

letters

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The Editor
Personal Computer World
VNU House
32-34 Broadwick Street
London W1A 2HG

or email > letters@pcw.co.uk

or fax > 0171 316 9313

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MP3: A CAUTIONARY MORALITY TALE

A while ago I came across MP3s and subsequently have downloaded several to my hard disk. However, many MP3 sites have links to, or include, pornographic material.

Although most of the sites at www.top25mp3.com/ do not contain this type of material, I would recommend blocking all the sites listed if you can. Also, unless you are specific, most links from www.alltheweb.com/ will lead to pornographic sites.

You could use www.oth.net and download a program such as Go!Zilla. This will bring back FTP links to the MP3 files you are looking for.

JAMES STORMONT

James@jstormont.f9.co.uk

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Justify the UK price hikes

On a recent holiday to Germany, as boredom set in having admired all the scenery I could possibly handle, I decided it was time to get hold of a copy of a local PC magazine. It was an enjoyable enough read until I reached the back pages of the magazine and the inevitable adverts for hardware, software, etc.

A quick look at the software prices confirmed my suspicions. Not only are we in the UK being charged extra by car manufacturers, train operators and airlines, but also, it seems, by software companies.

For example, a copy of Macromedia Dreamweaver 2.0 (English version) is advertised at DM532 including tax, postage and packing to the UK. Converted at DM2.70 to the pound, this comes to £197 compared to £269 in the UK, a difference of 40 per cent! Needless to say the price difference is about the same across the board.

Bearing in mind that there are no import duties from EC countries and – unlike a car – a software application does not have to be converted to right-hand drive, how do manufacturers justify these huge differences? Whatever the answer I know where I will do my shopping in future!

GEORGE FEICHTER

george@feichter.force9.co.uk

The Editor replies >

Manufacturers have an increasingly difficult time justifying pricing anomalies within the European Union, though they may still single out the cost of local support. It's possible that the Euro, if adopted, will eliminate some pricing differentials, and the Internet will certainly have an influence, but really big differentials like this do raise suspicions. We'd like to hear from other readers who have found similar 'bargains' in Europe – did your actual experience of buying and using the software really turn out to involve huge savings?

ORBITAL CONSIDERATIONS

Your reviewer's comments on the Evesham Vale Athlon 600 (PCW October 1999) are surely a bit harsh in respect of the inclusion of a Castlewood Orb removable drive. The reason that this drive has not become a standard item is more to do with its recent introduction than any other cause.

The comparison with the Jaz drive is far from complete. The technology is different, the capacity is, as you say, greater and, while data transfer rates are greater, the cost of both drive and, more importantly, the cartridges is less. The Orb drive is or shortly will be available with EIDE, SCSI, USB, parallel port and Firewire interfaces, all well within the first year of introduction. Iomega still does not support all these options and as far as I am aware has not indicated any intention to do so.

If we are to have an alternative to the Iomega products, which is cheaper, has

a higher capacity and hopefully is more reliable, then Evesham deserves to be congratulated for bringing forward new technology, rather than just following the crowd.

JOHN TROMAN

jtroman@clara.co.uk

Riyad Emeran replies >

It's true, the Orb drive is a low-cost removable storage device with a decent capacity. However, you can't escape the fact that a Jaz2 drive offers similar capacity and the advantage of mass adoption. I'm not a fan of monopolies, but at the moment, if you want to transport data you're more likely to find other machines with a Jaz drive than an Orb drive. Not to mention that imaging bureaux and repro houses freely accept Iomega media, giving the formats a greater use than just data backup.

DVD & VCR: AN INCOMPATIBLE CASE?

I found Gordon Laing's 'Hands On Hardware' article on DVD (*PCW October 1999*) very useful and informative. I want to buy a DVD drive for my PC and connect the output to my Nicam VCR. I intend to buy a retail kit, including MPEG decoder card, to take the load off the processor. I want the best quality available and the going rate is affordable for me (for example, Creative Labs' kit now available at about £150 inc VAT). However, I have a few questions which I hope you'll be able to help with.

First, I was concerned to read of the quality degradation that occurs if you use a pass-through cable. I understand this is necessary to overlay video on the desktop. However, as I intend viewing on my TV via VCR, can I avoid using the pass-through? (Note: my monitor has two inputs.) Do all the MPEG cards use a pass-through? If not, which ones don't?

Second, My VCR has the usual composite video and SCART inputs. Using the composite video seems simple enough, but wouldn't the image clarity be better using the S-video output on the MPEG card? If so, is it possible to connect the S-video output to the SCART input on the VCR?

And finally, how do the major players compare? For example, the Creative Labs 6x Encore complete kit seems to be widely available, but I've

also seen complete kits (ie with MPEG decoder cards) available from Sony and Philips.

In fact, how about a group test?

JOHN GILMARTIN

a3403131@infotrade.co.uk



Riyad Emeran replies >

First and foremost John, why do you want to connect your DVD player to your VCR? If you're intending to record DVD movies, you're contemplating video piracy and FACT (Federation Against Copyright Theft) would not be very happy about this. And even if you didn't get caught, why would you want to watch a DVD movie on a VHS cassette?

Moving on, I'm afraid the majority of MPEG2 decoder cards use pass-through cables. There were a few that didn't, but I haven't seen one like that for a while. However, if you never intend to watch films on your PC monitor you don't need to use a pass-through. But, since you pointed out that your monitor has two inputs, you could connect your graphics card to one input and the MPEG2 card to the other. That way you have the option of watching movies on your monitor without degrading your graphics card's signal.

You're right, the image is far superior using S-Video rather than Composite since the chrominance and luminance signals are separated. However, unless you have an S-VHS VCR, it's unlikely that it will be able to accept an S-Video signal. As for what to go for, any new DVD-ROM drive can supply data fast enough for MPEG2 playback, the important part is the decoder card. The majority of good cards on the market use the Real Magic Hollywood chipset from Sigma Designs. Sony bundles this card, as does Philips, and Video Logic makes a card based on the same chip. On the whole, though, if you're really interested in DVD as a movie medium, you're better off buying a dedicated player.

Correction

Sharp PC-A250

UltraLite sub-notebook

Unfortunately, the gremlins got in the works last month and printed the picture of the Sharp PC-A250 UltraLite notebook over the text of the review. We apologise for this error. Readers who wish to read the full review can find it on our website at: www.pcw.co.uk

DON'T WASTE YOUR TIME...

I read with interest Clive Akass' news snippet at the bottom of page 23 (*PCW October 1999*) regarding the new two-hour limit on screaming.net. He says you can overcome this, but how? What is the second window you need to open? I am trying to download a three-hour driver and keep getting cut off. An early reply would be appreciated so I can use my scanner again.

MARTIN HARVEY

Grantham, Lincolnshire

Clive Akass replies >

Click on New under the file menu in your browser, then New Window. Clicking your browser icon should also work. You can use this second window while the first is still running. Your download might pause – Windows is not truly multitasking – but any access made from this second window should reset the screaming.net timeout. Just open and close a site in the new window and your download should continue. Note that you can have several web accesses going at once, limited by your bandwidth and processing power.

To be doubly sure you might try using GetRight, a utility that we have featured on the PCW cover discs in the past. It's also available from www.getright.com. This is recommended for any lengthy download, as there is always a risk of line glitches and it allows you to resume after an interruption.

Note: If you are sending a letter by email and wish to be considered for the monthly Taxan prize, please remember to give a full address and contact details.