The Internet continues to offer PC users a range of useful not-for-profit information sites and research projects. _PCW_ continues its coverage dedicated to spreading the news on these non-commercial good works. If you have details of any such sites, please send information to readerweb@vnu.co.uk

RESOURCE

Action 2000
http://www.bug2000.co.uk/

The millennium bug is set to bite in less than three months' time and this top-notch site, sponsored by the UK Government, offers free advice on how it might affect you. No matter what level of technical expertise you have, it's easy to find lots of information on how to check out your own PC. At http://domestic.bug2000.co.uk/index4.shtml, for example, home computer users can find information on how to test their equipment, and advice on what to do without calling in the experts. For small business users, as well as home users, the Software Status Database at <http://business.bug2000.co.uk/get_help/software_index.shtml> is also a must.

The Spy who Watched me
http://www.spy.org.uk/

This is a not-for-profit UK website, devoted to turning the cameras back on those who use them to watch us. While the widespread use of CCTV and webcams has been useful in tackling some crimes, the site argues that these technologies are increasingly used by powerful vested interests to monitor all of us and record everything we do, in order to control us. The site asks the question: is everything recorded on CCTV what it seems? There's also a section on how much information we give away when we visit a website. We rate this a big fat 'P' for Paranoia. That

SITE FOCUS

A House without Windows?
http://zork.net/refund

The Microsoft Refund Newsletter site is a cornucopia of riches, put together by Linux-lovers obsessed with the Windows licensing policy. These are people who regard Microsoft in terms approaching fanatical zealotry, and their vision is single-minded, focused and based on pure hatred. Therefore, it's utterly fascinating.

There are links to some long-winded, scrupulous accounts of the attempts of early campaigners who fought with Microsoft OEMs (the hardware manufacturers which assemble PCs) to buy a machine without the operating system. Meeting with a wall of obstruction and half-hearted 'Sorry, it can't be done!' arguments meant that these conscientious objectors just got madder and madder and more determined to win the point of principle. 'Why should I be forced to buy something I don't intend to use?' asks Donna, and it's hard not to sympathise with her struggle.

The 'Refundees' are now arguing that it's best to take up your case directly with Microsoft, rather than its OEMs. Don't click the YES button when you first switch on the machine, they advise; instead, boot up from pre-prepared floppies and then apply to Microsoft for a refund.

Amid all this blinkered prejudice, you start to wonder how bad Microsoft really is. For many people who have bought PCs, the company's operating system and the standards that have been created around Windows have enabled a great deal of productivity, communication and fun. The Refund Newsletter site, however, is a resource for the few who care to dissent from that view – the anti-Gates rebels who have always belived the Mac was better, that Unix was stability personified and that Linux will one day rule the Internet. Take your pick.

doesn't mean they're not out to get you, though!

PROJECT

The Power of Images
http://www.cast.org/strategies/image_barrier.html#Power
CAST is an educational, not-for-profit organisation that aims to make the most of technology as a way of expanding opportunities for those with disabilities.

However, new technology can not only liberate the disabled, it can also work against them. One of the projects that CAST is promoting aims to help the visually impaired get more out of the Web. CAST is asking sympathisers building Web pages to make their use of images more friendly to those who are visually impaired.

Images are hugely powerful and increasingly central to all our major communication and entertainment mediums. However, if websites use visual elements that have no identifiers, they can become meaningless to many surfers. The project suggests that judicious use of ALT tags and D-Links can be a major way of helping Web designers make their sites more accessible.

Search the Stars
http://www.setiathome.ssl.berkleyedu/
Yes, the search for extra-terrestrial intelligent life is gathering pace with this project to analyse radio signals from across the universe. All you need do is download a piece of software from this US university site and then use the idle processing time, when your PC normally simply displays a screensaver, to 'analyse' lengthy periods of radio signals to see if any pattern emerges that might represent intelligent communication aimed at Earth. At the very least, seti@home is becoming the coolest screensaver to use.