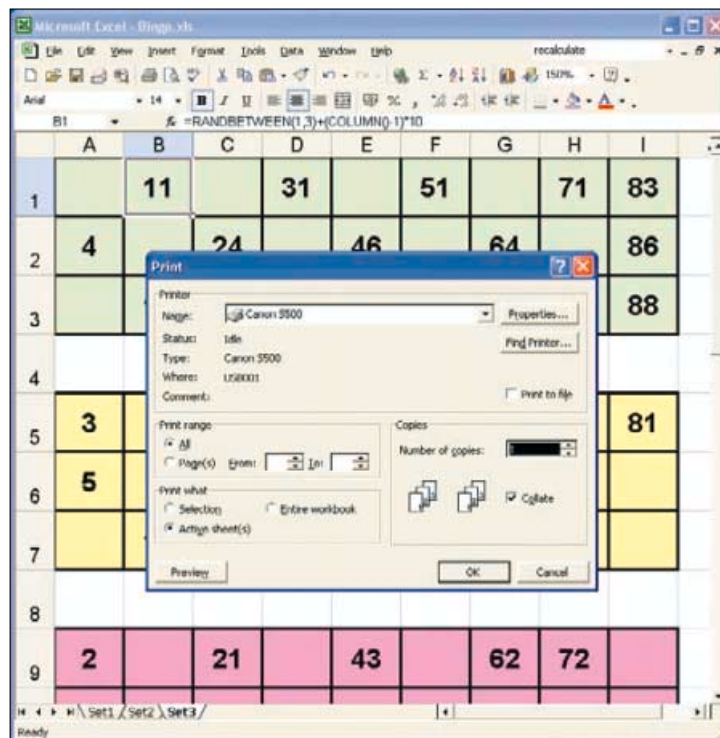
STEP 12...

TO SET UP THE page ready for printing click Page Setup on the File menu. Click on the Page tab and check that the paper orientation is set to Portrait and the size to A4. Click on the Margins tab and locate the 'Center on page' boxes at the bottom. Tick both the Horizontally and Vertically boxes, then click on OK. ▶



STEP 13...

CLICK ON PRINT PREVIEW in the File menu to check that everything is in order. If it is, click on the Close button on the Print Preview control bar and, if you haven't already, save the workbook as Bingo.xls. If you can't see all six cards centred on the page then check the row heights and column widths (step 2), the paper size and orientation (step 12) and the 'Center on page' options (step 12). ▶



STEP 14...

PRINT THE BINGO CARDS in the usual way, using the Print command on the File menu. Every time you load the Bingo.xls workbook, the random numbers are recalculated and you get a unique set of bingo cards. To change the numbers on every card without reloading the workbook, simply press the F9 key before printing each sheet. **ENDS**



Get started with geocaching

Find out how easy it can be to take part in the hi-tech treasure hunt known as geocaching

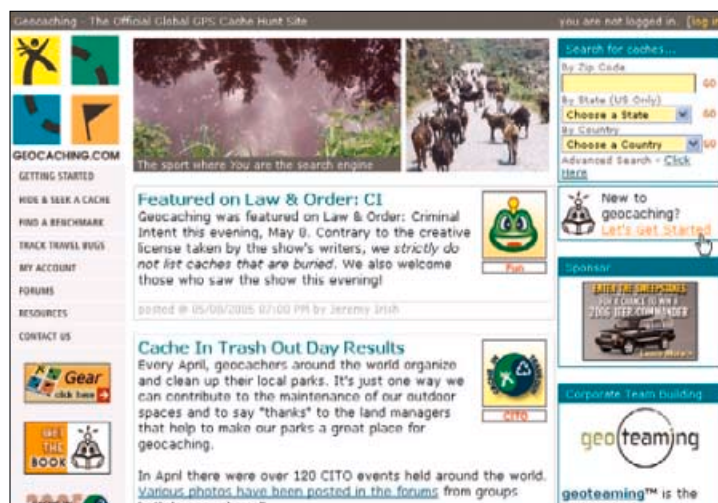
Geocaching is a relatively new pastime that has gained great popularity across the globe. We have run a couple of features on geocaching over the past few years (most recently in issue 174), and we know of many readers who have as a result taken up the sport.

Put simply, geocaching is a modern

take on orienteering, combining technology and adventure. To take part, you need internet access and, ideally, a handheld **GPS** receiver. But don't worry if you don't have one of these: there are other ways to enjoy geocaching. This Workshop will show you the ways you can get involved.

STEP 1...

IN ESSENCE, THE GAME of geocaching involves travelling to a set of published coordinates to hunt for a concealed item – the cache. Typically, this will be a lunchbox-style container in which the person responsible for planting the cache will have placed a notebook and pen, and perhaps a few knick-knacks and trinkets besides. As noted in our introduction, geocaching is best played using a handheld GPS receiver. These devices make use of a network of satellites orbiting the earth to determine exact longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates and nowadays, they can be picked up for under £100. As an alternative, though, you can manually plot coordinates on an Ordnance Survey map. ♦



STEP 2...

OBVIOUSLY, BEFORE YOU CAN set off on the hunt for a geocache, you need some coordinates. Numerous sites exist that list these but the most comprehensive is Geocaching.com. Indeed, at the time of writing it plays host to information on 170,000 caches secreted in over 200 countries. Before going any further, we recommend directing your **web browser** to www.geocaching.com and clicking on the Let's Get Started link on the right-hand side of the page. Here you'll find lots of in-depth information about every aspect of the sport. When you're done, click on the Home link in the top left-hand corner of the page. ♦



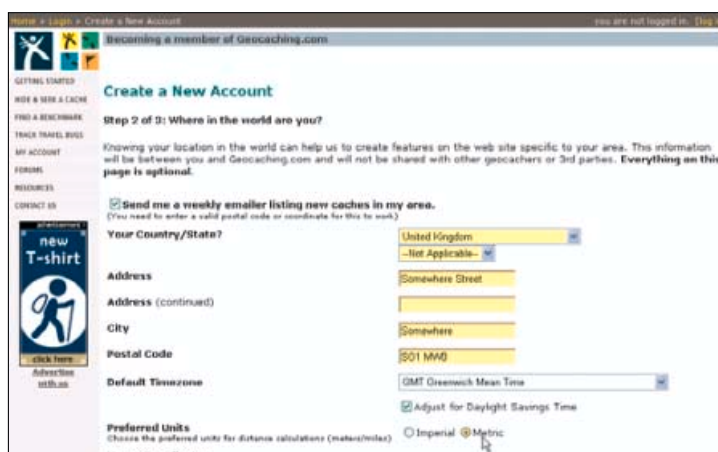
STEP 3...

YOU DON'T HAVE TO register with the site to make use of Geocaching.com's basic search facilities but doing so will allow you to actively engage with other players, by tracking your geocaching success stories and chatting on community forums. If you'd prefer to crack right on and look up some coordinates for a nearby cache, skip to step 8. Otherwise, click on the My Account link on the left-hand side of the home page. ▶



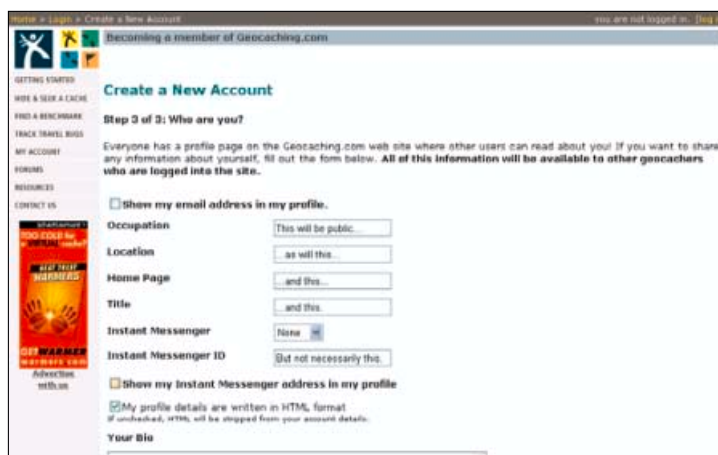
STEP 4...

ON THE LOGIN TO Geocaching.com page, click on the Create a new account link and fill out the subsequent form requiring your personal details. You might want to choose to receive text emails rather than **HTML**; and a tick in the checkbox at the bottom of this form will add you to Geocaching.com's mailing list, if you wish to be kept abreast of any updates to the site. When you're finished, click on the Create my account button. ▶



STEP 5...

FILLING OUT THE FIELD on this next form is optional, but doing so will better tailor Geocaching.com's services to your location and personal preferences. If you've already acquired them, either via GPS or a traditional paper map, you can even add your home coordinates. When you're finished on this page, click on the Update my location info button. ▶



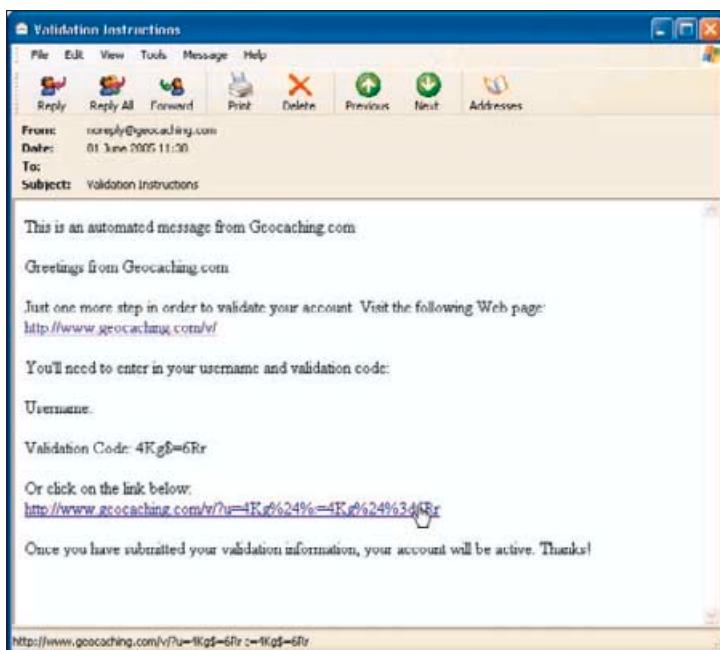
STEP 6...

WE'D ADVISE EXERCISING A little caution on the information you enter into the third and final form during the registration process. Though clicking to remove ticks from the checkboxes on this page will hide your email address and instant messenger identity from Geocaching.com site visitors, be aware that all other information will be public. Tap in as much or as little information as you're happy to supply here and then scroll down the page to hit the Save my Profile Details button. ▶

NEXT STEP
turn over...

HOW TO GO GEOCACHING

Get started with **geocaching**



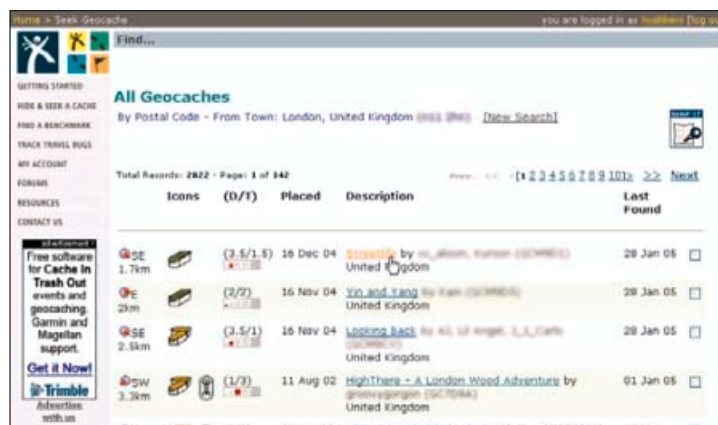
STEP 7...

GEOCACHING.COM WILL NOW SEND a validation code to the email address supplied in step 4. When the email arrives, open it and click on the supplied link. Alternatively, you can click on the 'validate your account now' link on the final page of the registration page and manually enter the code that was emailed to you, along with your chosen username (before clicking on the Activate my account button). From now on, you can log into the site using My Account on the left-hand side of the Geocaching.com home page. ▶



STEP 8...

SEARCHING FOR COORDINATES FOR geocaches can be done in a variety of ways. Perhaps the simplest is to type in a postcode in the By Zip Code search box on the Geocaching.com home page and hitting Enter (it will happily recognise UK postcodes, as well as US zip numbers). Try this now, most logically with your current home or office postcode. Alternatively, hit the Click Here link alongside Advanced Search to hunt for geocaches by place name, keyword, latitude and longitude, and so forth. ▶



STEP 9...

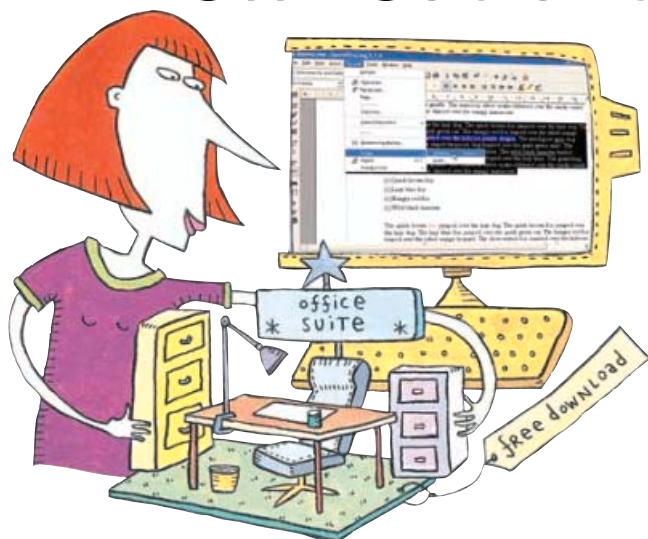
WHICHEVER WAY YOU SEARCHED, hitting Enter will result in a list of matching geocaches. Depending on your criteria, distances may be displayed, along with icons to describe the type of cache – like a simple, single geocache; or so-called multi-caches, which may involve treks to numerous sets of coordinates – difficulty and terrain ratings (a high terrain rating might indicate a mountainous walk, for example), and the date the cache was last found. Click on one of the geocache name links under the Description heading to find out more about a particular entry. ▶



STEP 10...

ALL THAT'S LEFT TO do is read the information about your chosen geocache before setting off with your GPS receiver or coordinates-bearing map to hunt it down. We'd recommend printing out the geocache's full listing from Geocaching.com, as having this to hand may help you in the field. You can now head for the coordinates to find the geocache. Depending on your chosen geocache, this may involve a short walk, a long drive or a worldwide flight. However, finding a geocache is rarely as simple as arriving at the coordinates: you may need to root around under bushes or in crevices to find the hiding place. Have fun. **ENDS**

Download and use free office software

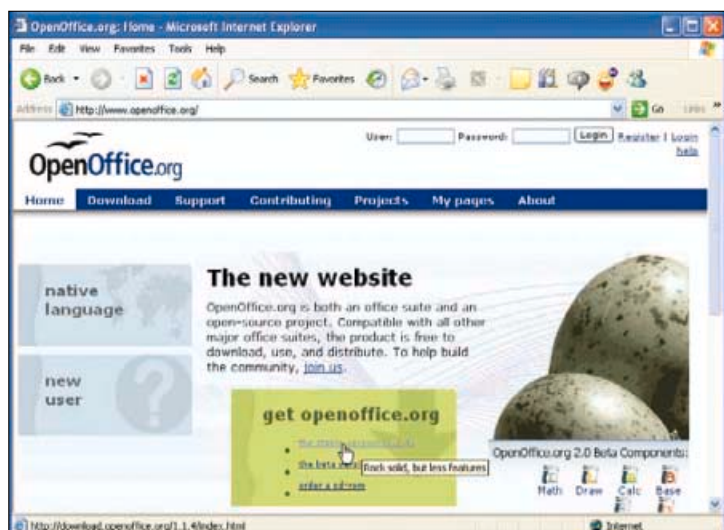


Get a software suite to rival Microsoft Office without spending a penny

Some people believe that there's no such thing as a free ride, while others are convinced that the best things in life are free. If you reside in the first camp it could be time to change allegiance, because it's possible to get a fully functioning and excellent office software package to rival the mighty Microsoft Office without

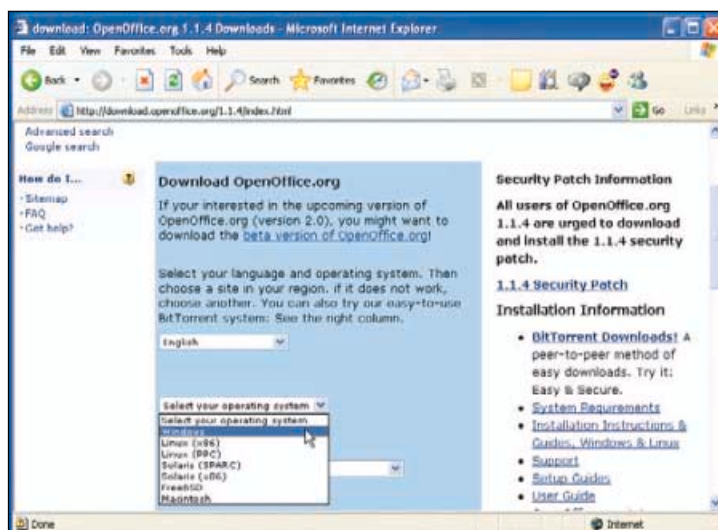
paying a penny – we're talking about OpenOffice.

Better yet, this software can both open and save Microsoft documents, so you can happily exchange files with others if necessary. If you're using a **dial-up** modem to access the internet, be warned that, at over **64Mb**, this download will take a very long time.



STEP 1...

OPEN YOUR WEB BROWSER and go to www.openoffice.org. On this screen, you'll see links to both 'Beta' and 'Stable' versions of OpenOffice. The 'beta' version may look more tempting, being newer, but we'd advise against choosing this: a beta is a test version, not a final product, and may still have glitches in it. Instead, click on the link to the Stable edition. This you can expect to be free of problems. ▶



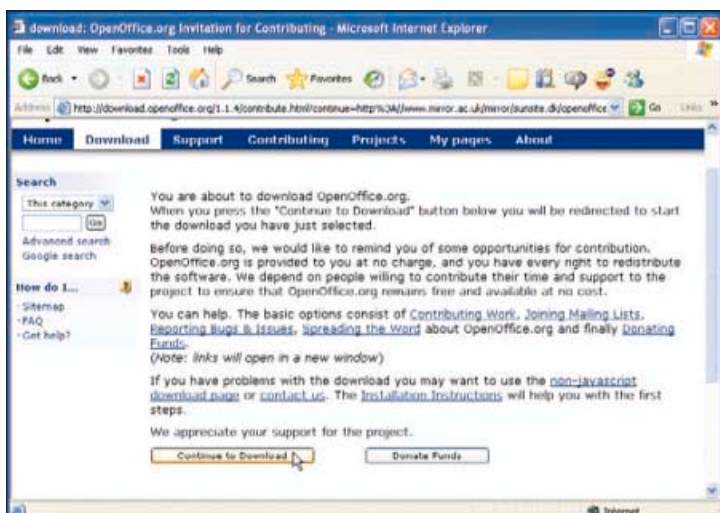
STEP 2...

ON THE DOWNLOAD SCREEN, you need to make some selections. To do this, click on the down-pointing arrow to the right of each selection box to get a pop-up list of choices. Select your preferred language and then the **operating system** installed on your PC. For most people this will be Windows (you don't need to specify which version) but options for Linux and Mac are also available. Finally, choose the location of your download site. Generally, it's wise to choose one as close to home as possible, so go for one of the UK sites. You are automatically moved onto the next page. ▶

NEXT STEP
turn over...

TRY OPENOFFICE

Download and use free office **software**



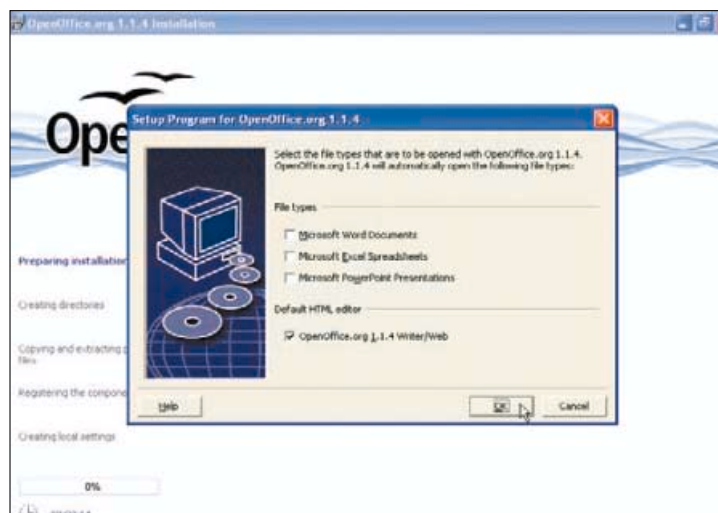
STEP 3...

YOU NOW HAVE THE opportunity to contribute to the OpenOffice project if you wish (by clicking on the Donate Funds button), otherwise click on the Continue to Download button. A **dialogue box** will then ask if you want to open or save the file. Click on Save. The Save As dialogue box now prompts you to specify a location to store the downloaded file. The default choice, on the Windows **Desktop**, is fine. Click on the Save button. The download will then begin. Be warned, however: if you're using a dial-up connection it may take several hours. ▶



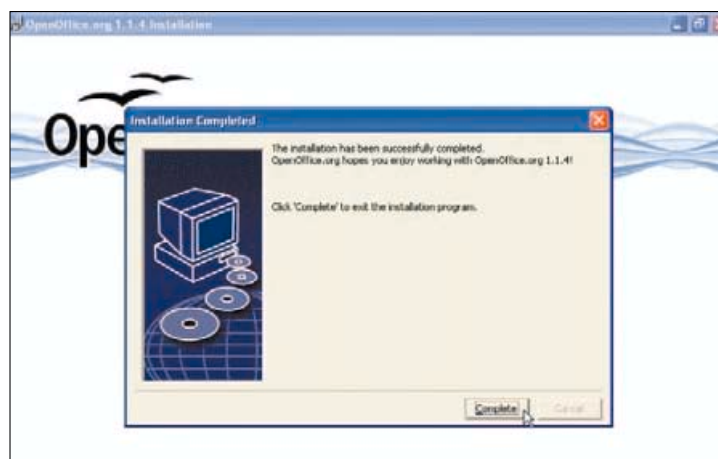
STEP 4...

WHEN THE DOWNLOAD IS complete, close the dialogue box if it hasn't closed automatically. The downloaded file will have appeared on your Windows Desktop as a compressed folder; right-click on this and select Extract All from the pop-up menu. If, in step 3, you chose to save this compressed file somewhere other than the Desktop, browse for it using Windows Explorer. Now you need to specify a place to put the extracted files. It's best to put them in a temporary folder, such as 'C:\Temp'. Browse to find it, click on Next, and the extraction process will proceed automatically. Click on Finish. ▶



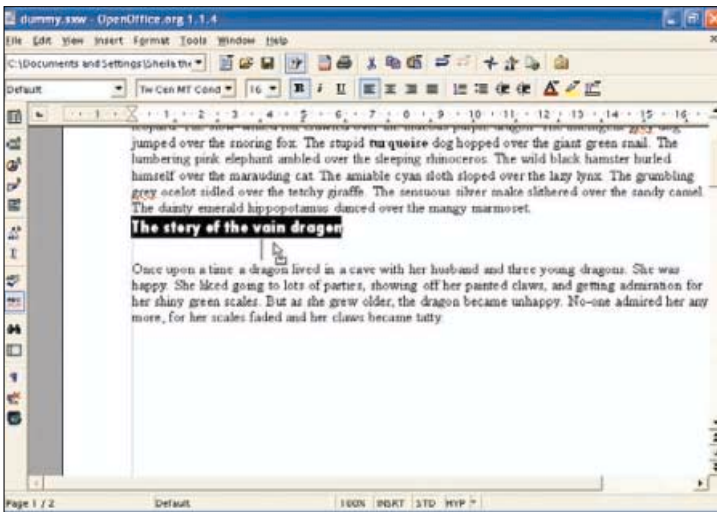
STEP 5...

OPEN THE NEW FOLDER ('C:\Temp' if you're following our example), and scroll down the list of files to find the application file called Setup: double-click on this and installation will start. Work your way through the set-up screens, accepting what is offered to you unless you have reason to make other selections. When you get to the screen asking which files will open with OpenOffice, be careful. If you have Microsoft Office on your computer and want to keep using it, leave the tick boxes blank. If you don't have Microsoft Office installed, and Microsoft documents will only be used with OpenOffice, tick the boxes. ▶



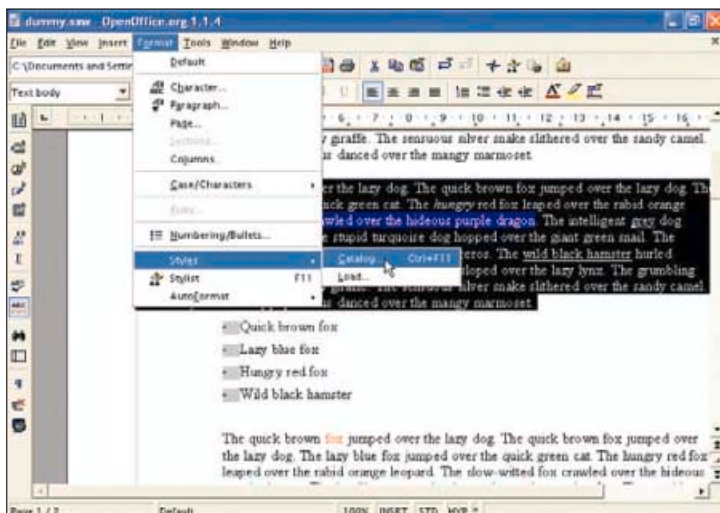
STEP 6...

WORK THROUGH THE REST of the installation. When it's complete, launch the software by clicking on Start, pointing to All Programs (or Programs in versions of Windows prior to XP), and then to OpenOffice. Here you'll see the various programs that make up OpenOffice. To start the word processor, for example, select Text Document. If you're used to working with a word processor like Microsoft Word, things should look very familiar in OpenOffice's equivalent, which is called Writer. A standard view of a page to work on and some **toolbars** with a number of icons will let you get started fairly quickly. ▶



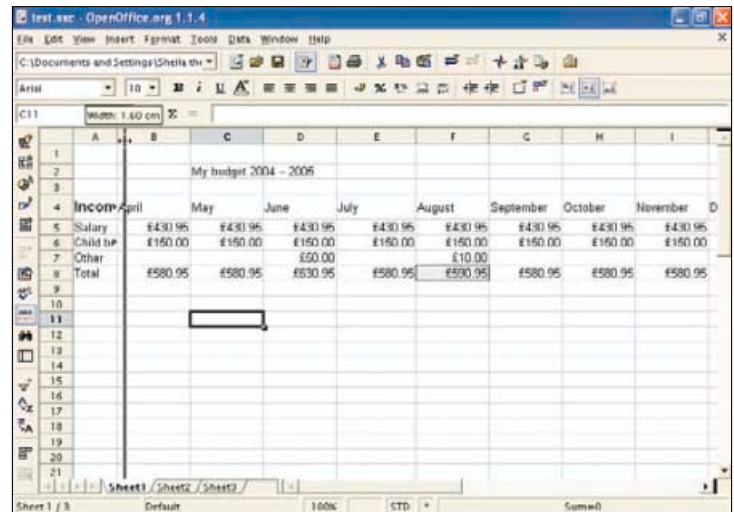
STEP 7...

THE BEST WAY TO get to grips with an unfamiliar word processor is to try it out with a dummy document. Type in some text to play with. Click twice on a word to highlight it and then try out features such as bold, underline and italic, which all have obvious buttons on the toolbar. Click three times on a line to highlight it – you can drag a title to a new position this way. To highlight a whole paragraph, you need to click at one end and drag the highlight to the other end. ▶



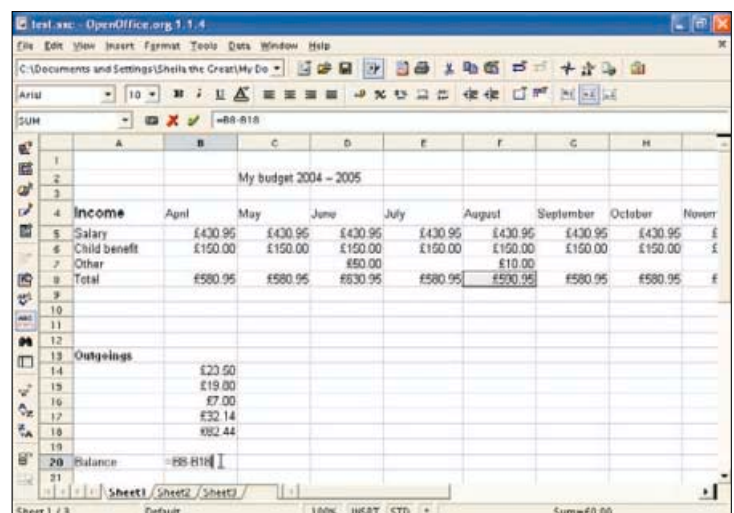
STEP 8...

YOU CAN COPY TEXT in the same way as Microsoft Word. If you click and hold down the Paste button on the toolbar, you'll get a choice of formats to paste in. Numbered and bulleted lists are available via buttons on the toolbar – simply click on these options to begin and end the lists. If you want to explore paragraph styles, click on Format, Styles and Catalog. A spell-checker is available, but not switched on by default. Click on the AutoSpellcheck button on the left-hand toolbar for this. ▶



STEP 9...

NOW TRY STARTING CALC, the OpenOffice spreadsheet, by clicking on Start, pointing to All Programs, and then OpenOffice – click to choose Spreadsheet. Note that there are buttons on the toolbar for formatting text, as well as for formatting **cells** with currency or percentages. You can widen cells by placing the mouse pointer to the right of the column letter and dragging across, and deepen cells by placing the cursor below the row number and dragging down. Use the OpenOffice cell styles by selecting one or more cells and double-clicking on the name of a style. ▶



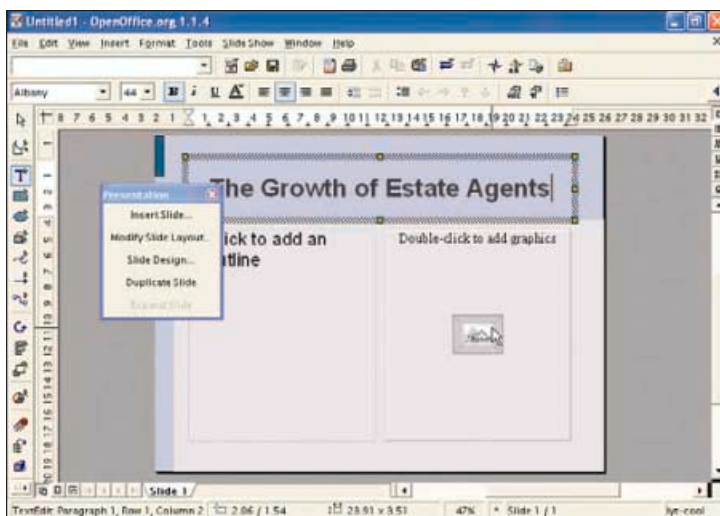
STEP 10...

TO ADD UP A column of figures in the OpenOffice spreadsheet, place the cursor in the cell below the bottom number, click on the Sum button next to the input line, and press Enter on your keyboard. A subtraction is slightly more complex. Begin by clicking in the cell that will contain the formula and enter the two cells that you want subtracted, for example '=B8-B18'. It's worth exploring the toolbar on the left of the screen. Choose Insert Graphics for pictures, backgrounds and so on or Insert Object for access to graph and chart drawing. ▶

NEXT STEP
turn over...

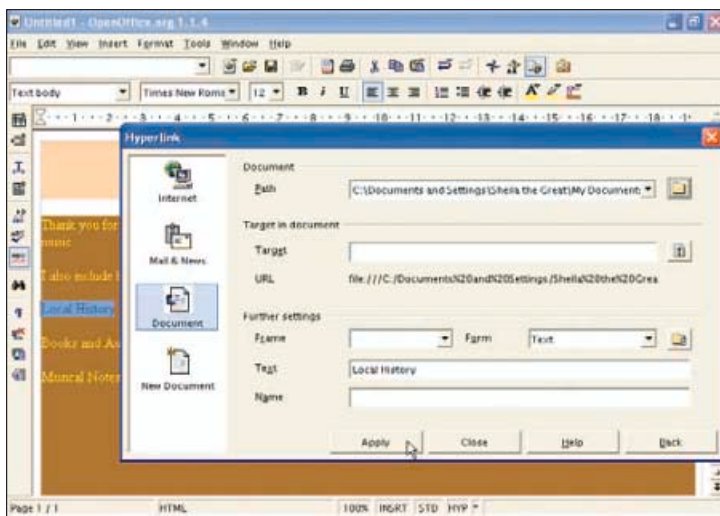
TRY OPENOFFICE

Download and use free office software



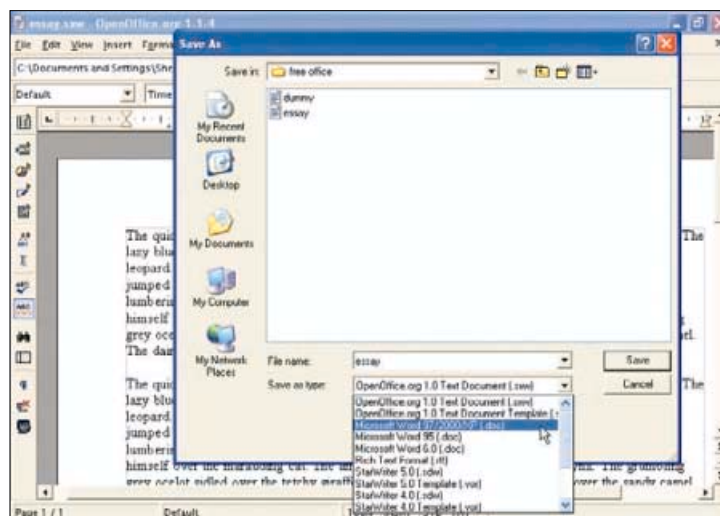
STEP 11...

WHEN YOU OPEN UP OpenOffice's presentations program (click on Presentation from the OpenOffice program group under All Programs from the Start menu), you'll be offered a template to work with. It's a good idea to try this program out at least once, as you'll see the styles and effects that are available. The ever-present dialogue boxes let you add and modify slides. Draw shapes and add graphics with the left-hand toolbar. Text formatting looks similar to the word-processing program. The right-hand toolbar gives you different views of your slides, and a preview slideshow.



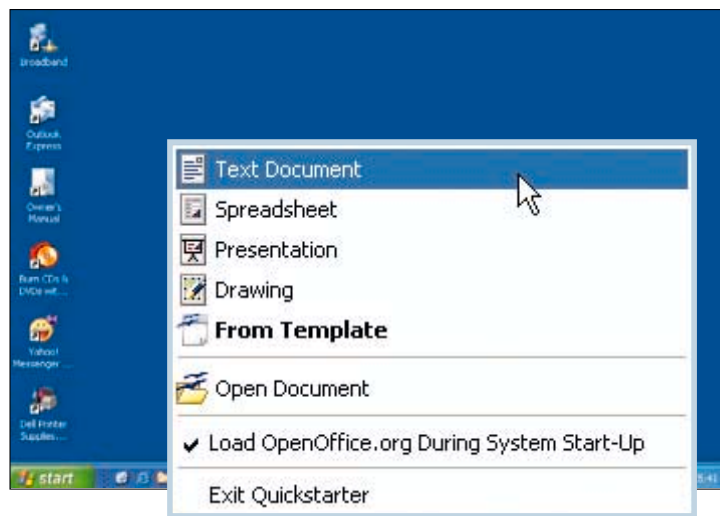
STEP 12...

OPENOFFICE EVEN INCLUDES a basic **HTML**-creation program, which enables the design of simple web pages. Enter and edit text as you would in the word processor. Draw a shape, enter some text then look in the Format menu to animate the text. Create some links by highlighting text then clicking on the Hypertext Dialogue button on the Function toolbar. Browse for a document to link to in the dialogue box. Click on Apply. Hold down the Control (Ctrl) key and click on your link to test it.



STEP 13...

ALL COMPONENT PROGRAMS OF OpenOffice are compatible with their Microsoft Office equivalents, so you can open Microsoft files directly. Unlike Microsoft Office, though, OpenOffice automatically lists all files. From the word processor, look for .doc files, from the spreadsheet look for .xls files and from the presentation program look for .ppt files. To save in Microsoft Office format, click on the Save button, or choose File, then Save. In the dialogue box, click on the down-pointing arrow by the Save As Type box and select the appropriate Microsoft version.



STEP 14...

AFTER YOU HAVE LAUNCHED OpenOffice for the first time, look out for the OpenOffice Quickstarter button on the Windows Taskbar. Right-click on this to see a short-cut menu for the various programs, as well as buttons to open any OpenOffice file, or to create a document from a template. With business cards, labels and presentations included, these templates are both helpful and easy to use. **ENDS**

View and work with PDFs

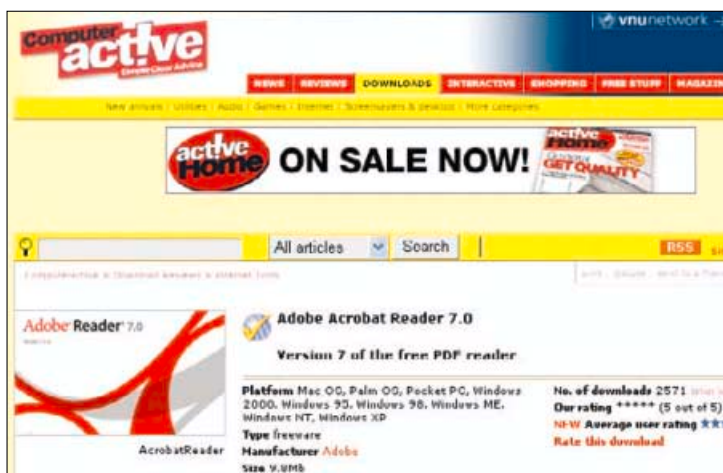


PDFs are fast becoming part of everyday computing. We show you how to use them with Adobe Reader

There was a time when Adobe's Portable Document Format (or PDF for short) was little more than a useful way for people involved in professional print and design industries to distribute publications without losing valuable formatting information.

These days, though, PDF files crop

up all over the place, from forms and information leaflets on government websites to 'electronic manuals' that accompany software applications that lack printed instructions. It's a good idea, then, both to be able to view PDF documents, as well as to know how to navigate them. This short Workshop will tell you what you need to know.



STEP 1...

BEFORE YOU CAN OPEN and read a PDF file on your PC, you will need to download and install a free program from Adobe called Reader. It's possible that you already have Reader installed, in which case feel free to skip to step 5. If you're not sure, it's best to download and install it afresh, as this will ensure you have the latest version on your computer. Launch your **web browser** and direct it to www.computeractive.co.uk/downloads/103888 and click on the red arrow marked Free Download. ➡



STEP 2...

NOW FILL IN THE two parts of the registration form, selecting from the drop-down menus the desired language, operating system you use (such as Windows XP) and your type of internet connection. Note that on the second half of this form, two checkboxes are ticked to indicate that you'd like to additionally download and install the Adobe Yahoo **Toolbar** and Adobe PhotoShop 2.0 Starter Edition: it's up to you if you want these extras, but as we will not be covering these in this Workshop we have clicked to remove the ticks. When you've made your choices, scroll down the page and click on Continue. ➡

NEXT STEP
turn over...

PDF KNOW-HOW

View and work with PDFs



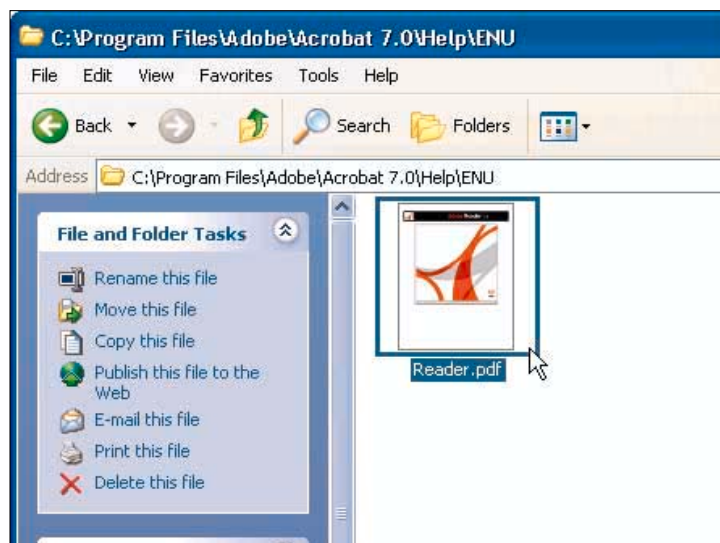
STEP 3...

ON THE NEXT PAGE, click on the Download button and then click on Save and choose a suitable location on your PC to store the downloaded installation file: the Windows **Desktop** is as good a place as any. When the download has finished, locate and double-click on the installation file. This will prompt your computer to download yet more files from the Adobe website, but the process is all automated, so best just to sit back and watch. ▶



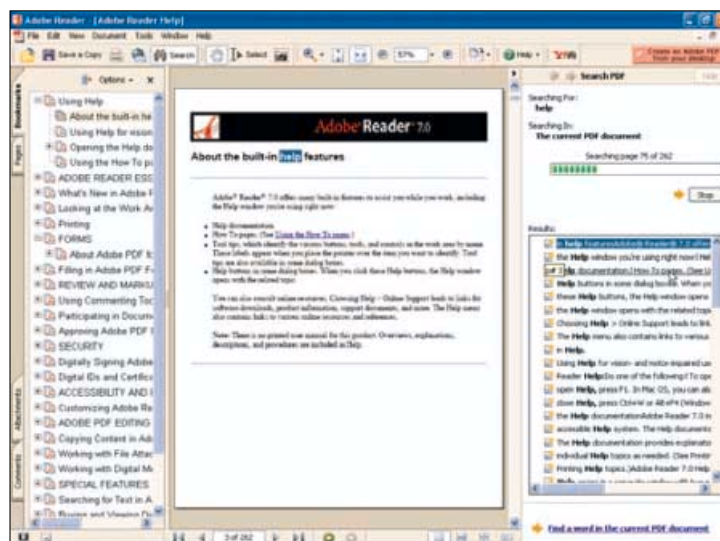
STEP 4...

EVENTUALLY YOU WILL BE presented with the first screen of the Adobe Reader set-up wizard. Read each screen in turn, pressing Next and Install when prompted, until the installation begins. The wizard may prompt you to close certain applications that need updating, such as your web browser. Finally, if all has proceeded smoothly, click on the Finish button to close the wizard. You will be prompted to restart your computer to complete installation, so do this now. ▶



STEP 5...

WITH THE INSTALLATION COMPLETE, it's time to open a PDF. As noted in our introduction, you may already have come across PDF files that you'd like to be able to view, in which case a simple double-click on the file will do the job. Adobe Reader will open automatically and allow you to read the document. The Reader application also comes with a few PDFs of its own: if you used the default installation folder, for example, you'll find the Reader help document as a PDF file in C:\Program Files\Adobe\Acrobat 7.0\Help\ENU (use Windows Explorer to navigate to this folder). ▶



STEP 6...

IT IS EASY TO get to grips with the Adobe Reader interface. Use the links down the left-hand side to skip to any page in the document, or the magnifying-glass tool (at the top) to zoom in and out of pages. If you want to search for text in a particular document, click on the Search button and enter a search phrase. If the document's security settings so allow, the Select tool can be used to highlight text, which you can then copy into the Windows Clipboard using the Copy command from the Edit menu (or use the keyboard shortcut Ctrl+C). **ENDS**

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HINTS AND TIPS

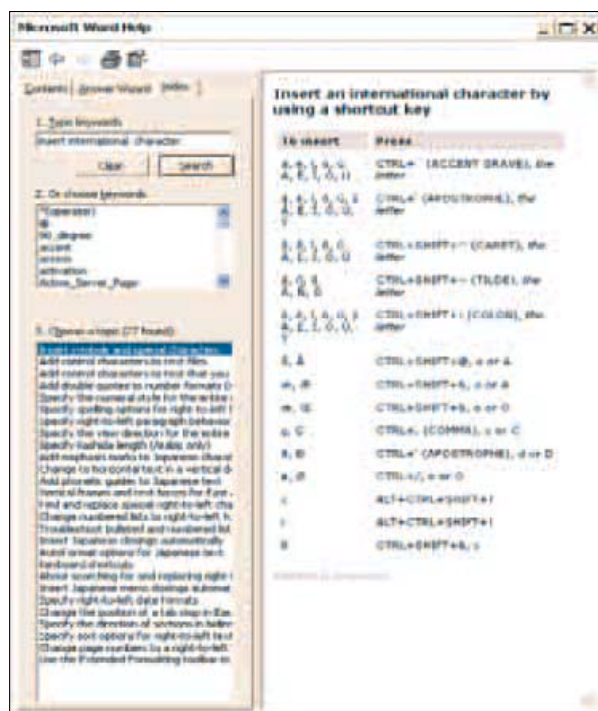
Spend less than a minute on each of these simple pointers and make your PC easier to use...

READER TIP

Simpler symbols

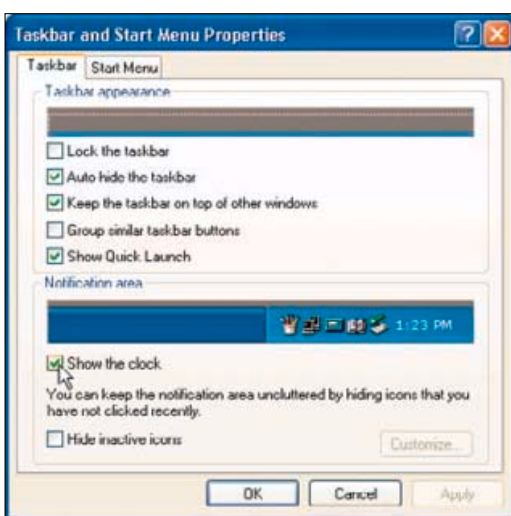
The Workshop in issue 189 suggests using Character Map for the insertion of accents when preparing text in foreign language. However, I have found that Microsoft Word provides a more than adequate, and, in my experience, much easier, method. Launch Word and open the Help facility (from the Help menu, or by clicking F1). Now select the Index tab and type 'insert international character' into the Type keywords box and then press the Search button. In the search results pane, click on the 'Insert an international character by using a shortcut key' link and you'll be presented with a comprehensive list of shortcut keys: print this out and keep it for reference.

Cedric Ashworth, Rainford



▲ Microsoft Word's Help can show you how to type international characters

WINDOWS

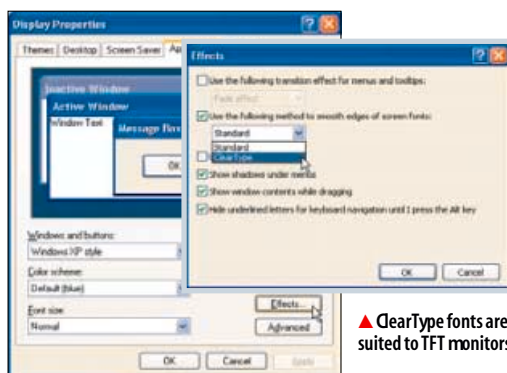


Drop the clock

Having a clock on the Taskbar is useful but if you would prefer extra space for the **System Tray** or for buttons, right-click on an empty part of the Taskbar and select Properties. Click on the option labelled 'Show the clock' to remove the tick and click on OK. If you want more information displayed with the clock intact, increase the size of the Taskbar to give it more space.

WINDOWS XP

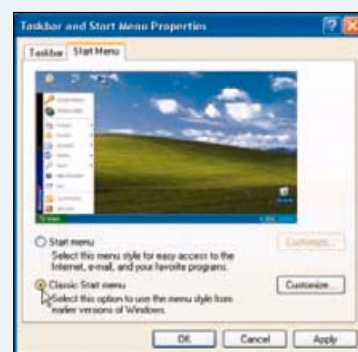
Easy on the eye



▲ ClearType fonts are suited to TFT monitors

Microsoft ClearType optimises how text is displayed on **TFT** flat-panel displays. This is possible because the red, green and blue elements are arranged differently to older **CRT** monitors. To enable ClearType, right-click on an empty part of the **Desktop** and select Properties. Click on the Appearance tab and then on the Effects button. Click on the box that says 'Use the following method to smooth edges of screen fonts' and select ClearType from the drop-down menu below. This should make fonts much more attractive on notebooks and TFT monitors.

WINDOWS XP



Old school

If you prefer the Start menu style of previous versions of Windows, it is very simple to revert to the good old days. Right-click on an empty area of the **Taskbar** and select Properties from the menu that appears. Click on the Start Menu tab at the top and then select the option that says 'Classic Start menu'. Click on OK to close the window and the Start menu will change to the old style.

READER TIP



Better sorting

When viewing files in folder windows, file names are generally sorted alphabetically. If you have frequently used folders or files that you'd like to appear at the top, you can force this to happen by renaming the file to include a special character, like a hash ('#') or a tilde ('~'), as the first character of the file name. You can also use this technique to better organise your Internet Favorites list.

Mike Hallam, Solihull

Next Issue...

- ◆ Make imperial-metric conversions in Excel
- ◆ Work with multiple Windows Desktops
- ◆ Get free protection from rogue diallers
- ◆ Make your own PDFs
- ◆ Hints & Tips

Broadband speeds for only £24.99 a year



OnSpeed offers dramatic speed increases that will transform your Internet connection whether you have Dial-up or Broadband.

Whether at home or on the go, OnSpeed offers broadband performance through your Internet connection for a fraction of the price.

There are plenty of products on the market which claim to boost your net connection, but which don't really deliver. OnSpeed is different. Not only does it increase your Internet connection speeds by up to five times but it is also cheaper than broadband and easier to install. There's no need to upgrade your hardware or do anything to your phone line, and no need to change your existing ISP or email settings. You're up and running in no time and it's impressively quick.

When independently tested OnSpeed increased a standard dial-up connection from 30kb per second to around the 300kbps level. This is well into broadband territory from just a standard Internet connection with email download speeds increased by as much as ten times. But while OnSpeed's performance rivals that of broadband, it costs just a fraction of the price.

Broadband will typically cost around £25 a month. OnSpeed costs just £2.08 per month, with no set-up fee or contract. It's all down to OnSpeed's compression technology, originally developed for the US military for battlefield communications (so you know a lot of money's gone into it).

OnSpeed is just a 1Mb software download that will work on any Internet connection including dial-up, 150k broadband and GPRS by compressing the data you download in web pages and email using unique compression techniques. The result is a dramatic reduction in the loading time of web browsing and email, it's all very easy and unobtrusive. OnSpeed sits as an icon in the taskbar, working away to make your browsing and email experience far more enjoyable.

Onspeed reported over 250,000 users in the last year alone, it really is that good, and with a 14-day money back guarantee there's absolutely no risk.

www.onspeed.com

NEW FEATURE! ONSPEED NOW WORKS WITH POCKET PC

OnSpeed can be used to accelerate Pocket PC PDAs' and Smart Phones' including GSM, UMTS, G3 and GPRS.



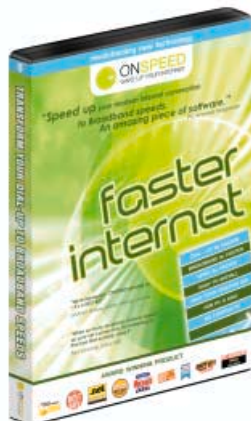
OnSpeed works by compressing your web browsing and web-based email, such as Yahoo or Hotmail, so not only will it dramatically speed up your connection by nearly 8x, it will also reduce your phone bill saving you £££'s.

DIAL-UP 5x FASTER | BROADBAND 3x FASTER | GPRS 8x FASTER

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ONSPEED
WAKE UP YOUR INTERNET

Play your cards right

Is it worth paying more for memory cards from known brands or will those from third-party suppliers do just as good a job? We tested a range of cards to find out

Digital cameras are now capable of taking better quality pictures than ever before and it's likely that if you have purchased a new camera in the last 12 months you'll be taking snaps using a 4- or 5-megapixel model. That higher **resolution** cameras now fall within the budget of most amateur photographers is good news for anyone interested in digital photography. The only downside is that the higher the resolution of the images you take, the larger the resulting image files will be and the fewer photos you'll be able to store on the camera's **memory card**. For instance, an image taken with a 5-megapixel camera at the highest image quality setting will typically result in an image file about **2Mb** in size, whereas a 3-megapixel camera would produce an image file roughly 1.5Mb in size at its highest quality setting.

It's unlikely that the memory card supplied with your digital camera will have a capacity larger than 32Mb. As a result, you'll be unable to take even the same number of images in one sitting as you would with a 24-exposure film. This means investing in a larger capacity memory card.

Memory cards have other uses too and if you have a handheld computer you may need a memory card for additional file storage.

Spoilt for choice

When it comes to selecting a memory card, the choice of products from so many different manufacturers can be a little daunting. While the format of the memory card you choose will be dictated by its compatibility with your camera, the brand you buy is up to you. By buying a memory card from the manufacturer of your digital camera instead of much cheaper alternatives, you may think that you're buying a better quality product.

At the time of writing, Fujifilm quoted the price of its 256Mb Secure Digital card as being £85, while an equivalent card from Crucial or Kingston would cost you just £18. Fujifilm is keen to stress that its memory card products can be picked up much cheaper than the recommended retail prices if you shop





Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

HOW MANY PICTURES THEY STORE

IMAGE RESOLUTION	64MB CARD	128MB CARD	256MB CARD	512MB CARD	1GB CARD
5 MEGAPIXELS	24	49	99	209	409
4 MEGAPIXELS	30	61	122	244	512
3 MEGAPIXELS	38	76	154	327	655
2 MEGAPIXELS	61	122	244	523	1,046

around online and even if you click on the Buy Now link on the Fujifilm website, you'll be offered this card for £33 – admittedly a more reasonable price but almost double that of Kingston or Crucial's 256Mb cards.

While it can be tempting to entrust the storage of your digital images to a known brand this may not necessarily be the best deal and it isn't guaranteed to give a better performance. On the other hand, if you do opt for a cheaper card from Kingston, Crucial or San Disk, for example, how do you choose between these third-party brands? The capacity of different brands of 256Mb cards will obviously be exactly the same across the board but do more expensive cards offer significantly better performance and quality when it comes to reading and writing files?

This could potentially have an effect on how quickly you can transfer digital images from a camera's memory card to a PC or transfer files between a desktop and handheld computer. There is now also a new breed of memory card on the market that offers faster reading and writing speeds for a price premium. Do these 'faster' cards give significantly better performance to make it worth paying more for them?

To answer these questions, we decided to put a range of memory cards to the test. We gathered together a range of 128Mb, 256Mb and 512Mb memory cards spanning different formats and timed how long it took to transfer enough data to the card to fill it to maximum capacity and how long it took to transfer all the data on the card to our test PC. We used a PC connected to an external **USB** memory card reader to do this.

We also included a range of memory cards that the manufacturer claimed were faster than standard cards to see how much of an increase in data transfer speed each of these offered. Among the memory cards we tested were products from Crucial, Kingston and SanDisk in the third party product camp, and Sony, Fujifilm and Olympus in the known camera brand corner.

Photo finish

Overall, the results of our tests indicated that there is no performance advantage to be gained by buying big brand memory cards over cards from third party suppliers such as Crucial,

Kingston and SanDisk. In some cases the data transfer speeds of the third-party cards were actually faster than the camera brand cards. Although data transfer speeds did differ between cards, no brand outperformed the competition consistently. Furthermore, our tests also indicated that there was actually very little to distinguish the performance of the standard speed cards with the 'faster' cards, which may cost up to £10 more than a standard speed card of the same capacity.

It seems third-party storage media will serve your needs just as well as memory cards branded with the name of your camera's manufacturer, providing you take good care of them. As always, we'd advise readers to shop around online and on the high street to ensure they get the best deal, and to base any choice of memory card on price rather than buying on the basis of brand. Of most concern when you're buying should be a card's capacity – see our table for a guide to the number of pictures you can fit on cards of different capacity.

Emilie Martin

- **Mb** A measurement of storage capacity, usually for computer memory.
- **Megapixel** A measure of the level of detail recorded by digital cameras – one megapixel means an image made from one million tiny dots (pixels).
- **Memory card** Small cards that can store many megabytes (Mb) of computer data or documents. Often used as a removable storage medium in digital cameras.
- **Resolution** The amount of detail shown in an image, whether on screen or printed.
- **USB** Universal Serial Bus. A standard that allows quick and easy connection of peripherals to your PC.

For more on Jargon Buster visit:
www.computeractive.co.uk

Memory card readers

Many new PCs and most notebook computers will feature a built-in memory card reader so you can transfer files to and from the computer with ease. If your computer doesn't have a card reader built in, it's possible to add an external reader, which can be connected to the computer using a spare USB port.

The Crucial High-Speed USB 12-in-1 Card Reader that we used in our tests can be used to read information from and write data to 12 different card formats

including the common Secure Digital, Memory Stick, MultiMediaCard and Compact Flash formats. It costs just £11 from www.crucial.com and connects to a PC's USB port via a cable. For around £5-£6 you can pick up a smaller reader that plugs directly into a USB port with no cable

required, although not all memory card formats will be supported by a single device. A smaller cable-free reader may be a better option for use with a notebook computer as it's easier to carry around with you.

➤ An external card reader links your camera and PC



Action packed.



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What's so special? How about the ability to record and store up to 400 hours of TV and movies directly from your TV, VCR, cable or satellite receiver, to playback anytime, anywhere on a bright 7" screen? That's in addition to being able to download, transfer and record up to 55,000 songs, store and view up to 1 million photos, play games and store your data files on a massive 100GB hardrive (40GB version also available). The AV700 blows the competition away. Boom. www.archos.com

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ARCHOSTM
on the **go** 

Top draw

You don't have to be a professional artist to create a masterpiece. Paint Shop Pro is an easy-to-use image editor that will help your imagination take flight, and it's free to try

Mention image-editing software and most people think of programs that help you touch up holiday snaps or remove the dreaded red-eye from birthday photos. While this view is true, it paints only half the picture of the potential of such applications. Over the next two issues, we will demonstrate how to begin your own creative projects with step-by-step examples, and introduce the tools and techniques that can be used to turn a PC, mouse and keyboard into a canvas, easel and palette.

To do this, we've chosen an application that everyone can use free of charge, to make sure no one is left out. The makers of Paint Shop Pro 9 (PSP) are offering a free 60-day trial of the software to download – see the box on page 64 to find out how to get your copy.

In this first part we'll look at some tips and techniques to get you started, progressing to more advanced tools and features in the second part in issue 193. We'll also discuss some ideas for what to do with your creations, from designing your own cards and invitations to creating jigsaw puzzles, T-shirt designs and labels.

Getting started

Top-end image-editing software can cost hundreds of pounds and although the sheer volume of tools and features you get is impressive, it's still a lot

of money to pay for a program you've probably never used before. The good news, then, is that you can try out PSP for 60 days without any obligation to buy – see page 64 for more information.

To get those creative juices flowing and introduce you to the artistic tools in PSP, we're going to create a simple insert for a CD case. The principles explored in this exercise will stand you in good stead no matter what your creative project is, and even if you use a different image-editing program, the commands and techniques will remain largely the same – all that will be required is a little experimentation.

When you open PSP for the first time, you'll be presented with a tutorial window called the Learning Centre. It's a good idea to spend some time going through this to



▲ Paint Shop Pro Learning Centre explains the basics of image creation

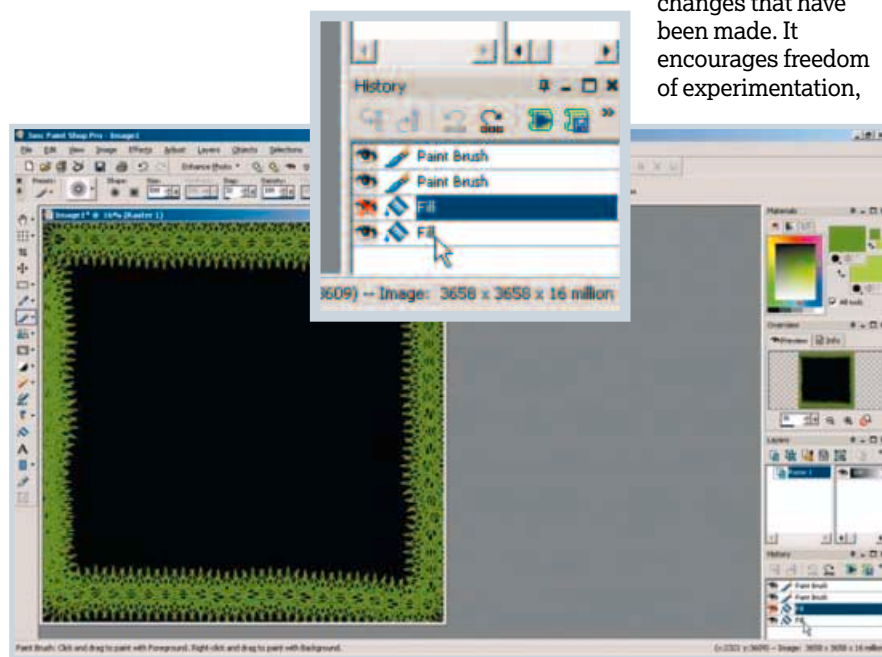


familiarise yourself with how the program works, as the one thing you don't get with a free trial is a printed manual. If you get stuck, you can open the Learning Centre at any time during a session by pressing the F10 key.

As we go through the process of creating our CD insert, we'll explore the tools and features of PSP in detail, but perhaps it's a good idea to get a basic overview first. Like most applications, there is a series of drop-down menus along the top of the screen and various buttons and toolbars underneath these menus. Hover the mouse cursor over each button and a label will appear describing what it does. Now focus your attention on the main workspace. Think of it like a blank canvas, on which you can place as many images as you wish to work on at any one time. To the left of the workspace are the artistic tools, such as paintbrushes, pens and erasers, while to the right are palettes for more global control of your project and the colours and materials being used.

The best way to come to terms with any new program is to experiment with its functions, and PSP is no different. Fortunately, on top of the standard Undo function for removing mistakes (click on the Edit menu and select Undo, or hold down Ctrl and press Z) there is also the History palette, which is visible on the bottom right of the workspace. This allows you to select any modification you have made to an image at any stage and remove it independently of any other

changes that have been made. It encourages freedom of experimentation,



▲ The History palette is a handy tool that lets you undo a change made at any point of your project

Get your copy of Paint Shop Pro

WE REVIEWED PAINT SHOP Pro in issue 182 and while our verdict was positive, you may have been put off by the £100 price tag. However, you can try the program for 60 days free of charge, with no obligation to buy.

Go to www.computeractive.co.uk/downloads/1154515, click on the Free Download button



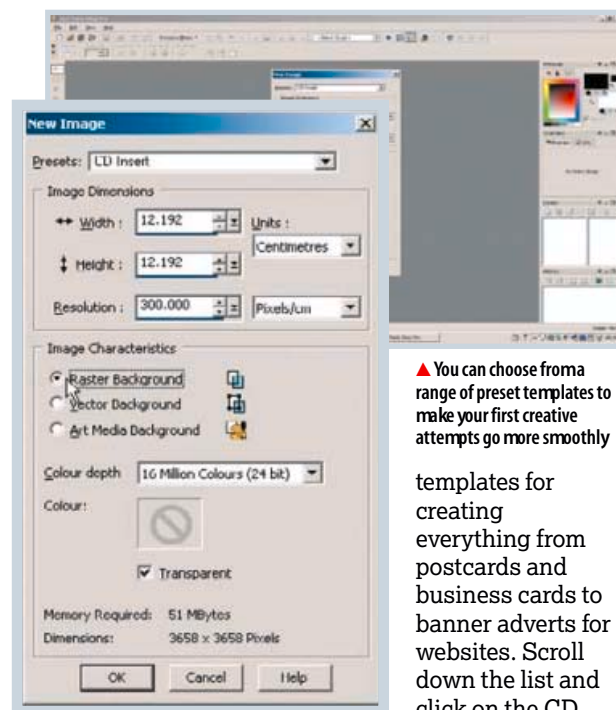
and choose Paint Shop Pro 9 Trial from the list that appears. You'll have to fill out a registration form before downloading. The download is 114Mb, in size which will take six hours on a dial-up internet connection. We have also selected two much smaller but similar applications for you to try – see the box on page 67.

and that is what creativity is all about.

Once you are comfortable with the look and feel of the program, it's time to see it in action. Even for something as simple as a CD insert, the creative possibilities are endless. You may wish to include parts of a digital photo as a background image for the insert. We will show you several ways to do so in the second part of this feature in the next issue, but for now we're going to take creativity to the limit and craft our insert solely from the brushes and artistic media in PSP. By the end, you'll be ready to transform your own ideas into excellent-looking results to impress your friends and family.

Using templates

Click on the File menu and select New. When the New Image dialogue box appears, click on the drop-down menu labelled Presets. Here you will see a list of



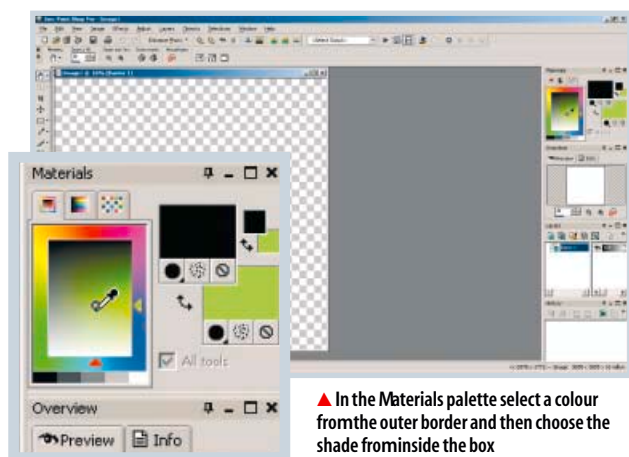
▲ You can choose from a range of preset templates to make your first creative attempts go more smoothly

templates for creating everything from postcards and business cards to banner adverts for websites. Scroll down the list and click on the CD Insert option. This

automatically sets the dimensions of the image to that of a CD case. There's nothing to stop you from doubling the width of the image and creating an insert that can be folded, giving a second side for song titles, for example.

Before clicking on OK to close the New Image dialogue box, take note of the options under Image Characteristics. Your choice here will determine the nature of the 'canvas' used to create your image. We are going to create a project using PSP's own artistic tools, so a Raster background is fine. A vector background is more suitable if you want to incorporate logos or graphic images into your project. We looked at vector graphics in detail in issue 180 and we'll elaborate further on how they can be used in your creative project in part two of this feature. Simply put, vector graphics are made up of lines rather than the tiny dots (or pixels) of raster images such as digital photos, and can be expanded without loss of quality.

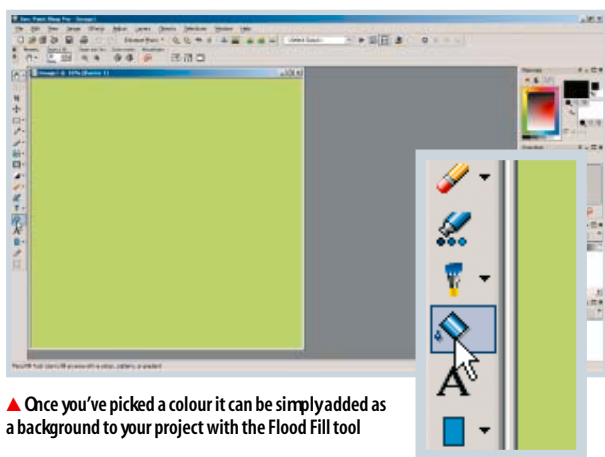
The final option under Image Characteristics is Art Media, which creates a blank canvas for using PSP's Art Media tools. This option allows for different canvas textures, which affect how the Art Media tools



▲ In the Materials palette select a colour from the outer border and then choose the shade from inside the box

look on the image – but we'll get back to this later on. Don't worry if you're confused about which type of background to select – you can always add new layers to your image as you work.

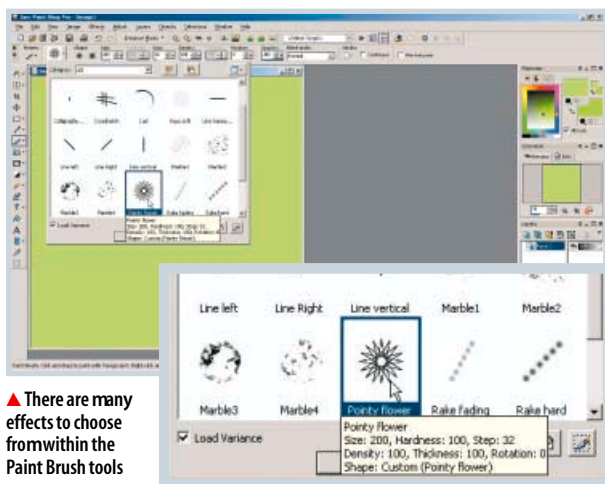
Now click on OK and a CD insert-sized window will appear on the screen. The image background will appear chequered – this just means it is currently empty. You can fill this with a background colour using the colour spectrum on the Materials palette at the top right of the workspace. First select a basic



▲ Once you've picked a colour it can be simply added as a background to your project with the Flood Fill tool

colour from the outer border and then choose a shade of that colour from the middle of the box.

Next click on the Flood Fill tool on the left of the workspace – it looks like a can being tipped over. As the name suggests, it fills an entire area with one colour. Click on the image background and it will change to

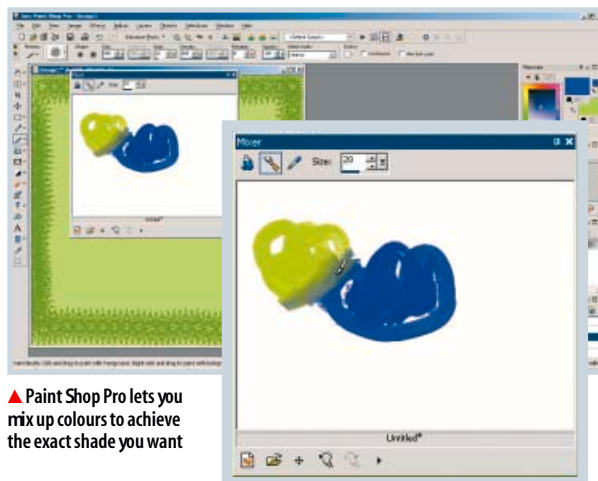


▲ There are many effects to choose from within the Paint Brush tools

your selected colour. We've chosen a bright green.

Now we're going to add some detail to the image using PSP's paint brush tools. Click on the tool that looks like a paint brush. Now, before going any further, look again at the Materials palette. On top of being able to choose the paint colour here, you can also select paint textures, swabs and other more advanced features. Next, take note of the brush options above the main workspace. Here you can adjust the style, weight and shape of the brush.

Explore the many options, paying particular attention to the drop-down menu to the right of the toolbar button labelled Presets. This allows you to choose from a variety of paint brush types. To paint the border of our CD insert, we've chosen the Pointy Flower brush effect. To use a paint brush, simply click and drag on your image. Play around with the various options until you find something you like – don't forget that anything you do can easily be undone or removed if it isn't quite to your liking.

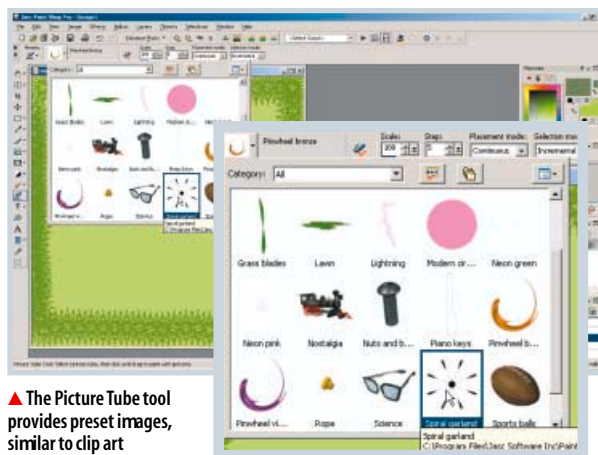


▲ Paint Shop Pro lets you mix up colours to achieve the exact shade you want

Brush up

While we're on the subject of paint brushes, click on the View menu, then Palettes and finally on Mixer. A small window will open on the workspace where you can actually mix colours together as you would in real life. Select the Mixer Dropper tool at the top of the Mixer window, then a colour from the Materials palette, and then select the Mixer Tube and click and drag to 'squirt' some colour into the window.

Now repeat the process with another colour and squirt some next to it. Select the middle tool – the Mixer Knife – and click and drag one colour into another to mix the paint. Now you can select your



▲ The Picture Tube tool provides preset images, similar to clip art

File formats

When saving your project, there is nothing wrong with using PSP's default file format – it has a .psp file extension – if you are only planning on using and modifying the image in PSP. However, if you want to email the image to someone who doesn't have PSP, or plan on having it professionally printed, you're better off saving it as a more common image file format such as JPEG or TIFF.

These formats require your image to be 'flattened' first. This means that the various working layers in your project have to be combined into one. To do this, click on the Layers menu, then select Merge and Merge All (Flatten). It's important to note that once this is done you can no longer work on the individual elements of the image, so make sure you're completely satisfied first.

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TISC 1562

colour from here rather than the materials palette when painting in your image.

Further down the set of tools is the Picture Tube tool. This squirts paint onto the canvas as if from a tube, giving a real feeling of depth and substance. But this tool also has a range of preset image types that can be added – a kind of easy-to-use clip art. Click on this tool and a new set of options will appear above the main window – click on the drop-down menu next to 3D Gold and look at the range of ‘tubes’ you can squirt from. We’ve chosen animals, for example, but you could try nuts and bolts, water droplets or the realistic pool ball option.

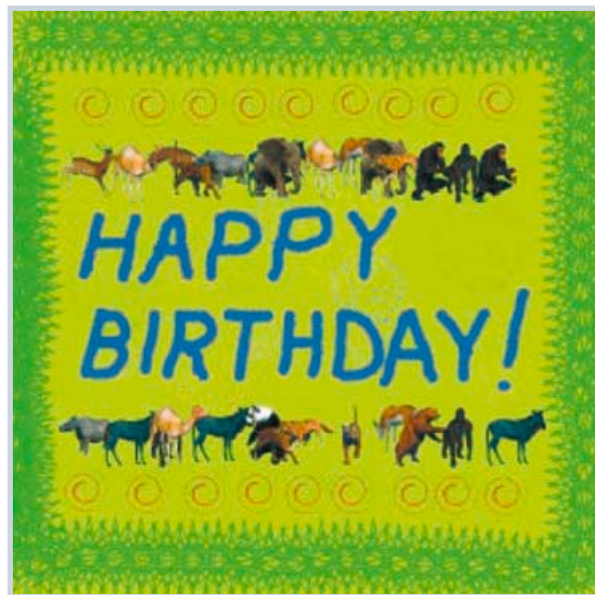
Working with layers

Next, look at the button below the Picture Tube tool. Click on the small arrow next to the Oil Brush, and a choice of eight tools will appear. These are the Art Media tools mentioned earlier. Click on one of the options and draw something on your image. Now

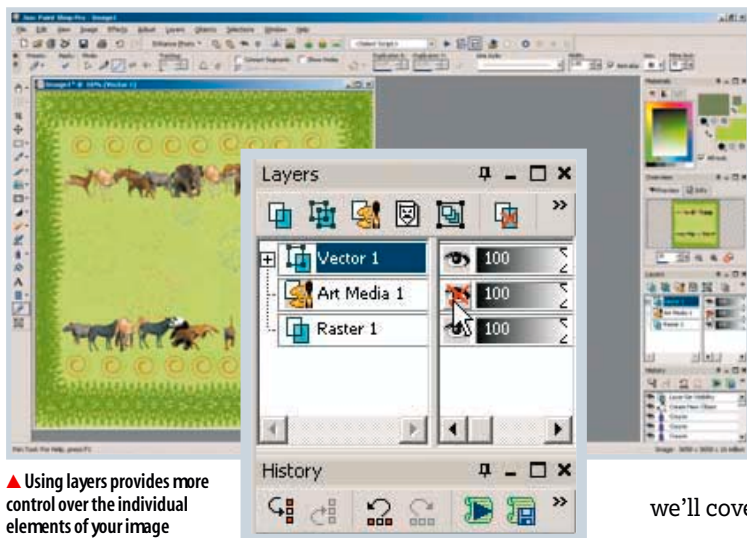
use Art Media tools and an Art Media layer will be created; anything created with the Pen, Rectangle or Text tools will appear on a Vector layer; and raster images will appear on a Raster layer. When working on an image, don’t worry too much about how many layers you build up – these can easily be combined when you have finished.

You’ll inevitably want to add some text to your CD insert, and in keeping with the slightly anarchic approach we’ve taken thus far, we’re going to

draw our text freehand using the crayon in the Art Media tools section. Select this tool, once again noting all the options that appear in the toolbar above the main workspace and adjusting them to suit. We are creating our CD insert to include as part of a child’s birthday present and so we’ve scribbled a suitable message in a bold and colourful style. We did this by clicking and dragging the mouse to write the letters – this is perfect for the style of insert we’re creating but you will have much more accurate and professional results using a dedicated graphics tablet. To enter text using the keyboard, choose the text symbol from the Tools palette – we’ll cover this in more detail in the next issue.



▲ The finished product: a unique and personal gift that took just a little time and effort



▲ Using layers provides more control over the individual elements of your image

look to the palette titled Layers on the right of the workspace. You will see that a new layer has appeared labelled Art Media 1. In order to make controlling your work easier, PSP creates images in layers depending on the type of graphic tools used. If you place some text on top of a logo, for example, with a digital photo behind it, three layers will be created, one for each element of the image. These can be viewed and worked on independently.

In the Layers palette, click on the eye symbol next to one of the layers to hide it. It hasn’t been deleted – just removed from view so you can work on the other layers without any distractions. Look at some of the other options in the Layer palette and see how they adjust the elements of your image. Note that each layer will be named after the type of tools used:

The sky’s the limit

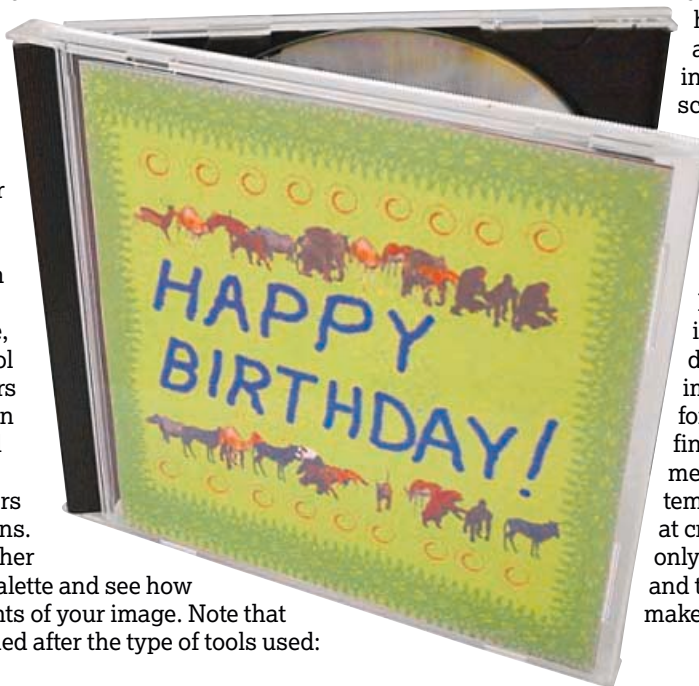
You don’t need to stop here – play around with PSP’s artistic tools to your heart’s content. We are satisfied with our creation, so the final step is to print it and insert it in our gift CD. For the price of a piece of paper and no more than half an hour’s effort we’ve created a unique and personal CD insert – and we’ve only scraped the surface of PSP’s capabilities.

With a little experimentation you will quickly discover more ways of expressing your artistic imagination. In our next issue, we’ll go into more depth on using digital photos and vector images, and suggest ideas for what to do with your finished illustrations. In the meantime, explore the templates and try your hand at creating other projects. The only thing it costs you is time and the rewards are sure to make it all worthwhile.

Martin James

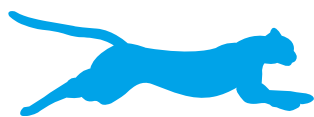
Free and easy art

We’ve chosen Paint Shop Pro because it offers a wide range of creative tools but you can download others that are cheaper or completely free of charge. NeoPaint 4 (www.computeractive.co.uk/downloads/1107654) has lots of drawing and painting tools. After a 30-day free trial, an activation code to unlock the software costs a third the price of Paint Shop Pro, at about £25. Tux Paint (www.computeractive.co.uk/downloads/1144330) is particularly suitable for children and is completely free. Neither will take more than half an hour to download using a dial-up internet connection.





27mph



64mph



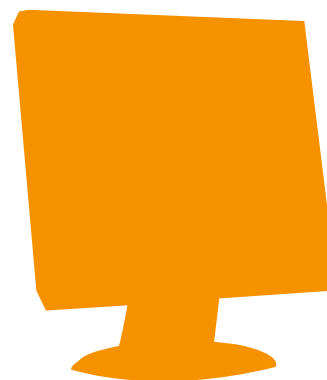
185mph



1875mph



2045mph



10msec



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A world of **difference**

Your computer can open up new worlds and help you learn to sing, speak several languages, play bridge and much more

THE COMPUTER really has reached into all areas of our lives, and this issue we have five diverse pieces of software that prove it.

We begin with some singing lessons using *Singing Coach Unlimited*, a program that will have you holding all the right notes in no time. Next we play bridge in the company of Omar Sharif, starting with simple matches and ending at the world

championships. After that, how about a trip on a virtual train on a track of your own design?

If the Crazy Frog is driving you crazy, *Create Your Own Ring Tones* will help you make music for your mobile in Real Music format. To finish off, how about being able to speak an amazing 31 languages? For just a tenner, *Teaching you 31 Languages of the World* will have you speaking the local lingo no matter where you go in the world.

Martin James

Singing Coach Unlimited



Many people would argue that the ability to sing can't be taught. *Singing Coach Unlimited* aims to prove them wrong, promising to improve both ability and confidence.

The package comes with a headset, complete with microphone, and the first step is to set this up and establish your vocal range. Fortunately, the supplied interactive tutorial, although slightly annoying, guides you through this clearly.

After that, it is simply a matter of working through the exercises and songs. The program marks your progress based on the accuracy of your voice, and won't let you move on until you've reached a sufficient

standard. It can track the progress of up to six users, and you can even compose basic songs to sing along to.

We found the headset to be of a good quality, although you need to sing quite loudly in order for the microphone to record properly.

The program has a strong American flavour and this shows in the supplied songs that make up the

exercises. These are more than just karaoke songs on a computer, however – the MIDI file format means the tempo and key can be adjusted to suit your voice.

It is no substitute for real lessons, but *Singing Coach Unlimited* encourages practice, and that's half the battle. ■



SINGING COACH UNLIMITED
Contact Interactive Ideas Ltd
Tel 020 8805 1000
Info www.interactiveideas.com

Overall ★★ ★

Price £51

Omar Sharif 3D Bridge



Omar Sharif and the game of bridge may seem like a bit of an odd couple but the actor started playing while filming *Lawrence of Arabia* and has been hooked ever since.

The game involves creating a character and tackling a series of artificial opponents in various tournaments, including the world championship. Initially there is only access to Rubber and Chicago Bridge, but win a few matches to demonstrate your skill and you'll be allowed to play Teams-of-Four or Pairs, with Omar Sharif himself as a playing partner.

For those new to bridge, the help

file is both detailed and logical, and each aspect of the game is well explained. There is no direct choice of difficulty to cater for different skill levels but there are ways of making gameplay easier, such as simple bidding.

The interactive elements within the game are subtle and unobtrusive, although the graphics

could be better. There is the option to play between networked computers, and you can save games to come back to at a later stage.

3D Bridge is an enjoyable title that will appeal to fans of the game, beginners and experts alike. ■



OMAR SHARIF 3D BRIDGE
Contact Mindscape
Tel 01293 582630
Info www.mindscape.co.uk

Overall ★★ ★★

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Create Your Own Ring Tones



▲ Create Your Own Ring Tones does one job and does it well, but use it at your own risk

If you despair of the existing ring tones on your Real Music mobile phone, but object to paying over the odds to download new ones, Create Your Own Ring Tones offers a cheaper alternative.

Unlike other Magix software, Create Your Own Ring Tones involves a simple, three-part process, without any complicated menus or toolbars. This is because it only does one job and does it well. The first step is to load a music track, either from a CD or your hard disk in MP3, WAV or WMA format. Next, highlight a section of the song using the program's mixer window. Finally, the selection is converted into the

Real Music format ready to be transferred to a mobile using USB, infrared or Bluetooth. The four-track mixer allows some degree of control and it includes various effects such as distortion, echo and reverb. You can even record your own voice and include it as one of the tracks in the mixer. The finished product can be listened to before transferring it to your phone.

This is a great utility but it does have one major snag. Creating ring tones from commercial music, even for your own use, is illegal unless you hold the copyright for it. There is a warning printed on the case, but even so we simply can't recommend this program. ■



CREATE YOUR OWN RING TONES
Contact Woolworths
Tel 01706 862789
Info www.woolworths.co.uk

Overall ★★

Price £8



▲ A powerful train simulator with a wide range of landscaping tools

Trainz Virtual Railway

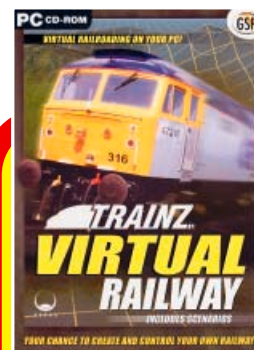
It's hard to think about a train simulator without including some wisecrack about delays, but Trainz is much more than simply an opportunity to show the so-called professionals how it should be done.

There are lots of exercises and scenarios to play out with a variety of trains but what will excite the enthusiasts are the Surveyor and My Collection modes. The former allows you to design your own layout in full 3D, with powerful landscaping tools and a wide range of buildings, tracks, bridges and other

objects that can be included. It's the perfect way to build a dream model train layout at a fraction of the cost.

The My Collection section allows you to view a wide range of railway stock in full 3D, with plenty of supporting information and facts to keep the railway buff happy.

Along with other features, including adjustable weather and international settings, Trainz is a well crafted program that will appeal to all train enthusiasts. ■



TRAINZ VIRTUAL RAILWAY
Contact GSP
Tel 01480 496666
Info www.gsp.cc

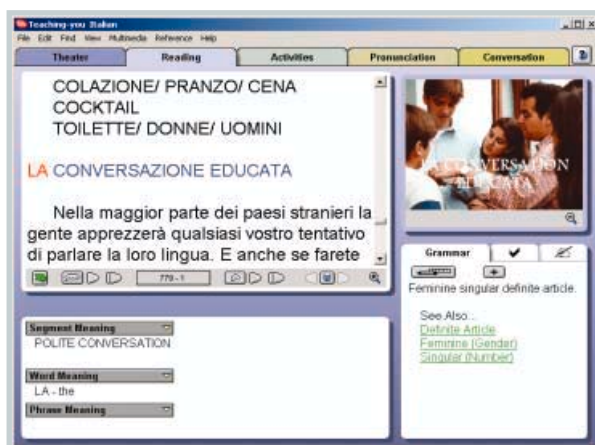
Overall ★★★★★

Price £10

Teaching You 31 Languages of the World

Any program that claims to be able to teach you 31 different languages has a pretty big job on its hands. Leaving aside the fact that few people would ever need to know that many languages (and especially not languages such as Tagalog, Swahili and Haitian Creole), there is a nagging doubt that quantity must inevitably have come at the cost of quality.

Thankfully this is not the case. The program is split over two discs, with most of the more obscure languages relegated to the second disc and the interactive elements for each language can be installed separately – so you don't end up with lots of files relating to a language you



▲ An excellent tool for learning both common and more obscure languages

have no interest in learning.

Selecting a language launches a tabbed workspace with the options Theater, Reading, Activities,

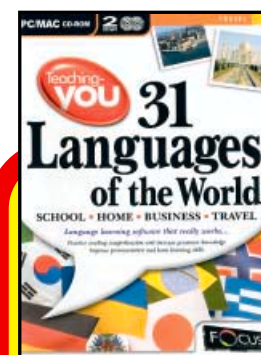
Pronunciation and Conversation. These sections, with their various listening and speaking exercises, will quickly help you build a

BUY IT!
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broad foundation in your chosen language.

There is also a speech analysis tool that compares your recorded pronunciation of words with that of native speakers. We were impressed by the inclusion of grammar rules and references, an area often overlooked by basic language programmes. Naturally, you won't become an expert using this program, but its depth was beyond our expectations considering the number of languages covered.

This is a superb resource for the regular international traveller to help you brush up on both familiar and unfamiliar languages. ■



TEACHING YOU 31 LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD
Contact Focus Multimedia
Tel 01889 570156
Info www.focusmm.co.uk

Overall ★★★★★

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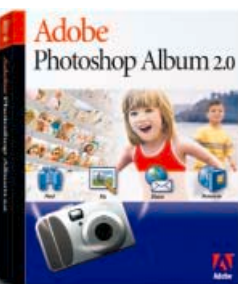
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game doesn't look particularly impressive. Its two-dimensional graphics serve their purpose well, but it looks rather out of date when compared to more modern titles.

One of the most unusual omissions from Stalingrad was any sort of multiplayer mode. Most games of this ilk allow you to play against your friends over a network, or via the internet; no such luck here.

To its credit, Stalingrad has a great soundtrack courtesy of Russian rock band Skafandr. This makes a welcome break from the tried and trusted military drums that help set the scene to most war games.

Stalingrad can be enjoyable, but its

"Despite its interesting premise, Stalingrad fails to make a positive impression"

Stalingrad

Defend Stalingrad against the invading Germans

World War II games are ten-a-penny, with new releases arriving almost monthly. The latest contender is Stalingrad from Black Bean Games, a real-time strategy title that focuses on the German assault on Stalingrad, where the Russians defeated the German army in a significant chapter in the war's history.

The game has two main campaigns; one dealing with the German army's assault on Stalingrad, and the other with the defence of Stalingrad by the Red Army. Before each campaign, you're shown a map of the movements of each force, and given a lengthy briefing about the strategies used in each scenario.

Despite its interesting premise, Stalingrad fails to make a positive impression. You're greeted with a bland and formulaic introduction sequence that does little to set the scene. Also, while most games use animated movies or simple voiceovers before each mission, we had to wade through several pages of text (including spelling mistakes) before getting into the game itself.

Stalingrad is based on the same game engine that powered Blitzkrieg – another real-time World War II

strategy title. If you are familiar with Blitzkrieg, you'll get to grips with Stalingrad in no time at all; if you're not, expect to use a lot of trial and error before you make any real progress. In fact, there is no tutorial mode, so if you have no prior experience with real-time strategy games, you may find it rather difficult. Once the action begins, though, it doesn't take long before

you're in the midst of a full-scale battle.

Being based on Blitzkrieg both helps and hinders Stalingrad. They share a similar level of design, so you'll need to formulate intelligent tactics rather than charge your way to certain death against much stronger foes. Unfortunately the



▲ It's more important to formulate intelligent tactics than to charge straight into battle

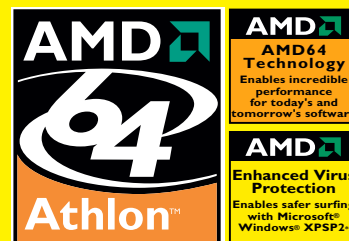
rushed presentation and the fact that it is founded on a much older (and also quite average) game mean it lacks the appeal of its peers. To its credit, it is quite cheap but there is little here to get really excited about.

Rory Reid

Info www.blackbeangames.com
PEGI age rating 12+
Also consider Beyond Blitzkrieg

Overall ★★
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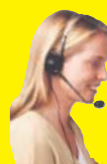
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Sacred: Underworld

Underworld is the official expansion pack for Sacred – a role-playing game that was released to great reception in 2004. To play, you'll need a full copy of Sacred, plus an experienced character (level 25 or higher), but beginners can jump straight into the action using one of two new character classes.

The first of these is the Dwarf – who can use firearms and lay mines. The second is the Daemon – an evil-looking creature that can adapt its skills depending on your needs.

Underworld also shows important data during battle

such as your target's health, level, class and resistance to magic – a useful feature.

If you didn't like the original, there is nothing here to sway your judgment. For fans, though, Underworld is a good diversion until Sacred 2 arrives.

Rory Reid

Info

www.kochmedia.co.uk
PEGI age rating 12+
Also consider
 Dungeon Lords

Overall ★★★★★

Price £20

Games Top 10

Here are the top 10 games according to the official UK Leisure Software chart. ©ELSPA. Compiled by Chart Track.



1 Guild Wars

£30 (online role-play) NCSoft Europe

2 Imperial Glory

£35 (real-time strategy) Eidos

3 Championship Manager 5

£35 (football management) Eidos

4 The Sims: University

£20 (add-on pack for The Sims) EA Games

5 World of Warcraft

£35 (online role-play) Blizzard

6 Football Manager 2005

£35 (football management) Sega

7 Half-Life 2

£40 (first-person shooter) Sierra

8 The Sims 2

£40 (people management) EA Games

9 Boiling Point: Road to Hell

£35 (first-person shooter) Atari

10 Star Wars Galaxies: Rage of the Wookiees

£20 (strategy game) LucasArts



Singles: Triple Trouble

Singles: Triple Trouble is billed as the perfect simulation of a flirtatious life. The main story mode follows Josh, a musician who moves to a new city. On arriving, he moves into a flat with his new friend Kim and his ex-girlfriend, Anna. It's up to you to choose the target of Josh's affections.

As before, you'll need to manage your characters' needs (including friendship and romance) to keep them happy. This can be done by socialising and learning to host intimate dinners, among other things.

Should you get bored of

Josh, there is also a Freeplay mode and 10 quests where you can pair five new characters in their own relationships. On the whole, Singles 2 is a welcome addition to the series. If you enjoyed The Sims and want a more adult and voyeuristic theme, it is ideal.

Rory Reid

Info www.deepsilver.de
PEGI age rating 16+
Also consider Playboy: The Mansion

Overall ★★★★★

Price £20

Guild Wars

Online role-playing games such as Everquest and Dark Age of Camelot can turn out to be pretty expensive, as

they charge a monthly subscription on top of the initial cost of the game itself. Guild Wars breaks that mould by allowing you to play

online with no monthly fee.

It follows the standard role-playing format, allowing you to create a character such as a warrior, magician or priest, and then sending you off on a series of quests in order to gain experience and develop new skills. There's an initial 'warm-up' section that allows you to master basic weapons and skills, and then you're plunged into a war between humanity and a horde of monsters known as the Charr.

At this point you can start to team up with other players on missions against the Charr. You can also form a guild with other players and fight against other guilds in a series

of arenas. This guild-versus-guild combat is limited to relatively small teams of four to eight players per side, meaning Guild Wars doesn't have the huge scale of rivals such as Camelot (where battles can involve dozens or even hundreds of players at once). However, the smaller scale of the game means the game's developers don't need to charge a monthly fee to keep it running.

The game itself is great fun, with exciting combat and spectacular graphics, and the lack of subscription fees makes it an ideal introduction to the online games scene.

Cliff Joseph



Info www.guildwars.com
PEGI age rating 12+
Also consider Dark Age of Camelot

Overall ★★★★★

Price £30

Flat friends

A flat TV needn't be expensive or state of the art. Svelte LCD models are nudging their way into the market between chunky CRTs and over-priced plasmas

There's nothing quite like a large flat-screen telly for showing off when the neighbours come round. They're sleek, elegant and above all pricey. However, in a few years time flat-screen TVs will lose their status symbol because they'll be everywhere. In fact, it won't be long before it will be difficult to even buy a standard **CRT** TV.

The reason for this is that LCD TVs are predicted to take over the television market in much the same way as they've become the primary choice for computer monitors. The benefits of LCD TVs are plain to see. They're extremely thin – a 32in LCD TV is just a couple of inches thick, whereas a similarly sized CRT screen would be around 20in deep. They're also light and so can be mounted on a wall. And because they're digital they are the ideal companion for new technologies such as Media Center PCs.

What's it all about?

Until recently, if you wanted a big, flat TV a plasma screen was your only option. In fact, throughout the 1990s the term plasma was often used as a generic name for flat TVs. Now, most industry insiders accept that plasma technology is nearing the end of the road. There are two reasons for this. The first is that plasmas just aren't economical to make in screen sizes smaller than 32in, and the second is that it's difficult to produce plasmas capable of supporting very-high-resolution video, something that will become increasingly important with the advent of High Definition TV (HDTV) services from the likes of Sky and Telewest next year.

The technology relies on a curious property of liquid crystals to produce images on the screen, but there's much more to an LCD screen than liquid crystal molecules, as the displays are made up of a number of different layers. The first layer is a backlight that illuminates the whole screen. The light from this travels through a polarised filter and then through a layer of red, green and blue liquid crystal cells that make up the **pixels** on the screen. An electric field is subjected to this layer, which allows light to pass through at different intensities. This light then travels through another polarised filter that finally projects the image onto the screen.

The upshot of all this is that even very large LCDs can be extremely thin. It's also generally accepted that LCDs have a longer screen life than plasma sets and that they're not as prone to image 'burn in' – the process where a static image shown for too long on a display leaves behind a permanent ghost-like image. The latest LCD screens also feature very powerful backlights that make them easy to watch even when they're in a room with lots of direct sunlight.



New and improved

LCDs weren't always considered a great option for TV viewing. One problem with early sets was that their viewing angle was very narrow. If you weren't sitting directly in front of the set, the picture would appear dark or the colours would take on unnatural hues. Thankfully, this effect has been substantially reduced. Nowadays most LCDs have a viewing angle that compares favourably with that of CRT sets, however, cheaper displays can still suffer from the problem. If you're thinking of buying an LCD you should look for one that has a horizontal viewing angle of 150-170 degrees and a vertical viewing angle of around 130 degrees.

Older LCD screens also suffered from poor 'response times'. This figure equates to the time it takes the pixels on the screen to react to moving video footage. On a display with a very slow response time you may see a ghost image trail behind fast-moving objects or the screen may look blurred when there's lots of action going on. Response time isn't really an issue with most modern LCDs, but you should always check to make sure the screen you are thinking of buying has a response time of 20ms or less.

The third issue to highlight is that of contrast. To be able to draw out details such as shadows and shades of grey in darker scenes a display needs to have a good contrast ratio. Early LCD displays struggled in this area with the result that different shades of grey or



Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

CRT The glass tube-based technology used to produce an image in most TV sets and monitors.

DVI A video connection used on some TFT monitors and graphics cards that provides a purely digital connection between a PC and monitor. This gives a higher quality image than using a standard VGA connection.

HDMI A specification that combines video and audio in a digital interface for DVD players, digital TV players and so on.

Pixel Short for picture element, which is the smallest part of an image displayed on a monitor or captured by a scanner or digital camera.

Resolution The amount of detail shown in an image, whether on screen or printed. For a screen, it is the number of pixels it can display (typically 1024 x 768 pixels for a 17in monitor).

For more on Jargon Buster visit:
www.computeractive.co.uk



▲ If money and space are no object then the 37in Philips 37PF9986 may be right up your ambient-lit street
 ▶ The SagemHD-L27 has a built-in memory card reader so you can view your digital photos in the living room

scenes containing lots of shadows descend into blobs of black. Obviously this is not good for movie watching as it can make even modern action films look like a 1940s horror movie. To avoid this

problem look for an LCD TV with a contrast ratio of a minimum of 400:1.

Connection inspection

LCD TVs use digital technology so they usually have a **DVI** socket that allows them to be hooked up to a computer. This makes them ideal for Media Center PCs. However, just like computer monitors, LCD TVs can have different native screen **resolutions**.

The cheapest LCD TVs generally have a resolution of 640 x 480 or 800 x 600 and an aspect ratio of 4:3. This is fine for watching analogue TV broadcasts, but not really suitable for viewing widescreen images from DVDs or digital TV. To get the most from these signals you'll need a set with a widescreen aspect ratio of 16:9.

Most widescreen sets have a resolution of 1,280 x 768 or higher, which means they're also capable of showing high-definition signals – a very high quality service expected to launch in the UK next year. However, in future Sky and other high-definition broadcasters may insist that sets have to support an encryption system called High Definition Content Protection (HDCP) to be compatible with their services. The industry has agreed a new labelling system for sets that will be fully compatible with these services, so if you want a set that's guaranteed to work with HDTV look for the HD-Ready logo.

▶ This Samsung TV supports HDCP and is fully compatible with HDTV



Spoilt for choice

There are now tons of LCD TVs on the market. Naturally, the most affordable sets are smaller in size. A good example of a more affordable TV is the 17in Samsung 730MW. This widescreen set costs around £430 and is a jack-of-all-trades. It has a built-in analogue TV tuner, can be used as a computer monitor and even comes with an FM radio tuner. More impressive is the fact that it will be fully compatible with HDTV services thanks to its 1,280 x 768 resolution and support for HDCP on its DVI input.

Of course, most people will need a larger set for the living room. As you move up in terms of screen size, the price also rises substantially, such as the 27in Sagem HD-L27 at around £1,000. This set is HDTV compatible and features other goodies such as a built-in memory card reader so you can display your digital snaps on your TV.

Those with money to burn will probably want a much larger set like the Philips 37PF9986. This is a 37in widescreen HDTV-compatible display that costs a wallet-draining £4,000. It uses Philips' wacky-but-effective Ambilight technology to improve colour and contrast performance. Ambilight TVs project a number of small lights onto the wall behind the TV, which change colour and brightness according to what's on the screen. It sounds crazy, but it does actually work.

A flat future?

There's no denying that the current crop of LCD TVs are very expensive, especially the larger screen sizes. But there's little doubt that the technology represents the future of TV and over the coming years the price will gradually fall more into line with what we currently expect to pay for a CRT television. When that happens there'll be little excuse for having a big CRT telly taking up so much space in the living room.

Niall Magennis

10 top TV tips

1. Check that the set has enough connectors to cope with everything you're going to plug into it.
2. Plasmas are generally cheaper than LCDs at screen sizes over 40in, so if you're on a budget an LCD TV may not be the best option for you.
3. If possible, get a demo of the TV and check that the picture doesn't look dark and muddy as this is a sign of a poor contrast ratio.
4. If you're planning on using the set with the Freeview digital service consider an IDTV model that has an integrated Freeview tuner.
5. Look for a TV with an **HDMI** connector, as it's the most modern and highest quality way to connect an LCD TV to a set-top box or DVD player.
6. LCD screens can suffer from stuck pixels – dots on the screen that constantly stay lit. Always try to get a demo of the screen you are actually going to take home to make sure it doesn't have any dead pixels.
7. Take a look at the TV from the side to make sure that the viewing angle is suitable for your room at home.
8. Check the features before you buy. Cheaper sets may lack features like Teletext and picture-in-picture support.
9. In the future all TV will be digital and broadcast in widescreen so it's best to opt for a widescreen set even if your budget is limited.
10. If you want to be able to use the set with a High-Definition service in the future look for the HD-Ready logo that guarantees compatibility.



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Do not 'mint return' Destroy voucher.



0 000031 364003 >

FREE Downloads

We've trawled the internet to test what you can get for free...

PAINT.NET 2

www.computeractive.co.uk/2129101

A replacement for Windows Paint

This enhanced version of Windows Paint includes extra tools which are normally to be found in commercial picture programs.

Type: Freeware

File size: 4.9Mb

Download at 56K: 17 minutes



Overall ★★★★★

BLAZE MEDIA PRO 5

www.computeractive.co.uk/2129118

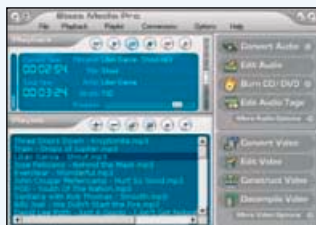
All-in-one media converter

A media player and converter with support for all kinds of audio and video formats. It has an impressive audio editor and basic video editor.

Type: Time-limited demo

File size: 9.9Mb

Download at 56K: 35 minutes



Overall ★★★★★

SAM 1.0.4.0

www.computeractive.co.uk/2129092

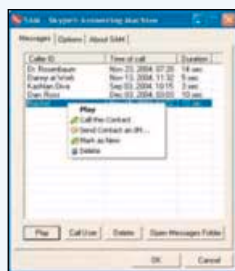
An answering machine for Skype

Skype doesn't have its own answering service, so you can use this program to answer calls for you. Like a real machine, you can record a greeting and save incoming messages.

Type: Freeware

File size: 526Kb

Download at 56K: 2 minutes



Overall ★★★★★

MSN SEARCH TOOLBAR

www.computeractive.co.uk/2135248

Search your Desktop with MSN

This is Microsoft's offering to the world of programs to search your computer. After indexing your files it will find any document in seconds.

Type: Freeware

File size: 5.35Mb

Download at 56K: 19 minutes



Overall ★★★

PICMASTER 3.9.2

www.computeractive.co.uk/2128654

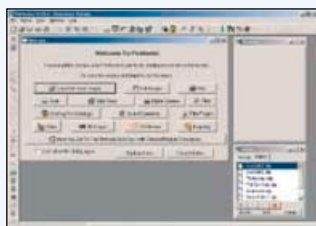
An image editor with nifty features

As well as editing pictures PicMaster can create 3D images – to be viewed with 3D glasses – from your pictures and add other special effects.

Type: Shareware

File size: 1.5Mb

Download at 56K: 6 minutes



Overall ★★★

Site seeing...

Expand your musical horizons with our selection of music download sites you may not have heard of

Go to www.computeractive.co.uk to find quicklinks to all these featured websites

www.bleep.com

Bleep sells music from a wide selection of British and worldwide independent record labels. The tracks are stored in a high-quality MP3 format, meaning they can be played on any portable player and burned to CDs as much as you like. Single tracks, including content not available elsewhere, are 99p while albums are £7 and double albums are £9.



www.wippit.com

Wippit's downloads start at 29p, and its catalogue includes music from major labels as well as independent ones. You can pay by credit card or via mobile phone or even opt for a yearly subscription, which allows you to download as much as you like from a selection of at least 60,000 songs, for no further charge.



www.djdownload.com

For budding digital DJs, DJ Download gives you the chance to listen to the best new dance tunes from the comfort of your own home. You can listen to all of the tracks on the website, and download them, in high quality, with prices starting at £1.49 per track. There is also information on featured labels and competitions.



www.warchildmusic.com

War Child is a charity working in The Congo, Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as the former Yugoslavia, where its work began in the 1990. Its download site includes hits from major artists as well as up-and-coming acts and plenty of independent music. Profits from the site go to support the charity's work with children in war-torn countries.



SITE OF THE FORTNIGHT

www.bbfc.co.uk

The British Board of Film Classification is the body that issues age rating certificates to films and video and DVD releases. Its website gives an easy way to check up on film ratings, and to find out exactly what they mean. The site includes a searchable database of theatrical, video, and DVD releases, giving ratings and the reasons a rating has been awarded, and lists of what scenes were cut and why.





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Win Lycos products worth over £2,400!

Get your photos, your opinions, or anything you want online with Lycos Web Hosting

The internet gives everybody the opportunity to make their mark in the world, but setting up a website can be a complicated process. Now, however, the All-in-one package from Lycos Web Hosting makes it easier than ever to set up a website.

If you have been hankering to design and create a website of your own, we can help you. Computeractive has teamed up with Lycos to offer one lucky reader an HP DX6100 PC worth £1,750 and one year's free web hosting from Lycos.

The DX6100 has a 2.8GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor with 512Mb of memory. There is an 80Gb hard disk and a CD-RW/DVD combo drive. A 17in flat-panel monitor gives a generous display without taking up too much room on your desk. Windows XP Professional is installed along with a copy of Microsoft Office 2003. A three-year warranty comes with the computer for long-term peace of mind.

Lycos is also giving away 11 one-year subscriptions to the All-in-one Web Hosting package as runners-up prizes. Worth £60 each, the package includes a web address and a very generous 1,000Mb of web space, which is more than enough for a

WHAT YOU CAN WIN

First prize is a HP DX6100 PC and one year free web hosting
11 runners-up will receive a year's free web hosting

large photo gallery. In addition, there is an email account that enables you to have up to 100 addresses.

Free with the All-in-one package is the OneClickSite tool. This allows you to set up a website quickly and easily, allowing you to create a weblog, put a digital photo gallery online and more. Other advanced options include the ability to create dynamic websites that are more interactive. Lycos offers a range of web-hosting services to match all kinds of user and traffic needs, so whatever your web needs are, Lycos has the solution.



◀ Create your own websites with Lycos Web Hosting and this HP PC



How to enter

Simply answer the question below and return it before 7 July to: Lycos competition, Computeractive, PO Box 10218,

Sutton Coldfield, B76 1ZB

Alternatively, you can enter online at www.computeractive.co.uk/competition.
<http://webhosting.lycos.co.uk>

LYCOS COMPETITION

How to enter by post

Just answer the following question and send the answer, to arrive by 7 July 2005, to: Lycos competition, Computeractive, PO Box 10218, Sutton Coldfield, B76 1ZB. Please complete the entry form in clear, block capitals.

Question

How much web space is available with the All-in-one hosting package?

- a) 1,000Kb ☐
b) 1,000Mb ☐
c) 1,000Gb ☐

Name: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Daytime phone no: _____

Email: _____

Standard competition rules apply. Competition not open to employees of Lycos or VNU Business Publications. There is no cash alternative and the Editor's decision is final. Offer applies to UK and Irish Republic only. Photocopied forms, postcards or sealed envelopes with the answers on the back are also acceptable. Only one entry per household. Email entries not accepted. We may use your contact details to communicate with you regarding Computeractive. ☐ I am a subscriber to Computeractive. We may use the contact details supplied to communicate with you regarding PCW. ☐ I am a subscriber to PCW. Email: ☐ Tick box to receive information about other products and services from the VNU Group by email. ☐ Tick box to receive information about products and services from selected companies by email. Postal/telephone: ☐ Tick box if you do not want to receive information about other products and services from the VNU. ☐ Tick box if you do not want to receive information about products and services from selected companies by post/telephone.

Congratulations

To issue 186's competition winners. An HP PC and copy of Settlers IV and The Bard's Tale goes to S Thrower, London. A copy of Settlers IV and The Bard's Tale goes to Garry Abbott, Coventry, Penny Beeston, Redcar, G Billings, Winchester, Christopher Cundall, Birkenhead, George Easton, Fraserburgh, Pearl Farrier, Kinver, M A Fisher, Leominster, Jim Halliday, Wishaw, Jim Kennedy, Co Galway, Hassni Malik, Brighton, Gill Pawson, Hemel Hempstead, Brian Scott, Amesbury, Linda Taylor, Blackpool, David Withington, Wigan

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [HTTP://WEBHOSTING.LYCOS.CO.UK](http://webhosting.lycos.co.uk)



noproblem@computeractive.co.uk

Answers to... PC PROBLEMS

Our resident technical doctor is here
to cure your PC ailments

Jargon Buster

Techno babble
demystified...

- **Dialogue box** A small window that pops up to display or request information. In Windows, Menu options that end with an '...' always open a dialogue box.
- **Motherboard** The main circuit board inside any PC into which every other component connects.
- **Processor** The chip that is the 'brain' of the computer. The faster the processor, the better a computer will perform.
- **Registry** A database integrated into Windows which stores information on all hardware and software installed on your PC.
- **Spam** Junk email sent to large groups of people offering such things as money-spinning ideas, holidays, and so on.
- **Spyware** Software installed (usually surreptitiously) as part of another application installation specifically to monitor and report back on a computer's use.
- **Virus** A malicious computer program designed to cause at best annoyance and at worst, damage to computer data. They are often hidden in innocuous-looking files or email attachments.
- **Web browser** A software program developed for navigating the internet.

For more on Jargon Buster visit:
www.computeractive.co.uk

Erroneous emails

Q I use Outlook Express 6 and my emails have started printing out in a large font size. Up until now it has always printed the messages in 10 point size. Now it takes several pages to print a message of only a few paragraphs, which is unsightly and costly. The From, To, Subject and Sent header sizes are still OK. I cannot recollect changing any options recently that might have caused this difficulty. How can I return to the previous setting?

Dave Sutton, via email

A This problem can happen when the font settings on your printer and Outlook Express are different, but it is straightforward to change this back again.

First you must change the font size in both Outlook Express and Internet Explorer so they are the same size. Start Outlook Express and click on the Tools menu followed by Options. Select the Read tab and click on Fonts. Select Smallest and then on OK twice. Close Outlook Express. Now start Internet Explorer, click on the View

menu, then on Text size and select Smallest. Close Internet Explorer and restart your computer. Once the computer has restarted you can change the font size for Outlook Express using the same method as above. <http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;276435>.

Unwanted company

Q The Windows XP Search Companion has appeared on the left-hand side of my Windows Explorer panel. I find this confusing but I don't know how to turn it off. I have tried System Restore but this has not made any difference. How can I stop it?

Ted Berry, via email

A The Search Companion can be turned on and off using the Search button in the toolbar of a Windows Explorer window. If this button is not on the toolbar, or the toolbar is not visible, you can turn the Search Companion off by pressing Ctrl+E. This will show the normal Explorer bar with common tasks. The other keyboard shortcuts you can use with Windows Explorer

are Ctrl+I to show your Favourites and Ctrl+H to show the History.

Is the floppy dead?

Q I hope to replace my desktop computer soon but I have a small worry; some of the PCs I am interested in do not have a floppy drive. I have a considerable number of floppy disks, so I will not be able to use them on the new computer. Are external floppy drives available to plug into a PC?

Dick Richardson, via email

A Floppy disks have largely been superseded by CDs, **USB** keys and other forms of removable storage. However, many manufacturers will add such a drive to a system, if you order it as an optional extra. If that is not possible, then you can buy an external floppy disk drive for your new computer. Prices start from around £15 for a drive that plugs in to a computer's USB port – go to www.computeractive.co.uk/activeprices and search for 'USB floppy' for some suitable devices.

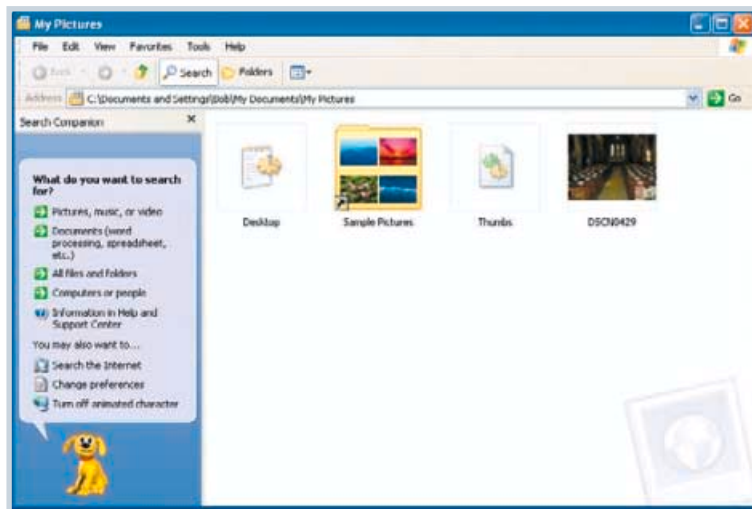
Alternatively, if your new PC has a spare drive bay, and you are comfortable opening it up, you may be able to fit an internal floppy disk drive and avoid having to use an external box.

Out of control emails

Q When I click on a link to an email address in Internet Explorer, lots of Internet Explorer windows open rather than my email program and an error message appears that says, "Could not perform this operation because the default mail client is not properly installed".

As far as I know, my email software is working perfectly. How can I click on these links and have my email work properly?

James Morely, via email



▲ The Windows Search Companion is useful if you want to find files but can also be easily hidden from view

A Start Internet Explorer and click on the Tools menu. Select Internet Options from the menu and then click on the Programs tab. Use the drop-down menu with the title E-mail to select an email program other than the one you are using and click on Apply. When the cursor has returned to normal, change the menu back to your usual email program and press Apply again. Click on OK to close the window. This should return your computer to normal again. This can sometimes happen because of a **Registry** cleaner program or if you have recently installed a new email program. ■

Society news

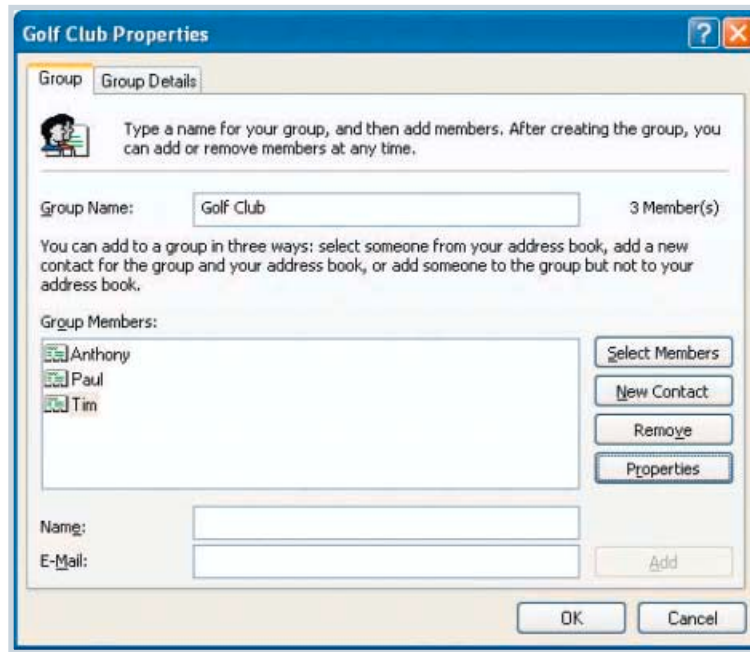
Q I manage a society's membership list in Microsoft Works Database. How can I extract email addresses to use in Outlook Express and send an email to the whole society?

Ken Cropper, via email

A You can send emails to multiple addresses in Outlook Express by using Groups in the Windows Address Book and import contact details from a Microsoft Works Database file.

Start Outlook Express, click on the File menu, then Import and finally on Other Address Book. Select Works address book (Works database file) at the bottom of the window that appears and click on Import. Use the Browse button in the next window to find the Works Database file containing the contact information you want and click on OK. If you used the template fields in Works Database for the contact details, Outlook Express will automatically enter the information in the address book. Fields that it does not recognise can either be put in the Notes field in the address book or ignored. Make your selection and then click on Import. A window will appear to tell you that the import was successful. Click on OK to make it disappear and then on Close in the Import **dialogue box**.

To create a group in the Address Book, click on the Addresses icon in the Toolbar in Outlook Express or hold down the Control and Shift keys and press B if you cannot see the icon. Click on the New icon in the Address Book toolbar and select New Group. A window will appear in which you can give the group a name and select members



▲ Use Groups in the Outlook Express Address Book to send out emails to mailing lists

of the group. Click on the Select Members button and pick contacts to include in the group by clicking on each of them and then the Select button. You can use the Find button to look for all the contacts with a common word in their Address Book entry and then select them all by clicking on the first contact, scrolling down to the last contact, and holding down the Shift button as you click on the last contact. Click on the Select button to add them all to the group.

To send an email to all the contacts in the group, click on the To button in the New Message window and double-click on the Group name to select it, then click on OK. Write your message and send it as normal and it will be sent to every member of the group. ■

Boomerang folders

Q In Internet Explorer Favorites there is an entry called Links. However many times I delete this, it always reappears when I next use the computer. How can I remove this unwanted folder?

I use Window XP Home with Service Pack 2.

P W Hunt, via email

A This is a special folder that Windows uses for other programs as well as Internet Explorer. Windows will recreate essential folders when it discovers that they have been deleted and so there is no way to remove it. Unfortunately, you will have to leave it where it is. ■

Spammers can use this pathway to establish an email addresses is active and then send spam to it.

When Outlook Express blocks the images in a message, a bar appears at the top of the message telling you what it has done, if you click on the bar, the images will be downloaded and shown in the email. Be sure to only do this with emails from people you trust. For more information on SP2, visit www.windowsupdate.com. ■

Lacking Service Pack 2

Q I have just bought a factory-reconditioned Advent T9201 computer. It does not have Service Pack 2. I have been told that as this computer has the Prescott Pentium 4 **processor** it may not work if I install Service Pack 2. I know I need Service Pack 2 but what can I do?

Geraldo, Bristol

Altered images

Q When I receive emails from eBay and The National Trust, they contain images I cannot view. They appear as blank squares with a red cross in the top left-hand corner. I am using Outlook Express on a Windows XP PC. I have also recently installed the latest version of Norton Security 2005.

W Spurdens, Somerset

A Since the security update for XP, called SP2, Outlook Express no longer displays images in **HTML** emails to protect you from **spam**. The images are not attached to the email; click on one and it will be retrieved via the internet.

A This problem affected certain **motherboards** that did not support the Prescott processor properly. Microsoft has a fix to install on your computer before installing Service Pack. You can find it at <http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?kbid=885626>. If you need to install the fix you can follow our Workshop in issue 177. ■

Paying off spies

Q A few weeks ago Spyware Doctor detected the Sah Agent in Explorer. Spyware Doctor was a free download but it wanted me to buy the full version in order to remove this Agent. As I mostly use Mozilla Firefox will this **spyware**

We can work it out!

If your PC or software is driving you up the wall, send us the details of the problem and we'll try to print a solution that will help you

Contact us by email at noproblem@computeractive.co.uk or by post at: No Problem, Computeractive, 32-34 Broadwick Street, London W1A 2HG. Whether responding by post or email, please include your telephone number and address. Unfortunately, we can't reply personally to your letters and emails or give technical advice over the phone. When sending a query, tell us about your PC and include full information about the hardware and software you're using. Screenshots of your problem would also be useful (try hitting the Print Screen button and then using Paste in the Edit menu of your image processor).

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affect me? Is there a way to eliminate it for free?

Tina Bullock, via email

A The Sah Agent is from a site called ShopAtHomeSelect.com and is used to record shopping habits. It may redirect your **web browser** to sites you did not select. You should certainly remove it as it can affect other programs.

Spyware Doctor is not the only anti-spyware program available, there are two free alternatives that we recommend – Ad-Aware SE (www.computeractive.co.uk/2128934) and SpyBot Search and Destroy (www.computeractive.co.uk/2128856). These programs should be able to find and remove all traces of this spyware.

If you need to remove this spyware manually, you should be able to find it in the Add/Remove Programs section of the Control Panel. Alternatively, you can find more detailed instructions at www3.ca.com/securityadvisor/pest/pest.aspx?id=453076082. ■

Autofill for all

Q When I was using Internet Explorer, I regularly used the Autofill function of the Google toolbar to fill in web forms automatically. After switching to Mozilla Firefox, I cannot install the Google toolbar. Can it be installed in Opera or other browsers?

Noel Stuart, via email

A While you cannot install the Google toolbar in Firefox or Opera (Google says it is working on versions for both browsers), there are alternative ways to automatically fill in forms.

You can install an Autofill extension to Firefox. Go to <http://autofill.mozdev.org>, click on Installation, then the download link and follow the instructions. This will do the same thing as the Google Autofill function. Once it is installed, you will need to close and reopen Firefox, then add the button to a toolbar. Click on the View menu, then on Toolbars, and Customise. Scroll down to the yellow pencil-shaped Autofill icon and drag it to one of the toolbars.

Finally, go to the Tools menu and click on Autofill, then Autofill Options, and fill in as many of your details as you want to be available automatically. Now, whenever you fill in a form, the fields that can be automatically filled will be

▲ You can install an extra toolbar into Firefox to fill in online forms automatically

highlighted in yellow. To fill them, click on the pencil icon.

Opera has a similar system built in. You can type your details in the Preferences and then right-click on a form to enter them. If you want to have the advanced search features of the Google toolbar in Firefox, go to the Googlebar extension (<http://googlebar.mozdev.org>) and click on the link marked 'Install Now: Firefox'. ■

The key to searching

Q When using Internet Explorer, I often find myself needing to search a page for keywords. I know Google offers a view of the page with keywords highlighted, but if I have not accessed the page through Google is there any way to search a page for specific words?

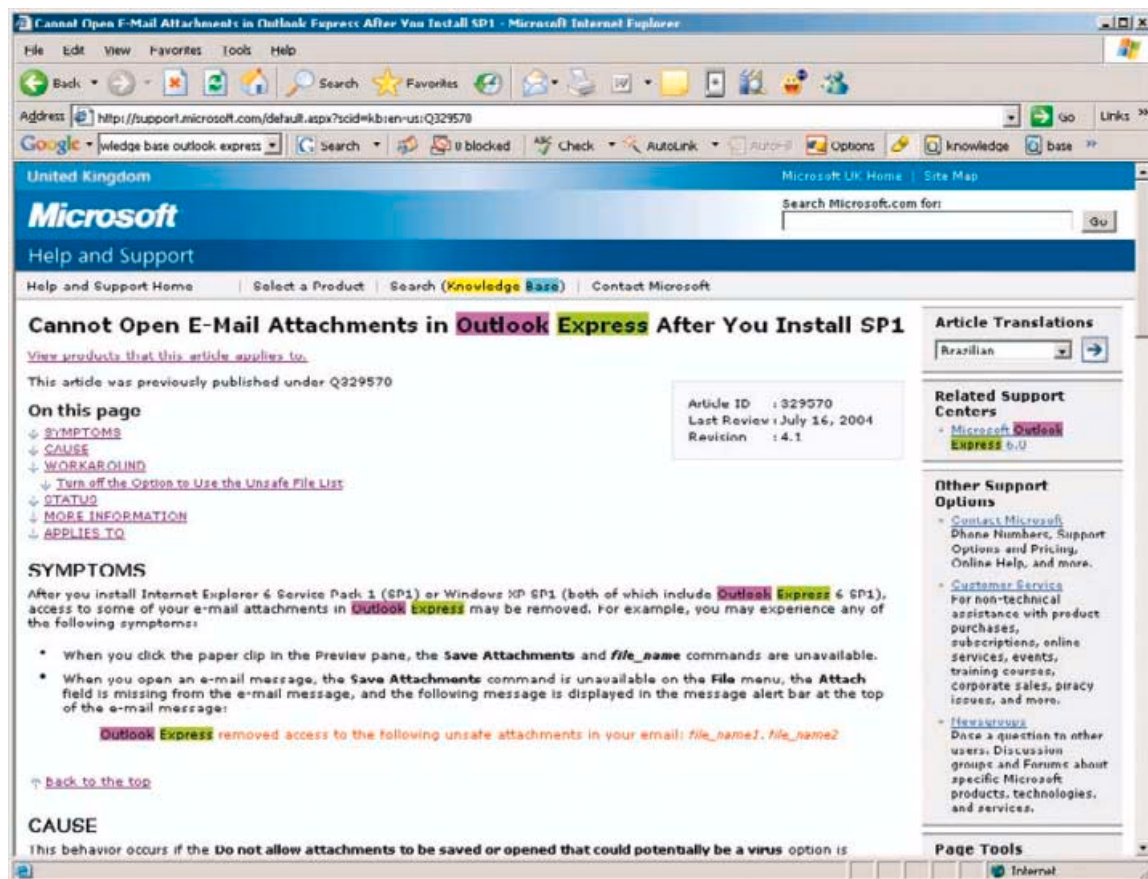
Patrick Hudson, via email

A You can search a page for words in Internet Explorer using the Find function – click on the Edit menu, then click on 'Find (on this page)' or press Ctrl and F to get the same function. Enter a search term and click on the Find Next button. If you want a bit more control, try installing the Google toolbar for Internet Explorer (<http://toolbar.google.com>).

In addition to making it easier to search Google, this also makes it easier to search inside a page, as you want to. Once you have installed it, any words you type in the toolbar's search box will appear on the right of the toolbar in a special area. Clicking any of these words will search the page for the word. Clicking on the yellow highlighter pen icon in the toolbar will highlight any search terms in the web page you have open. ■

Home security

Q In issue 185 you recommended a program called Down2Home for keeping track of how much data you download from the internet. I have tried to download it but cannot access the site due to a security problem. When I click on the link to download the file, an error message appears which



▲ Use the Google Toolbar in Internet Explorer to highlight search terms in a web page



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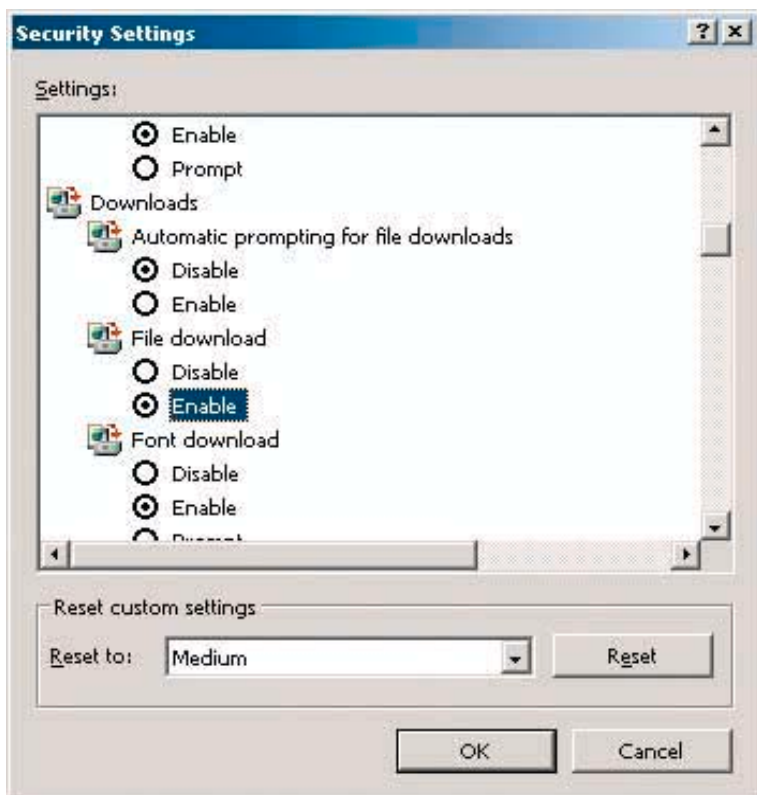
DATE

We will use one or more of the various contact details supplied to contact you about Computeractive including your subscription, reader research and related products or events. Please indicate below your privacy wishes for other contact from VNU and 3rd party organisations: Email ☐ Tick box to receive information about other products or services from the VNU group of companies by email ☐ Tick box to receive information about products or services from selected companies by email Mobile/SMS ☐ Tick box to receive information about other products and services from the VNU group of companies by SMS ☐ Tick box to receive information about products and services from selected companies by SMS Postal/telephone ☐ Tick box if you do NOT want to receive information about other products and services from the VNU group of companies by post/telephone ☐ Tick box if you do NOT want to receive information about products and services from selected companies by post/telephone. Offer available in the UK only, for overseas subscriptions call +44 (0)1858 438870. Offer limited to one gift per household, please allow 28 days for delivery.

Offer Ends: 31st July 2005 Source Code: C219

* READERS TO THE RESCUE...

Can you help your fellow readers? Do you need a problem solved? Join our forum dedicated to PC trouble-shooting at www.computeractive.co.uk



▲ Adjust the security settings in Internet Options to allow trusted downloads

says: "Your current security settings do now allow this file to be downloaded". How can I get hold of this file? I am using Windows XP Professional, with Norton Anti-virus and the ZoneAlarm firewall installed.

Robert Gowing, via email

A The problem here is that your computer is a little too secure. Internet Explorer's security settings have been set at high, so it will not allow you to download any programs because they could harm your computer. While this can be useful to reduce the risk of downloading **viruses** or spyware, it can be a little restrictive.

To change the settings, open Internet Explorer and go to the Tools menu, then select Internet Options. In the dialogue box that appears, click on the Security tab, and click on the Internet icon (a globe), then on Custom Level. Scroll down the list that appears until you find the Downloads section. In that section you will find an entry marked 'File download' which will be set to Disable. Click on the circle next to Enable for this entry, then click on OK. Click on OK again to close the Internet Options box, and you will now be able to download the file.

If you are concerned about security, you can always change the setting back once you have downloaded the file. If you wish to

do so, repeat the instructions above, but click on the circle next to Disable, then click on OK. ■

Broadband hang-ups

Q I have been using BT broadband for about a year with web-based email. Recently BT Yahoo has allowed Outlook Express to be used but I now find I have a problem with my internet connection.

If I open Outlook Express I get the usual log-on screen and when I click on Connect, BT Yahoo is connected. Incoming emails are downloaded in a few seconds and then the computer disconnects itself. I then have to go through the log-on process again and it will stay connected. But if I then type an email and try to send it the computer disconnects itself from the internet after I hit the 'send' button, until I log on again.

Alan Burke, Brighton

A Outlook Express has been set to automatically close your internet connection once it has finished sending and receiving email. To fix it, open Outlook Express and click on the Tools menu, then Options. Click on the Connection tab in the dialogue box that appears, and remove the tick from the box marked 'Hang up after sending and receiving'. Then click OK to close the box. ■

THE PROBLEM

I need to access symbols such as the acute accent and the tilde used in Spanish. I understand that it is possible to get these characters by holding down the Alt key and typing a number sequence for each character, but nothing happens when I try this.
Sean Burns, Issue 190

YOUR ANSWER

There is an easier way to access these symbols. For the upside-down '?' press and hold the Ctrl,Alt and Shift, then press the '?' symbol on the keyboard. For the upside-down '!' press and hold Ctrl+Alt+Shift then press the '!' symbol. For the acute accent, press and hold Ctrl, then hit the apostrophe key and press the letter to be accented. For the tilde, press and hold Ctrl and Alt, hit the '~' and then type the n.
Chris Morris, Cowplain, Hants

THE PROBLEM

I have over 1,000 35mm colour slides of my family. I would love to scan them into my PC and put them onto CD or DVD to share with the family. What is the best way to do this and what equipment do I need?
Eric Cryer, via 190

YOUR ANSWER

You could use a scanner with a transparency adapter. I use an Epson Perfection 2580 scanner and have achieved excellent results. This scanner is a flatbed type which will scan slides, and it will also produce positive images from film negatives. Shop around and you should be able to get the scanner for just over £80.
Mal Rowlatt, via email

A better way than scanning is to project the slides at an angle (say 45°) onto a flat, white screen, and use a digital camera on a tripod, placed at the opposite angle an equal distance from the screen to take a picture of the projected image. For best results, use a bright projector in a darkened room. You can then download the resulting images from the camera to the PC. I have printed over 3,000 slides, up to A4 size, this way without a noticeable reduction in quality.

Jean Lloyd, Ceredigion

* Your help wanted

If you can answer the questions below, or have questions you want answered, write to the No Problem address given on the left, or go to our website: www.computeractive.co.uk

THE PROBLEM

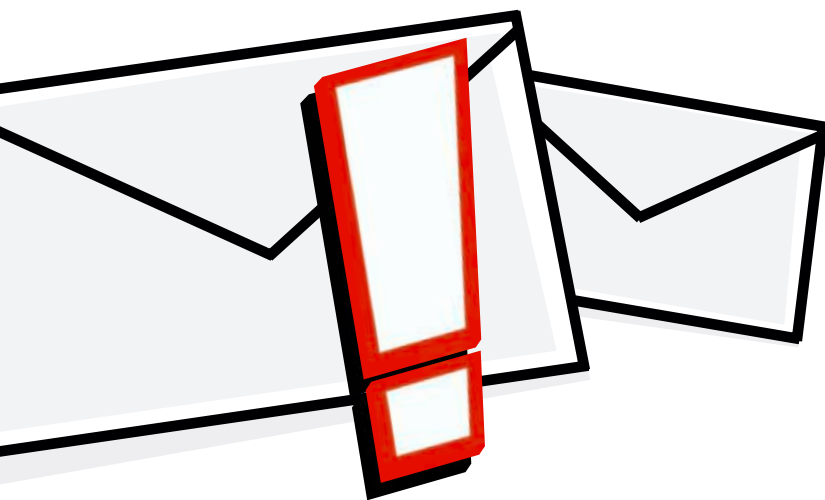
Since upgrading Acrobat Reader to version 7 I have been unable to download or open any PDF files in Internet Explorer. Does anyone know how I can make it work again?

Jim Bricknell, via email

THE PROBLEM

When I insert images or text boxes into Microsoft Word, they disappear when I move them around the page. They are there, but I have to click on the crop button to get them to show, and even then only one thing appears at once. I am using XP and have a high-spec PC, so I am unclear why this is happening. How can I keep them on the screen?

Thommo, via email



We want your opinions! Write to us on any of the topics covered in Computeractive

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EACH ISSUE, the writer of our Star letter will receive a NEC ND3540A dual-layer DVD drive, enabling one hour of DVD video to be recorded in just six minutes and up to 8.5Gb to be stored on one disc. With 32-speed CD-burning capability, it is also a versatile and cost-effective solution for burning CDs. For more information on the NEC ND3540A drive and other NEC products, go to www.nec.co.uk.

Have your say; email us at letters@computeractive.co.uk or write to us at: Letters, Computeractive, VNU Business Publications, 32-34 Broadwick Street, London W1A 2HG.

To be considered for the Star letter prize, please include your full name and address. We cannot offer technical assistance or reply personally to correspondence but all letters are read by our staff.



Is it a fake?

I entered the competition in issue 189 online using the web address www.computeractive.co.uk/competition but I noticed that the title to the competition page came up with the address www2.computeractive.co.uk/competition. Although the page looked and behaved like your normal competition page does, I have not come across 'www2' before and was concerned I may have been redirected to a rogue website. I gave only my email address. Need I be concerned and should I be taking any action apart from routine **virus** and **spyware** scans?

Mike Sharp, via email

The addition of a '2' after the 'www' is simply an indication that the web page you are accessing is stored on a second web **server** at the same organisation. This is often the case when accessing certain pages of large organisations.

For the Computeractive website, we use a technique called load balancing. When demand to view our pages soars, a second server automatically kicks into action, evening the burden between the two, hence the 'www2' prefix displayed in your **browser**. It is nothing to worry about from a security point of view.



No friend of mine

In issue 190's Hints and Tips, Joe Dobson suggested adding an internet service phone number to



Star letter

Not the whole truth



Your article 'Information Overload' in issue 190, intimating that "older people and those on lower incomes" were having difficulty dealing with the constant stream of new technology and baffling jargon, is only true in part.

Being very much an 'older person', I find that I and many of my contemporaries can deal very well with new technology. But we are perhaps more discerning in its use and have little or no need to have smartphones permanently attached to our ears. I certainly have no wish to download music, be exploited by paying through the nose for ever-changing ringtones or television by phone; our ears are assaulted enough by this modern trend each and every day.

Older people use technology that suits their varied needs and interests and if something 'new' comes along that we feel may be of use to us we soon manage to read up and master the subject. We also possess the ability to carry out mental

arithmetic and problem-solving in the event that the batteries fail or there is a power cut. This is, unfortunately, more than can be said of some younger people. I'm not having a go at young people or the new technologies; there is great good in both, but just stop for a moment and ask yourselves, "do I really need this new development or am I just adding to the excess profits of the manufacturer?"

Norman Knapp, via email

This news story has generated a lot of debate but we have to point out it didn't outline our views. It was a study from Ofcom and we reported its findings. We have many older readers – some well into their 90s – as well as those on a tight budget and they can put us to shame with their knowledge, understanding and enthusiasm for technology. We also have others, of all ages and incomes, who are bewildered by the ever-changing face of IT. Some agreed wholeheartedly with Ofcom's findings; others said it was patronising.

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BT's Best Friend or Friends and Family discount schemes. I tried both lists and was informed the number could not be added to either of these.

Louise Iduas, via email

Non-geographic telephone numbers, such as those beginning with 0845 or 0870, are excluded from BT's discount scheme. However, upon request many ISPs will supply an alternative geographic number, which should be eligible for inclusion. Our apologies for the confusion.

Paper trail

I was pleased to read in Consumeractive the final result of Dean Randall's dispute with Dell in issue 190. Prior to my retirement I worked for Trading Standards dealing with consumer credit and debt. It was not unusual for a debt collection company to restart claims again a number of years after a dispute was settled.

I would therefore advise Mr Randall to keep all copies of correspondence, to and from Dell, for six years.

David Smith, Birmingham

Under the 1980 Limitation Act, a company or person can take action for breach of contract for up to six years from the date when the alleged breach occurred. Most of us don't and wouldn't find this length of time practical, but for cases such as Mr Randall's, we agree with Mr Smith and advise keeping all correspondence for the stipulated time.

Jammy dodgers?

I downloaded a comical graphic and ringtone from Jamster UK in March. It was duly delivered but I then began to receive text messages from Jamster inviting me to join their club and I continue to receive other offers.

I deleted the messages, which would arrive at all hours. My mobile phone bill arrived for March and three text messages were itemised at £2.55 each. When my April bill turned up, there were a further 10. I phoned my mobile provider and was advised to text a STOP message to Jamster, then make a follow-up phone call.

My bill for May has just arrived, and I noted that these cancellation instructions have also been charged at £2.55 each. The total cost therefore for this one ringtone has been some £38. This has discouraged me to even think of using the wider services available by mobile. This letter should serve as a warning to everyone – especially the parents who subsidise their children's mobiles.

I have visited Jamster's website and downloaded miles of small print that a barrister would have problems sifting through. Is there no regulatory body that can keep a watching brief on these sharp practices? I don't mind paying for services, but not what appears to be unsolicited advertising by a company desperately trying to promote its material.

Chris Weston, via email

This is an ongoing problem that the mobile industry claims to be addressing. Anyone in Mr Weston's shoes should first contact the company supplying the ringtones, games or logos for a refund; most people are successful. His mobile phone company should also be willing to fight on his behalf and take his complaints seriously. It is also possible to complain to the premium-rate line watchdog, ICSTIS. You can do this online at www.icstis.org.uk or phone the organisation on 0800 500 212. Mobile phone operators have also set up an information forum at www.m-e-f.org.



Amateur dramatics

I was excited to read of the BBC archive going online, as reported in issue 188. I visited this site, which is not part of the BBC's site I noted, and was extremely disappointed. The type face is so small that it is very difficult to read. While I look forward to the project, I earnestly hope it will be done far better than this. I speak as a long-term admirer of the BBC, even as a past employee (in the early days of television), so I do hope the project will be managed better than this first attempt seems to indicate.

Arthur Dungate, Church Crookham,

You can change the text size of any website to suit you – if using Internet Explorer, choose the text size option from the View menu on the menu. If your mouse has a scroll wheel,

it's even easier – just hold down the Ctrl key on the keyboard and move the wheel to change the text size.

Lost in music

I am concerned about your report on music downloading as my daughter **downloads** music from the internet. You stated that the music industry is clamping down on illegal downloads and if the person who is downloading the music is under age then the parents could face the fine. I have a fair understanding of the

internet but how do I know which sites are legal and which are not?

My daughter is only downloading one or two songs per month, but I want to stay on the right side of the law. Perhaps you could do an article on this to help all of us who want to do the right thing, but are unsure who to trust.

Tony Williams, via email

It's highly unlikely that you would find yourself facing legal action for downloading a few tracks each month, even if they were illegal. There is no foolproof way to check a site's legality, but the best way to stay inside the law is to choose a download site from www.pro-music.org. This site is run by the British Phonographic Institute, which represents the music industry in the UK. As a rule of thumb, most sites that offer free music, especially if it is modern chart music, are likely to be illegal. Also beware of a growing problem – sites that try to take money from you up front offering 'legal' downloads but which in reality only direct you to illegal **file-sharing** sites.

Jargon Buster

Techno babble demystified...

-  **Browser** An application that lets you view pages on the internet, such as Internet Explorer.
-  **Download** Process of transferring files onto your PC directly from another computer. You might, for instance, download music or pictures from the internet.
-  **File sharing** Swapping files with other people over the internet, using a service such as Kazaa.
-  **Server** A computer on a network (such as the internet) that stores shared information.
-  **Spyware** Software installed as part of another application specifically to monitor and report back on a computer's use.
-  **Virus** A malicious program designed to cause at best annoyance and at worst damage to data.

For more on Jargon Buster visit:
www.computeractive.co.uk

Corrections and clarifications

It is Computeractive's policy to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please email letters@computeractive.co.uk with any important corrections.

In issue 191 in the story 'Diallers still wreaking havoc' on page 9, the web address for BT Privacy Online should be www.bt.com/btprivacyonline.

In our review of Barclays Bank online banking service in issue 191, we said users had to complete a convoluted signing-in process to access accounts. It is actually possible to save details by clicking the 'remember me' box. However, we do not advise using this method on publicly shared computers.

On page 63 of issue 191 on computer fairs, we incorrectly described the wiring scheme for a plug. It should be blue, brown and green and yellow.

In issue 191, we reported the price of the Medion MD95376 notebook PC as £799, when it is £899. This was due to incorrect pricing information provided to us by Medion. We apologise for any confusion caused.

Our Best Buys are a selection of the best products reviewed in Computeractive in recent months. Those selected are not necessarily winners of our **Buy It!** award but they have fared well enough in our tests to warrant consideration. The prices were correct at the time of printing but use them as a rough guide. The prices we print are suggested retail prices. For the latest, lowest prices on a wide range of products go to www.computeractive.co.uk/activeprices

PRODUCT	TYPE	WE SAY	PRICE	ISSUE	RATING	AWARD
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PCs

Apple Mac mini	PowerPC G4 1.42GHz	It's ideal as a stylish second computer for the living room or kids.	£589/£339	184	★★★★★	
Mesh Matrix Fireblade CAX	AMD Athlon 64 3800+	An excellent PC by any standards. Handles anything you throw at it.	£1,300	186	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Evesham Axis AK47	AMD Athlon 64 3700+	A powerful PC with half an eye on the future.	£1,299	190	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Hi-Grade DMS II 3400	Intel Pentium 4 3.4GHz	A feature-rich, quiet home entertainment PC.	£1,099	189	★★★★★	
Intellect ProDesk A64/2800S	AMD Athlon 64 2800	Excellent office and internet performance for a budget PC.	£499	184	★★★★★	BUY IT!

Notebooks

Mesh Centrino PCI-X CA	Intel Pentium M 1.8GHz	A very capable notebook with excellent battery life.	£899	190	★★★★★	
Asus W5343A-BH	Intel Pentium M 1.6GHz	Seriously good looking and very portable.	£1,291	187	★★★★★	
Sony Vaio VGN-S3XP	Intel Pentium M760 2GHz	Can do everything a desktop PC can, but at a hefty price.	£1,800	188	★★★★★	
Cybercom MD42792	AMD Athlon 2600+	Not the most powerful notebook but comes with loads of extras.	£799	175	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Evesham Voyager X4	Intel Pentium M725 1.6GHz	It's small, looks good and offers great value for money.	£849	181	★★★★★	

Printers

HP LaserJet 1020	Laser printer	Economical and fast, great for the home.	£93	190	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Canon Selphy CP600	Photo printer	High initial outlay but very economical printing with good features.	£200	192	★★★★★	BUY IT!
HP Photosmart 8450	Colour inkjet	A stunning printer that produces superb prints of all kinds.	£249	183	★★★★★	
HP psc1215	Multifunction device	A compact device that offers excellent print quality and value for money.	£70	169	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Lexmark P315	Laser printer	Only works with digital cameras and memory cards but it's very cheap.	£100	187	★★★★★	

Peripherals

LG GSA-4163B DVD writer	Removable storage	Supports every media format going and for less than £50.	£45	186	★★★★★	BUY IT!
CTX P972L	Monitor	A stylish and very reasonably priced 19in TFT monitor.	£323	179	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Miglia HarmonyExpress	Sound card	An impressive and affordable sound card fitted on a USB key.	£35	182	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Ozenda 11g Wireless ADSL Firewall Router	Networking	An easy-to-use wireless ADSL modem at a great price.	£71	171	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Logitech Cordless Desktop LX501	Keyboard and mouse	Not the cheapest but a very solid desktop set.	£60	170	★★★★★	

Software

Half Life 2	Game	Up there with the best computer games ever made.	£40	177	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Apple iLife '05	Utility software	Four powerful and easy-to-use mac programs for just under £50.	£49	186	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Ufly4less	Utility software	The easiest way to track down and book low-cost flights.	£25p/a	190	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Roxio Easy Media Creator 7.5 Supersonic	Media management	A vast collection of music, video and image-editing tools.	£70	188	★★★★★	BUY IT!
F-Secure Internet Security	Utility software	A low-cost, all-in-one security system that requires very little attention.	£39p/a	186	★★★★★	BUY IT!

Gadgets

Fujifilm FinePix F455	Digital camera	Great price for a great camera.	£260	183	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Creative Sound Blaster Wireless Music	Media-streaming device	Its remote makes it the best audio-streaming device of its type.	£150	176	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Creative Zen Micro	Digital music player	For its size, it's the best equipped player on the market.	£190	179	★★★★★	BUY IT!
Buffalo Linkstation	Networking	A clever way of storing and sharing your files on a network.	£149	185	★★★★★	
Ricoh Caplio R1v	Digital camera	No memory card but otherwise a good, affordable camera.	£200	184	★★★★★	BUY IT!

consumables

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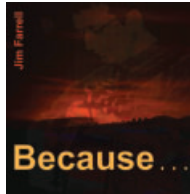
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stylus colour (chipped)

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HP C6657A colour

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880, 890, 895, 950, 970

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G85, G95

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