A humble games console is doing what the PC can only dream of.

Dream come true

Convergence is a word that has been thrown around the PC industry for a long time now. For years we've been told that the PC is going to converge with standard consumer entertainment products and seamlessly integrate with the rest of our appliances. Unfortunately this miracle failed to happen, and the complicated operating procedure of a PC made its dream of becoming a consumer product very unlikely.

A consumer wants something that can be unboxed, plugged in and used. They don't want to have to waste time configuring or loading. When was the last time you had to download a driver for your VCR before you could rent the latest movie?

The PC may be infinitely upgradable, but that also means that any software or hardware item won't necessarily work with the configuration you have, and it's this problem that has kept the PC out of the consumer heaven it aspires to.

That said, we have finally seen the first truly convergent product hit the market. A product that has all the simplicity of a consumer box, but still has the ability to browse the Internet and send email, and it even runs a Microsoft operating system. However, this new machine hasn't come from a PC manufacturer, or even from Apple. No, this leap forward in convergent technology comes courtesy of Sega.

Sega has been making arcade video game machines for as long as most game players can remember, and it's been producing home video game consoles for almost as long. Sega's Dreamcast is the latest games console to hit the market and it's a truly impressive system. Besides the fact that it plays some of the best video games you're likely to see outside an arcade, it has a couple of important tricks up its sleeve.

Included in the box with all Dreamcasts is a 33.6K modem. This is a removable unit, so it can be upgraded for a 56K unit if you desire. Unlike any previous game console, the Dreamcast runs a Microsoft operating system, Windows CE to be precise. Windows CE offers everything you need for Internet connection and email, but it's held in ROM so there's no time wasted waiting for boot-up.

You'll also find a disc in the box with your free ISP account, so you really can just plug it in and surf the Internet. Of course you'll have to fork out an extra £20 for a keyboard to use these facilities properly, but you're still getting a complete Internet and email machine for £220. With these figures it makes Tiny's attempt at free Internet PCs all the more laughable, especially when you consider that you can play the most advanced games available as well.

Sega should be congratulated for taking the first step on the path of consumer/IT convergence, but I doubt it will have everything its own way for long. Microsoft is already working on its own games console, which will no doubt include similar features to the Dreamcast. If this trend indicates anything, it's that the days of needing a PC for Internet connection are numbered.

> A consumer wants something that can be **UNBOXED, PLUGGED IN AND USED.** They don't want to waste time configuring or loading

Riyad Emeran, Editor