editorial

In the world of PCs, the future's bright, the future's digital.

Definitely digital

Computers may have calmly dealt with zeros and ones for decades, but as far as the consumer electronics market is concerned, the late 90s have seen a digital feeding frenzy. Wherever you look there are digital cameras, digital camcorders, a host of digital audio formats, digital mobile phones, digital televisions, and who could forget digital versatile disc, DVD? It's undeniably an exciting time, not just for the promise of superior quality but also for the convergent possibilities. If your PC and digital camcorder talk the same digital language, then why not connect them directly to each other and be done with all those nasty analogue signals? In some cases, it really is almost as simple as that. Most digital camcorders are fitted with IEEE-1394 FireWire interfaces, and while not exactly widespread on PCs yet, you can buy suitable interface cards to exchange information. Early adopters of Digital Television may also find 1394 interfaces in the back of their set-top boxes, too.

The greatest interest today lies with digital video, whether captured with a camera, delivered on a disc or transmitted over the airwaves. We'll be taking a much closer look at Digital TV as soon as the cable companies get their act together in the New Year, but in the meantime this issue contains our complete guide to digital video [p208]. We've looked at digital camcorders, digital (and analogue) video capture, video-conferencing cameras, all-in-one TV tuner cards, and a selection of DVD-ROM drives, along with how to watch movies on your PC. It wouldn't, however, be *PCW* if we didn't have a PC group test, and this month we've got a system for everyone [p138]. In time for Christmas we've compared no less than 12 PCs: four budget models at £699, four mid-range systems at £999, and four high-end £1,499 PCs, ideal for power users or gamers alike. Equally irresistible is our group test of budget photo retouching packages under £100 [p184] — in fact, some are as cheap as £30! The harder-core of you will be pleased to find the first of a three-part *Hands On Workshop* on the increasingly popular Linux operating system [p242]. And anyone who deals with financial software will welcome our guide to the euro and its implications for your small business [p166].

Finally, it may say January on the cover, but you are without doubt reading our Christmas issue. Upholding a festive tradition, the *PCW* staff have written their Christmas wish lists to Santa [p128], which will be winging their way to the North Pole, or at least to the manufacturers who've produced the most desirable kit this year. And if the long winter nights are getting you down, then why not have a go at our 1998 *PCW* Christmas Quiz [p175] — no less than 50 festive (and, er, industry-based) questions await your perusal. The person with the most correct answers out of the sack when we get back to work will win a Canon digital camera, and the next 20 get a copy of Microsoft Encarta 1999. What more could you ask for? Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

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Gordon Laing, Editor