

NEW PRODUCTS >> reviews



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Nik Rawlinson
DEPUTY EDITOR

Nik Lite and speed freaks

It was perhaps not the glitziest launch of the year, but there was only one event that managed to attract the attendance of the entire PCW team last month – the launch of Nik Lite Millennium Edition. It was the result of over 12 months of intense development and involved the manipulation of almost 2GB of code but by the end of the event it was universally agreed that the new improved upgrade was worth the effort and was a vast improvement over version one.

Of course, Nik Lite is not an application but simply the result of half a day spent cleaning up a badly neglected hard drive. A year of installing and uninstalling five or more software packages a week had taken its toll on my poor PC's resources and now it was fragmented,

cluttered and slow. A daily 'You have run out of space on drive C' message and a Windows directory that had bloated to the size of a zeppelin finally convinced me that something had to be done.

There were a number of options open to me but in the end I opted for backing up any vital documents and data, deleting as many useless looking directories and applications as I could find and then biting the bullet by throwing a deltree command into the Windows directory and taking cover.

Testimony to the fact that it was poorly organised and crammed to bursting with tiny, fragmented files, is that it churned for over 20 minutes before returning control to the command prompt, but it set me thinking. I reckon that 95 times out of a hundred I use the recommended uninstall routine supplied with software I install, so why should my drive be such a mess? There are a number of factors that could explain the size, but a huge number of undoubtedly redundant system files is more often than not the result of an unclean uninstall.

But when was the last time you asked

how easy it was to uninstall software?

We all ask questions about how easy a package is to set up and install, but how many of us spare a moment to think about what will happen when it reaches the end of its useful life and we're after a quick way of dispatching it to the software graveyard? Perhaps we put it to the back of our minds because we don't like to imagine that the package for which we have just shelled out several hundred pounds will not last forever.

Perhaps what we should be asking, though, is why it does not. If it works today it's going to work just as well 10 years down the line. The only difference is that newer software will do it better and faster and it is, like it or not, the 'better

faster' maxim that drives the IT industry. Sometimes it is justified – you'd never dream of trawling the

It is, like it or not, the 'better faster' maxim that drives the industry

Internet on a 9,600bps modem now that the web is more than just text and links – but in most cases you'll rarely find yourself using the latest gizmos of the resource-hungry 'better faster' apps you'll be installing next month.

If this is making me sound like a luddite then perhaps that's what I am. I'm all for an easy life, and I couldn't imagine writing anything without Links, the Office 2000 cat watching over my every move, even if most of my prose seems to reduce it to a lazy slumber within three paragraphs, but sometimes it feels as though the world of computing has bastardised the phrase 'what you've never had you'll never miss' and rewritten it as 'when you get what you've never had you'll realise what your PC is missing'.

So my message is simple. If you want to save yourself a bloated Windows directory and an afternoon spent with your system disks in one hand and a pile of Zip backups by your side, stick with what you've got until you're sure you really do need that upgrade to the 'fastest best yet'.

NIK_RAWLINSON@VNU.CO.UK



**VNU
European
Labs**

VNU Labs tests all kinds of hardware and software, from PCs and modems to databases. All our tests simulate real-world use and for the most part are based on industry-standard applications such as Word, Excel, PageMaker and Paradox. Our current PC tests for both Windows 98 and NT are the SYSmark tests from BAPCo. In all our performance graphs, larger bars mean better scores.

Ratings

★★★★★ Buy while stocks last
★★★★★ Great buy
★★★★ Good buy
★★★ Shop around
★ Not recommended

AST Century City

The first offering from the **sealed-box brigade** looks good, but may not be the sale of the century.

At last, the first 'EasyPC' compliant computer has hit the UK consumer market. This next generation of machines builds upon the PC99 standard by stripping out even more legacy components than before, producing a smaller, more attractive box.

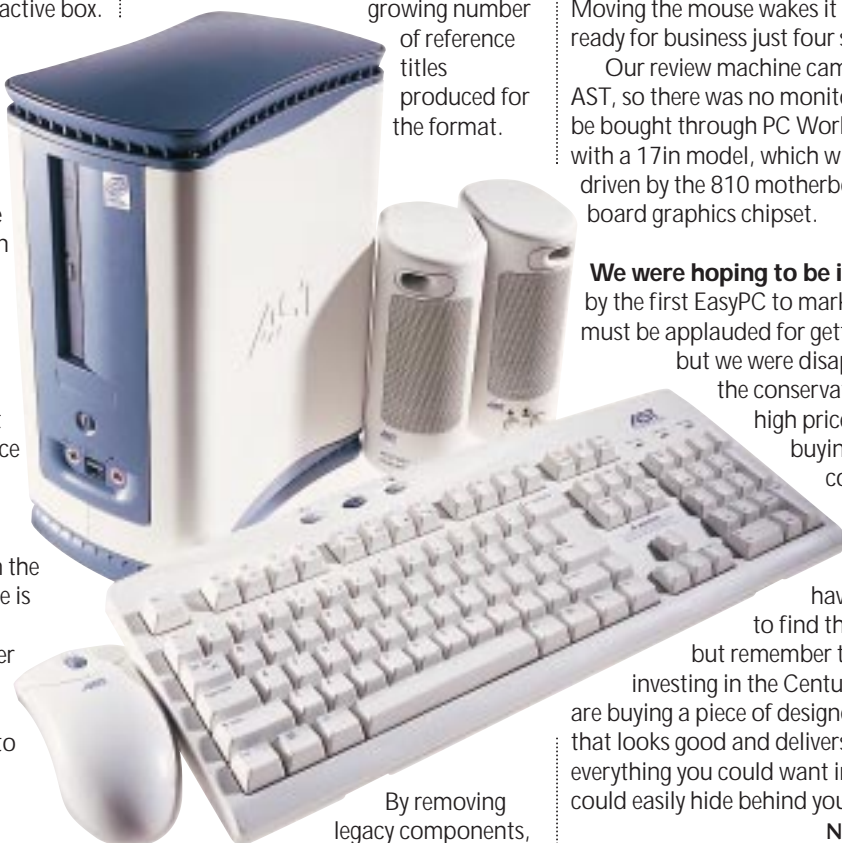
The first thing you notice about the Century City is the lack of a floppy drive. AST cannot be criticised – indeed, it should be congratulated for the move as it is a necessary action for assuring compliance with the EasyPC standard. Even so, it is worth bearing its absence in mind if you are thinking of making a purchase. If you're not happy to share your files solely across the Internet or some form of direct connection you'll have no choice but to shell out for some external storage.

Fortunately, USB is in abundance. With two ports on the front and two on the back there is plenty of room for Zip drives, scanners, web cams or whatever you have in mind, and if you're wondering how your web cam will get its images onto the Internet, there's a built-in Lucent WinModem.

The type of people to whom this first batch of EasyPC machines is likely to appeal will be unlikely to want to take a look at the insides, which is a shame. Once the plastic outer casing has been removed a single screw can be loosened, freeing the whole of the right-hand side to hinge down onto the desk, just like a tiny G4 Mac. You can even do this while it's still turned on.

What you find inside is actually very little: no PCI or ISA slots, and just a single free memory slot. The processor is a 500MHz Celeron, which is fair enough, but it's a shame AST has skimped in other areas, especially considering the price. There's a mere 64MB of RAM and the hard drive runs to only 8.4GB. In an

EasyPC machine there's no room for a second hard drive, so you'll have to replace it altogether if it starts to feel cramped. The only removable media drive is a CD-ROM, but we would have liked to see DVD in there to access the growing number of reference titles produced for the format.



By removing legacy components, AST has managed to

shrink the power supply to just 85W, reducing the need for cooling and hence producing a markedly less noisy machine. The PC's footprint is considerably smaller, too, taking up no more space than a decent-sized toaster.

One of the earliest promises of the EasyPC

standard was faster boot and shutdown times. We put this to the test. A complete shutdown and power-off was done in just five seconds – impressive indeed. A regular cold boot was completed in 89 seconds, making it comparable to an average standalone desktop with a fairly clean, defragged hard drive. After we had invoked the

'quick boot' option in the BIOS this was cut to 76 seconds, which equates to a reduction of around 15 per cent. The real bonus, though, is sleep mode, which will suspend the system state and cut the power within a couple of seconds. Moving the mouse wakes it up and it's ready for business just four seconds later.

Our review machine came direct from AST, so there was no monitor, but it can be bought through PC World, bundled with a 17in model, which will in turn be driven by the 810 motherboard's on-board graphics chipset.

We were hoping to be impressed by the first EasyPC to market, and AST must be applauded for getting it there, but we were disappointed by the conservative spec and high price. If you were buying the same components in a regular case you wouldn't have to try hard to find them cheaper, but remember that by investing in the Century City you are buying a piece of designer technology that looks good and delivers almost everything you could want in a box that could easily hide behind your monitor.

NIK RAWLINSON

Complete shutdown and power-off was done in just five seconds

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £899 (£765.11 ex VAT)

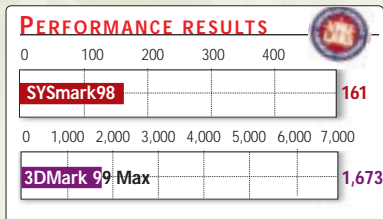
Contact AST 01628 521 111

www.ast.com

Good points Tiny, attractive, USB everywhere, sleep mode is a real time saver

Bad points Memory and hard drive are a little cramped

Conclusion Tomorrow's technology today, but tomorrow's prices will probably be lower



Fujitsu Siemens Celsius

A mobile workstation to set your temperature rising.

This is probably the first time you've seen the names Fujitsu and Siemens on the same product: the two companies announced an alliance at the beginning of October 1999, and the Celsius mobile workstation is the first fruit of the union.

The Celsius is an unusual beast, aimed squarely at the professional client who needs a portable CAD and 3D-graphics workstation. Its main credential for the role is its graphics chipset, a custom-designed affair called the Celsius GM1. By desktop PC standards the chipset is fairly modest: 8MB, running over an AGP 2x interface with hardware OpenGL acceleration. For a notebook it's unique, and gives the machine a considerable leg-up for those running any OpenGL accelerated application.

The unusual features don't stop there. The unit we looked at sits at the top of a trio of Celsius models, and packs no less than 512MB of RAM. The keyboard is the detachable variety that debuted on Siemens' Scenic Mobiles a while ago: it unclips from the main unit and communicates via an infrared link. The communication is two-way, with the keyboard's integral LCD display continuing to show the main battery's state of charge, disk activity and so on. It's a tad flimsy when detached, but works perfectly and the feel of the keys is excellent, with good tactile response.

With the keyboard detached a smartcard slot on the top surface of the main unit is revealed. Activate the SICRYPT security feature, insert a smartcard and program it with a PIN, and there's no way to access the machine or its data without the card and PIN. This includes attempts to access the data by physically removing the drive.

The Celsius contains a mobile Pentium II/400, complete with 256KB of full-speed L2 cache, a 10GB IBM hard drive, and is topped off by a 1,024 x 768 TFT screen. There are two removable device bays at the front, but you're spoilt for choice, since four devices are supplied as standard: lithium ion battery, two-speed DVD-ROM drive, mobile Zip drive and floppy drive. The battery managed to

power the unit for just over three hours with all power management turned off. Despite the fact that it comes with NT4 Workstation, the Celsius has full power management facilities, including auto switch-off at shutdown. But it doesn't have USB support, so you'll have to wait for Windows 2000 to make use of the single connector.

Silver notebooks were one of 1999's biggest vogues, and the Celsius won't

disappoint anyone in this department, being clad in magnesium alloy. At 3.8Kg, it's no lightweight, but this is a mobile workstation, not a sub-notebook.

As Fujitsu Siemens is well aware, the GM1 chipset gives it a considerable advantage over the opposition for its target market, but it's strange that it sports only 8MB of SGRAM. With the extra memory overhead of double buffering and the Z-buffer for depth information, OpenGL apps are limited to a maximum of 1,024 x 768 at 16bit colour: fine when using the TFT but not so hot when the unit's hooked up to an external monitor. CAD means high resolutions – if the company really wants to impress it needs to make a variant with 32MB of video RAM and a 1,280 x 1,024 TFT.

The chipset also lacks the ability to do hardware fogging and alpha blending. Fujitsu Siemens claims these are hardly ever used in 3D applications, but it's not exactly unknown for 3D visualisation apps to use fogging as a depth cue. Given its size, it also seems odd not to have a



built-in network adaptor. You'll know

if you're a customer who needs a Celsius. By its very nature it's not right for many users. Nonetheless, it's a high-quality, well-focused product that means business.

DAVID FEARON

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £6,020 (£5,123 ex VAT)

Contact Fujitsu Siemens 01252 555 300
www.siemens.de

Good points Custom OpenGL graphics, data security, half a gigabyte of RAM

Bad points Graphics nothing special by desktop standards, no network adaptor, predictably expensive

Conclusion A brave product that deserves recognition, but it's not everyone's cup of tea

PERFORMANCE RESULTS



Gateway Profile 2

Innovative design and respectable performance, a PC that fits in anywhere space is at a premium.

There's a rash of smaller form factor PCs on the market. Most of them are destined to sit on corporate desks due to their high price tags, but Gateway has a compact PC that won't break the bank.

The Profile 2 measures approximately 455 x 390 x 240mm. Gateway has managed to keep the size to a minimum by opting for a 15in TFT flat-panel display, rather than the usual bulky CRT variety, but the real space-saving feature is that it has squeezed the computer itself into the screen's stand.

You might assume that such a small computer

It has to be said that this approach to PC building has its drawbacks, as the Profile is essentially a 'sealed box' and we could find no way to access its internal workings even after we had undone all the screws we could find. So if it's important to you to keep your computer at the cutting edge by adding in the latest graphics cards, for example, perhaps the Profile is not for you.

All the components that go into the PC are built onto the motherboard, which is how Gateway has managed to fit a fully-featured computer into less space than a cereal box. But a SYSmark score of 160 proves its small stature isn't matched by slow performance.

On the flipside, it provides you with everything you will need with a quad-speed DVD-ROM drive, plus DVD movie playback software and an on-board 56K modem. However, we would sound a note of caution if you are planning to use the Profile to watch movies – a 15in TFT screen may not be the best medium.

This is not, however, to detract from the quality of this particular screen, which is bright and clear, with a wide viewing angle, so it would be a pleasure to work at, even if it cannot do full justice to DVDs and games. And by its very nature it is part of what makes the Profile so slimline.

would be underpowered, but the Profile's specification, while far from the most powerful you can find, is plenty to run all but the most demanding applications. It is built around a 466MHz Celeron processor, plus 64MB of RAM and a generous 13GB hard disk drive that should meet most users' storage demands.

For less experienced users there is another advantage of opting for a PC that cannot easily be upgraded. Most computer problems are caused by novice users opening up their PCs and fiddling around inside. With the Profile there is no chance of this, so your computer should run faultlessly out of the box.

If expansion is important to you all is

not lost as there are three free USB ports, aside from the one taken up by the keyboard – the mouse attaches to this via a USB port on the keyboard. Indeed the full-size keyboard is the bulkiest component in this PC, taking up more desk space than the screen and machine.

Upgrade addicts aren't the only ones who may be disappointed by the Profile; dedicated

gamers would also be advised to steer clear. The on-board 4MB Intel 810 graphics chipset isn't up to the 3D graphics necessary to play the latest titles so we couldn't run our usual 3DMark graphics test. But 2D performance is not a problem, so if you can sacrifice that extra dimension then graphics are fine and it managed 23.5fps at a resolution of 1,024 x 768 in our Quake 2 test.

Sound is another matter. There are built-in speakers and a headphone jack, but pump up the volume and you'll suffer tinny audio quality, with virtually no bass provided by the on-board SoundMAX sound card.

Gateway hasn't skimped on software, as the Profile comes with all that you need to get started, including a copy of Microsoft Works and everything you need to get onto the Internet.

URSULA TOLAINI



PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £1,526 (£1,299 ex VAT)

Contact Gateway 0800 552000

www.gw2k.co.uk

Good points Small form factor, good performance

Bad points Limited upgradability, poor 3D graphics

Conclusion If space is the problem, then the Profile 2 is the answer, and for once a small form factor doesn't equal a huge price

PERFORMANCE RESULTS



Sony Vaio PCG-X9

Mobile video editing is a **real possibility** with Sony's roomy X9.

Right from the start Sony's range of notebooks was geared towards digital video editing. Even the first Vaio had a FireWire or IEEE1394 port. This allowed you to connect a DV camcorder to the notebook and transfer your footage without any degradation in quality. Unfortunately the hard disk constraints of mobile computers were such that it wasn't really viable to use a notebook for video editing unless you desperately needed to do it on the move. But this is about to change

The X9 is the new top of the range notebook aimed at the mobile video editor. There are quite a few new developments but the two most notable are the hard disk and the CPU. The X9 sports a massive 18GB hard disk, making it more than capable of video editing. Of course, even this capacity is small compared to the size of desktop hard disks, but it's more than adequate for the job at hand. The processor is Intel's latest chip, the mobile Pentium III running at 500MHz. Supporting the CPU is a generous 128MB of RAM, keeping the spec as cutting-edge as possible.

Bundled with the machine is Sony's DVgate digital video-editing software, so you really do have everything you need for a mobile video studio.

Even though the X9 targets the digital video editor, it's a very impressive mobile PC as well. As always ergonomics are very important with notebook computers, and both the display and input devices are paramount to the user. The screen on the X9 is a 13.3in affair with a resolution of 1,024 x 768. The lighting is uniform across the entire

surface and Sony has placed a protective cover over it to prevent damage.

The keyboard is one of the best we have seen. The keys are large and well-spaced while the travel and break are spot on. Even typing for extended periods is no problem. Pointer manipulation comes courtesy of a touchpad that exhibits equally impressive performance. The software controlling the touchpad is also comprehensive. As with most notebooks you can switch off the touchpad's tapping ability to stop inadvertent cursor movement while typing. However, Sony has added the option to allow tapping, but only when you're not typing.

On the right-hand side of the keyboard is a jog dial.

When no windows are active a small selector appears in the top right-hand corner of the screen. The jog dial allows you to scroll through multiple options such as launching DVgate or Microsoft Word, while pressing the dial activates your selection.

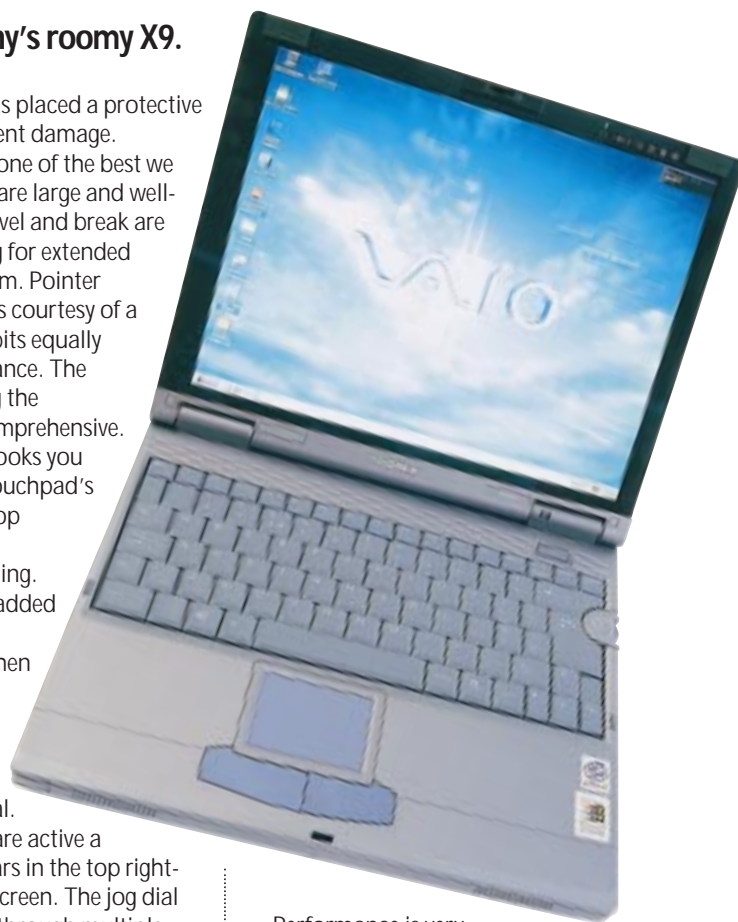
The X9 comes with a DVD-ROM drive as standard, which slots into the single expansion bay. The floppy drive can also be used in this bay or it can be connected externally via the supplied cable.

On the left of the unit is the FireWire port and two PC Card slots, while on the right is the expansion bay and audio ports. At the rear are USB, serial and docking bay ports. There is no integrated parallel port, but when the floppy disk cable plugs into the docking station port it also provides a parallel port.

Included in the box is a docking bar with a host of extra connectivity. The bar gives you two USB, one serial, one parallel, line in and out, VGA, composite video, S-Video, PS/2, FireWire and most impressively, optical digital out.

Rounding the package off is a 56K PC Card modem for Internet connectivity.

On the whole the only thing missing is a carrying case, although you do get a nifty little case for holding the peripherals.



Performance is very impressive with a SYSmark score of 199 – on a par with a 500MHz Pentium III desktop. That said, it's only two points faster than the 450MHz Hi-Grade PIII notebook we looked at in December.

Ultimately, the X9 is a triumph, it allows serious digital video editing on the move and has all the requirements of a powerful desktop replacement.

RIYAD EMERAN

PCW DETAILS



★★★★★

Price £3,700 (£3,149 ex VAT)

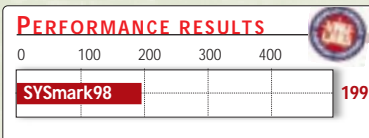
Contact Sony 0990 424 424

www.sony.co.uk

Good points Very fast and well featured, great bundle

Bad points Expensive

Conclusion At last, a serious solution to mobile digital video editing



THE RAISED REAR OFFERS BETTER COOLING FOR THE PIII



Kodak DC290

A premiership camera but not in a league of its own.

The DC290 is the newest camera in Kodak's digital range. Manufacturers in every area of computing need a simple figure to latch onto to convey the superiority of their products, and with digital cameras it is CCD resolution.

The 290's box proudly states that the camera has '3.3 Megapixel Ultra Resolution', but that's only when images are interpolated upward, artificially inflating resolution with no real gain in quality. The actual CCD resolution is 2.3 megapixels, pretty much par for the course at the high end. The highest non-interpolated image resolution you'll get from the 290 is 1,792 x 1,200.

Kodak hasn't demonstrated a great deal of design flair in its digital range, although the 290 is better looking than some of the early models. It's pretty much square when viewed from the front, and the added height makes it comfortable to hold. The unit's lens is an f3-f4.7, 38-115mm equivalent zoom, which again is more or less the standard for higher-end zoom models, but Nikon's Coolpix 700 and 950 will manage f2.6-f4, while Sony's F505K delivers f3.3 at its powerful 190mm telephoto setting.

The 290's image resolution and compression quality settings are separate, so you can choose either 720 x 480, 1,440 x 960 or 1,792 x 1,200 at any of three JPEG compression quality modes, or with lossless TIFF compression. This also applies to the Ultra 2,240 x 1,500 interpolated resolution, with the exception of the TIFF option.

The DC290 sports both optical viewfinder and 2in TFT monitor, with control via the monitor improved over earlier models: there's now a four-way thumb pad *à la* Sony for menu navigation. The thumbnail review mode is better than most, with four thumbnails displayed at a time along the top of the screen and an enlarged thumbnail of the current picture in the bottom half.

An excellent feature of the DC290 is its time-lapse mode. You can set the



camera to take up to 1,000 pictures at intervals of between one minute and 24 hours, assuming you have the memory. Once they're taken, you can assemble them into a movie with the AVI generator utility bundled with the unit. There's also a voice recording feature via an integral mic – you can attach annotation to each shot individually, and when the shot is deleted the annotation is deleted too.

The age of 4MB digital cameras has thankfully passed, and the Kodak is supplied with a single 20MB Compact Flash card. This will give you 250-300 pictures at the lowest res, highest compression mode, down to around 30 in high (non-interpolated) resolution with low compression.

This is a high-end consumer camera, not a semi-professional, and operation is largely automatic – there's no aperture or shutter priority mode. Exposure can be nudged by plus or minus two stops, and you can choose from multiple and single-spot auto, or manual focus. There are daylight, fluorescent and tungsten white

balance modes, too, as alternatives to the automatic setting.

Digital camera quality is improving rapidly. The DC290 is no exception, and an image taken with low compression is hard to tell from a print.

The original bugbear of digital cameras was colour divergence – giving a video-esque quality – but this has now been mostly eliminated. CCD artefacts haven't completely disappeared, though,

with discernable noise on uniformly-coloured surfaces, particularly white, in low-light shots without flash. Focus and image sharpness isn't as good as the competition, notably Sony's F505K – edges tend to be soft.

The DC290 has some very neat features, and image quality is unlikely to leave you disappointed. Overall, though, Sony has stolen the march on this area of the market for now.

DAVID FEARON

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £800 (£681ex VAT)

Contact Kodak 0870 243 0270
www.kodak.com

Good points Fine image quality, lots of features, 20MB memory

Bad points Almost everything it does is done better by Sony

Conclusion A good high-end consumer camera, but at the risk of repeating ourselves, Sony's F505K simply outclasses it, although the Kodak does have considerably more memory supplied as standard

NEC MultiSync FE700 and Hansol 710P

Cheap and cheerful **quality monitors** that won't disappoint.

The latest addition to NEC's range, the MultiSync FE700, sports a flat 17in CRT (16in viewable diagonal) that we found comfortable to use at a respectable 1,152 x 864 with no discernable flicker.

What, in fact, you get for your money is one of the most affordable aperture grille displays on the market. There was practically no reflection and it has a well organised and extensive OSD with degauss, image rotation and five pre-set colour temperatures ranging from 7,500K to 9,300K, that are supplemented by a user-defined setting. Trapezium adjustment is a little confusingly called 'align'.

The monitor suffered from slightly uneven luminance at the far right and left-hand edges, but this was otherwise uniform on the vertical



THE FOCUS ON NEC'S MULTISYNC WAS SHARP AT THE EDGES

plane. Upon arrival there was also slight evidence of pincushion distortion, although this was easily eliminated through the on-screen menu, which also helped it to achieve perfect geometry, even in the corners, where squares really did look like squares and not rectangles.

There was no lack of focus when we compared bright white and darker grey characters and no discernable loss of focus when comparing the traditionally sharper centre of the display with that at the edge.

On the other hand, there was slight moiré on two of our test patterns and both horizontal and vertical colour registration were slightly misaligned, although in everyday use this is not something you would be likely to notice. Screen regulation was very poor, and when we applied a flashing white block to an otherwise black screen it expanded dramatically.

Hansol has hit a similar price point with its 17in (16in viewable diagonal) 710P. It's not far off being flat, unless you compare it directly with the NEC, but instead of opting for aperture grille you get the less exciting shadow mask.

Both NEC and Hansol opted for a captive signal cable, so any problem with this means replacing the whole monitor. Like the NEC, the 710P suffers from practically no reflection and is pleasant to use for long periods.

The OSD is extensive and easy to navigate but falls short of the NEC in terms of colour temperature presets: it has two factory settings, supplemented by a user-defined option, which is not as easy to set as that on the NEC.

Screen uniformity was good on both the horizontal and vertical planes, so there were no undesirable brighter stripes along the edges. Upon arrival there was slight trapezoid distortion to the image displayed, but this was easily rectified through the OSD.

Geometry was spot on – fine lines were crisp, corners were sharp and lines that should have been straight were. Unfortunately, there was slight blooming when bright white characters were compared with the same in dark grey.

Focus was uniform across the whole surface of the display, even in the hard to reach corners but, like the NEC, it suffered from slight moiré, even after degaussing, and had very poor screen regulation. Again, both horizontal and vertical colour registration were slightly out of line.



HANSOL'S 710P HAS THE EDGE OVER NEC'S MONITOR

At these prices there is no longer an excuse to settle for anything less than a

17in display, or for PC manufacturers to consider bundling anything smaller. NEC impressed us by delivering a Natural Flat Diamondtron display for less than £200, which we hope is a sign for the future. These have traditionally been the *crème de la crème* in the monitor world so it's good to see them being made available to users on a lower budget.

With its 710P, though, Hansol has proved that technology is not everything and, putting aside the fact that aperture grille displays are brighter because of their unbroken strips of phosphor and often display a much purer colour, it has the slight upper hand here with a marginally sharper contrast and slightly lower price.

NIK RAWLINSON

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

NEC MULTISYNC FE700

Price £199 (£169.36 ex VAT)

Contact NEC 0645 404020

www.screengods.co.uk

★★★★★

HANSOL 710P

Price £186.83 (£159 ex VAT)

Contact Hansol 01252 360400

www.hansol-uk.com



SB Live! Platinum

Plug straight in to **your PC studio**, and play.

Creative Labs has been at the forefront of PC audio since its inception, and in many ways it's been a bit of a one-horse race. With each new generation of SoundBlaster card the competition is left wondering how to copy it. This time, however, Creative has outdone itself.

The SoundBlaster Live! Platinum is exactly what every budding PC musician has been asking for. Creative has obviously been listening to its customers, because there isn't a single thing missing.

In the box you get the latest generation of the SoundBlaster Live! card, which is a seriously good addition to any PC. The usual array of digital and wavetable effects are present, but that's not what makes the package special. Also in the box is the Live! Drive II. This little beauty slips into a free 5.25in drive bay and features an array of connections that turn your PC into a studio.

Integrated into the Live! Drive you'll

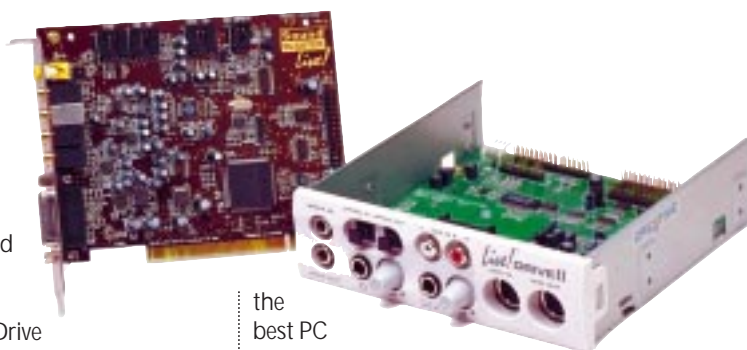
find optical digital in and out, coaxial digital in and out, analog in and out, Midi in and out and headphone and microphone jacks.

With the Live! Drive II in your machine it's never been easier to import or export digital data to DAT or MiniDisc.

The story doesn't end there though. As well as the full complement of SoundBlaster applications and tools, there's also a copy of Cubasis VST in the box, so you can start sequencing straight away. Plus, if you're into games, load up the bundled Aliens V Predator – but make sure you keep the lights on.

Making it a truly great retail package, Creative also throws in a microphone, both digital and analog CD-Audio cables and even screws to fix the Live! Drive II.

The SoundBlaster Live! Platinum is



the best PC sound product ever, it really is that simple. And if you take the incredibly low street price of £125 ex VAT into account, it's an essential purchase.

RIYAD EMERAN

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £146.87 (£125 ex VAT)

Contact Creative Labs
01189 344 744

www.europe.creative.com

Good points LiveBay and bundled extras

Bad points None

Conclusion Best PC sound product ever



Matrox Marvel G400-TV

A bundle of tricks that **ups the ante** of your 3D performance and lets you watch it all on TV.

Marvel is an understatement given the level of functionality Matrox has crammed into the G400-TV. Building on the success of the Marvel G200, this card proves that you can have the best of both worlds – the bells and whistles of a TV-enabled card combined with lightning-fast graphics performance.

To see how well it performed in the graphics stakes, we put the Marvel up against its big brother the Millennium G400 Max. The Marvel fared well, notching up 4,425 3DMarks as opposed to 4,516 for the Max at the standard resolution of 1,024 x 768 in 16bit colour.

Moving onto the video-editing front you'll find the features of the Marvel hard to match for the price. The card itself is a standard size AGP affair with 16MB of

SGRAM, that attaches to a blue break-out box (BOB). The BOB includes the TV Tuner as well as input and output connectors for composite and S-Video, allowing you to place the box on your desk for easy access to the ports.

Using Matrox's dual-head technology, Marvel can output a separate image to a TV, enlarging the Windows desktop or providing full-screen DVD playback, without reducing the refresh rate of the primary monitor. In addition, the card can capture video in real time using a hardware MJPEG codec, that provides quality video at a decent frame rate and allows for frame accurate video editing. The resulting AVI can be converted to an MPEG2 movie.

To make use of all this, you'll find a copy of Avid Cinema video-

editing package, Matrox DVD player, PhotoExpress image editing, PC-VCR to control the tuner, LSX MPEG2 transcoder, and a couple of games

WILL HEAD

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £257.33 (£219 ex VAT)

Contact Matrox 01753 665 500

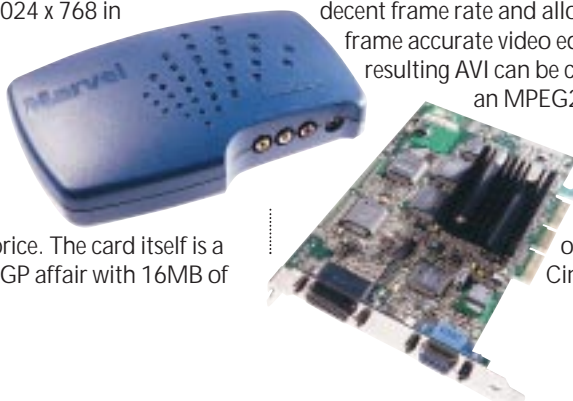
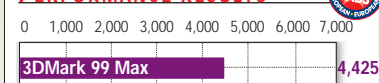
www.matrox.com

Good points Dual head, hardware MJPEG capture, good graphics performance, TV Tuner, software bundle

Bad points You can only use the dual head with a TV, not a second monitor

Conclusion If you're into video editing, but don't want to sacrifice 3D performance, the Marvel G400-TV is a win-win solution

PERFORMANCE RESULTS



Kodak DC240i

Even digital cameras are **Mac-ophiles** these days.

The DC240i is another product redesigned to appeal to iMac users. The original Kodak DC240, released a year ago, has been given translucent plastic covers in a range of colours: blueberry, tangerine, lime, strawberry and grape.

Back when it was released, the DC240 was a top of the range megapixel camera. A year on it is mid-range with its 1,280 x 960 resolution. It has the same

lens as the DC240, equivalent to a 37-119mm lens on a 35mm camera which gives 3x optical zoom backed by a 2x digital zoom should you wish to use it. The camera comes with an 8MB CompactFlash card, that will store 21 pictures at the highest resolution and 56 pictures taken at 640 x 480.

The menu options on the DC240i are obviously aimed at the amateur user. Among the first are those for adding borders and effects, such as black and white or sepia tones, to your pictures. However, there are exposure and white balance settings for you to play with.

To use the camera with USB on an iMac, you will have to be running Mac OS 8.5 and on a PC it has to be Windows 98, although serial interfaces are included for use with older OS



versions. PC users get a raw deal on the software bundle: Adobe PhotoShop 1 for the PC, while Mac users get version 2, although both Mac and PC users also get Adobe PageMill 3. Downloading pictures into any TWAIN-compliant application is easy enough using the bundled USB connector and camera drivers.

The DC240i handles colour well, producing bright images with well-rounded and rich tones. However, it deals less well with surfaces that reflect a lot of light, leaving images looking a bit over-exposed.

ADELE DYER

PCW DETAILS



Price £449.99 (£382.97 ex VAT)

Contact Kodak 0870 243 0270

www.kodak.com

Good points Easy to use.

Bad points Poor deal for PC users on the software bundle. Images occasionally overexposed

Conclusion A good little camera, but there are better options for the price

OnStream SC50

Affordable **tape storage drives** have arrived.

Tape is a natural choice for data backup as it provides a good balance of performance and low storage costs. However, what is irritating is that most high-capacity tape drives cost substantially more than the hard disks they are protecting. OnStream is set to break the mould as its SC50 offers 50GB of compressed storage on a single tape and yet costs far less than the competition.

Only available with a SCSI interface, the SC50 uses a multi-channel head to record data on eight tracks simultaneously and employs an embedded servo mechanism to keep the head positioned correctly in the event of tape wander. Each tape has special servo tracks that are also used to identify defective areas as the drive will stop writing if it can't read both tracks.

OnStream includes Echo backup software and a 60-day evaluation of Veritas Backup Exec. Aimed at workstation backup, Echo assigns a drive

letter to the SC50 so you can use drag-and-drop operations for copying and restoring data. However, you can't use any other backup software alongside Echo because it loads a background task that requires exclusive access.

For testing, the SC50 was installed on a Dell PowerEdge 2300 server with dual PII 400MHz processors and running Windows NT Server 4. Using the supplied copy of Backup Exec, the SC50 secured 3.2GB in only 36 minutes at an average of 93MB/min. Full tape to hard disk verification was slightly faster at 105MB/min while a restoration of 2GB of data took 22 minutes at an average of 100MB/min.

Clearly, OnStream is offering a superb backup solution that is ideal for



high-end workstations and servers alike and the combination of speed, capacity and price is unbeatable.

DAVE MITCHELL

PCW DETAILS



Price £586.32 (£499 ex VAT)

Tapes £43.42 (£36.95 ex VAT)

Contact OnStream

0800 328 1204

www.onstream.com

Good points Good performance, high capacity and very low costs

Bad points Echo software requires exclusive access

Conclusion High-capacity backup should not be an expensive luxury and the SC50 ensures that it isn't

Kyocera KI-G100/SD-66K

A mobile phone unit boasting **world coverage**, for adventurers and those who like expensive toys.

Along with the Internet, mobile phones represent one of the biggest growth industries of the past decade. Mobile phone coverage has become so widespread that you're likely to find a GSM signal in almost every town in the world. This is all well and good, but if you're not travelling to a town, or even to an inhabited area, your GSM mobile phone won't do you much good. You could be hiking in the Himalayas or trekking through the Amazon, where mobile phone coverage is definitely needed but sadly lacking. However, there is an answer to this problem and it's called the Iridium network.

Unlike standard mobile phone networks, Iridium doesn't use cells to keep in contact with all its users. Instead, it has a network of 66 satellites that beam the signal to and from its phones. This means that you can use an Iridium phone almost anywhere on the planet, making it ideal for adventurers. Of course the situation isn't perfect. Because you are beaming a signal to a satellite, you need to have line of sight to the sky. This means that an Iridium phone won't work if you're inside a building, unless you can point the aerial out of a window.

One of the first companies to produce a phone using the Iridium standard is Kyocera. The company is more commonly known for making printers, so this is quite a departure. That said, it's done a fine job of implementing this new technology. Although Kyocera produces an Iridium-only phone, we decided to look at its Iridium/GSM combo unit.

This package comprises a KI-G100

GSM mobile phone and an SD-66K Iridium unit. The beauty of this solution is that you can use the GSM phone separately when you are in an area with coverage and then slip it into the Iridium unit when you aren't.

Considering that GSM phones are getting smaller and sexier all the time, Kyocera has done a good job with the KI-G100. It measures 41 x 130 x 25.5mm (w x h x d) and weighs only 105g. It offers

Vegas, you can slip the KI-G100 into the SD-66K unit and use Iridium instead. Once the two units are joined it looks similar to the very early brick-sized mobile phones. Although you can use a specific Iridium SIM card, if you have a Cellnet GSM SIM card in the KI-G100, you can use that to make calls on the Iridium network as well. In use Iridium wasn't perfect. It generally took about 10 dropped calls before a connection was actually made. Once the call was put through, though, the sound quality was every bit as good as a standard GSM call. Although standing on the streets of London or Las Vegas watching call after call being dropped wasn't much

fun, if I was stuck in the jungle and needed help a few dropped calls would be a small price to pay. Call charges vary from the country of origin and range from \$1.18 (72p) to \$2.74 (£1.67) per minute of call time.

The Iridium module comes complete with two lithium ion batteries and a smart little remote vibrating buzzer. This is particularly useful if you've got lots of heavy weather clothing on and you can't hear the phone ringing. If you place the small buzzer near your body, when the phone receives a call it will vibrate to alert you.

On the whole Kyocera has come up with a great product. The market for this type of equipment may not be huge, but if you find yourself out in the wilderness, this is exactly what you need.

RIYAD EMERAN



approximately two hours' talk time and 70 hours' standby. It boasts all the usual mobile phone features and has a useful jog shuttle for scrolling through your address book and options. The phone uses the GSM 900 standard, which gives you coverage in almost every country – with the exception of the US. For some reason the Americans decided to launch their GSM network on the 1900 standard, used by no other country in the world.

If you find yourself without GSM 900 coverage, as I recently did while in Las

PCW DETAILS



Price £1,645 (£1,400 ex VAT)

Contact Kyocera 0118 923 0789

www.kyocera.co.uk

Good points Flexible GSM/Iridium combo, worldwide coverage

Bad points Expensive, niche market

Conclusion A great product that will be a godsend to those who need it and an expensive toy to those who don't

Dreamweaver 3 and Fireworks 3

There is **substance beneath the makeovers** given to two market-leading web-design packages.

Dreamweaver and Fireworks have long been the HTML and web image optimisation editors of choice for professional web designers because of their clean, fuss-free way of working. Many users will wonder what Macromedia could possibly do to either of these products to improve on what they already have. We wondered, too, so put them to the test.

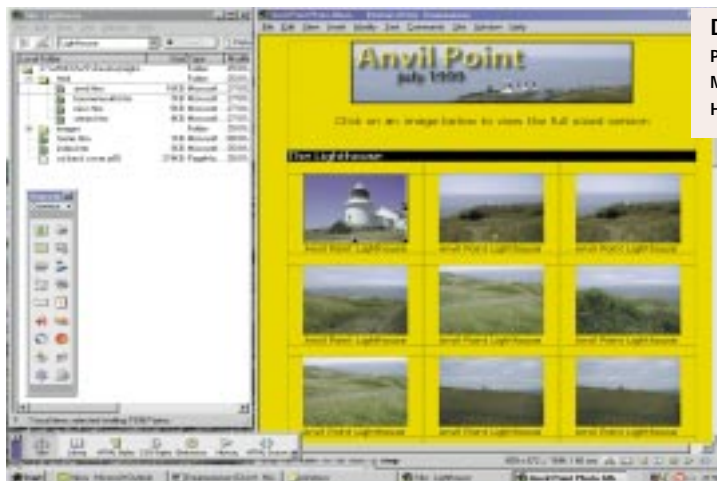
Dreamweaver 3

Dreamweaver 2 has won two *PCW* group tests and we have yet to find anything that comes close to matching its ease of use, compact HTML coding and speedy, simple operation.

On the surface, version 3 looks remarkably familiar. The interface is much the same, but if you look closely you'll see it has been expanded. New sheets have been added to the Objects palette and new buttons on the working window give immediate access to cascading style sheets and the new HTML styles.

There's also a new history palette that allows you to roll back an unlimited number of changes, even back past 'saves'. The history list itself can also be saved and run much like a macro, saving time on future pages. Another time-saving feature is the ability to customise every menu through JavaScript, thereby tailoring the package to meet your exact requirements.

With Microsoft Office making it easy to generate web pages from Word and Excel, the new 'Clean Up Word HTML' function will be welcomed by many. In our tests, it removed multiple Word-specific tags and reduced the size of the resulting file to around 50 per cent of the original. It made one minor alteration to a numbered list, but only to bring it in line with HTML coding conventions, but apart from that the output looked identical and the code was clean.



DREAMWEAVER 3 HAS POSSIBLY THE FASTEST METHOD YET OF CREATING HOT-SPOTS ON A MAP

be kept open without cluttering too much screen real estate, and as users of any of the previous incarnations of Dreamweaver will know, this is a desktop-hungry application. The raw HTML coding window now has an

For Dreamweaver 3, Macromedia has developed the idea of HTML styles. Older browsers cannot handle cascading style sheets (CSS) and so, to facilitate speedy formatting, Dreamweaver includes a new palette into which users can save their most commonly used text styles.

Highlighting an area of text and clicking the style on the list applies the necessary HTML tags, drastically cutting the amount of time taken to format complex sections. Hitting CTRL-Y will also now apply the last style to the current piece of text, much like the redo function of a word processor.

Dreamweaver has always made raw-code editing easy with its integrated HTML editor, but this is now supplemented by the 'Quick Tag Editor'. Highlighting any page element, such as an image, and hitting CTRL-T brings up a small window containing just the tag that activates that element. This can be directly edited on the spot, without the need to switch into the code-editing mode. Pausing while you enter a tag will bring up a list of possible tags that match the first few characters entered. The correct tag can then be selected using the mouse.

The full HTML editing window, meanwhile, has been transformed into a tabbed palette that can be dragged around the workspace and docked among other palettes. In this way it can

edit menu attached, making it easy to search, copy, paste and so forth from directly inside the window.

Dreamweaver is also closely tied in with Fireworks. With Adobe now bundling ImageReady 2 with Photoshop 5.5 this is a sensible move as it once again makes Fireworks a viable choice of image editor for the Dreamweaver user. Selecting a graphic for editing in Dreamweaver automatically opens it within Fireworks and the code produced within Fireworks is backwards compatible with Dreamweaver.

With group working in mind, collaborative editing functions are now available. Files can be checked 'in' and 'out' to ensure that you never get more than one person working on a file at any one time.

Image maps can be defined from directly within the property inspector bar, which tailors itself to contain only the fields relevant to the element you are editing at any particular time. Dedicated tools that appear whenever an image is selected allow you to draw the map's hot-spot areas that can then be repositioned using the mouse pointer. This surely has to be the fastest way to create an image map.

It was always going to be difficult for Macromedia to improve on what it had with Dreamweaver 2, but with the addition of HTML styles and the Quick Tag Edit window it seems to have

managed to produce a product worthy of an upgrade.

Fireworks 3

In common with Dreamweaver, Fireworks now has a history palette, allowing you to scroll back your list of actions, even past file saves, and save the entire palette as though it were a macro, saving time if you often carry out the same tasks on multiple images.

A welcome change is that the workspace has been tabbed. What this means is that four sheets lie on top of one another and, by clicking on the appropriate tab, you can flick back and forth between your work, a preview in which any rollover buttons will work, and two-up and four-up previews of your work after 'optimisation' – Macromedia's term for the process of compression or colour reduction necessary to facilitate speedy modem downloads. Additionally, this 'optimisation' encompasses a new lossy GIF option that performs similar functions to JPEG compression before saving in GIF format.

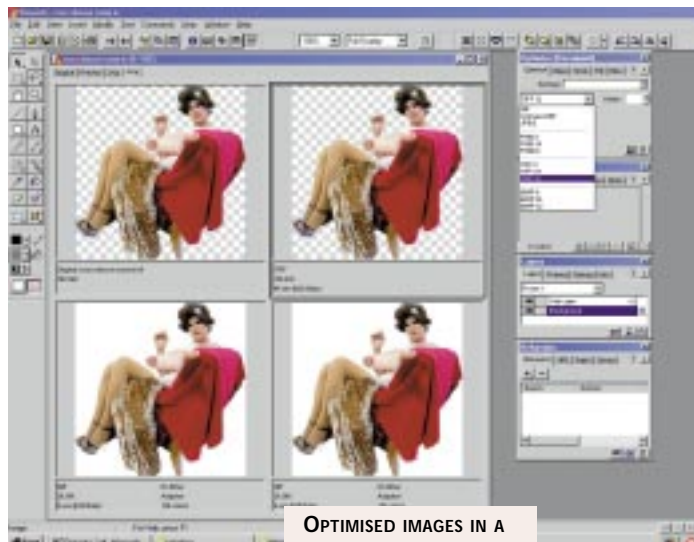
With a tabbed workspace such as this you no longer have to navigate the 'save' dialog before you know what images will look like on the page, so you can now create your masterpiece with even more confidence than users of Fireworks 2.

HTML can now be copied to the clipboard and pasted directly into your web editor of choice and curves have been added for controlling brightness/contrast and hue/saturation levels. There is a new symbol library that allows you to store commonly used objects. The easiest way to think of this is as a versatile, multi-page clipboard. Buttons dropped into the library carry with them all of their associated slices and links.

The accurate placement of image elements is now easier than ever: the align heights function equals the distance between each object in a group, while 'align widths' does the same on a horizontal plane. Selecting the font drop-down menu now simultaneously opens a small window beside the font list. Running the mouse over any of the fonts then displays

the text you have already typed in the highlighted font before you have committed to it – a real time saver.

Text entry and editing still all has to be done through a dialog box, unfortunately, and you cannot yet type directly onto the page and



OPTIMISED IMAGES IN A FOUR-UP PREVIEW LETS YOU EDIT WITH EASE

edit your attributes through a palette

A change we didn't like was the way that adjustment drag bars have been switched from vertical to horizontal operation. Previously, if you had wanted to change the size of a font or the level of quality reduction in a JPEG, you held down on the adjustment slider, which would then pop up a vertical scale. You would then drag your mouse up and down it without moving your finger.

These pop-up sliders now appear below the button you have pressed and you have to move the mouse again before you can start using them, which takes a little getting used to and lacks the fluidity of the original implementation.

The 'effects' palette has been greatly expanded and can now be increased still further through the use of third-party plug-ins. There is no longer a need to distinguish between single and multiple effects as each is

presented on a fly-out menu and added to the list of effects applied to each object one after another, letting you go back and edit any individually applied effect directly without adjusting or undoing the rest.

The package has retained its ability to import Photoshop images, keeping all of

the layers intact, and Fireworks behaviours are now recognised as native Dreamweaver behaviours, buttons in Adobe GoLive or JavaScript rollovers in Microsoft FrontPage. HTML export options run along similar lines, with Dreamweaver, FrontPage, GoLive and 'No HTML' at your disposal.

The whole picture

For both Dreamweaver and Fireworks, it was always going to be difficult to improve on version 2, but the new usability features, global history palettes and Dreamweaver's innovative Quick Tag Editor and HTML styles make either a worthy candidate for those considering an upgrade. If you're looking for an end-to-end integrated solution to web design, you'd not go far wrong

if you bought both packages together.

NIK RAWLINSON

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Dreamweaver 3

Price Dreamweaver full product £269.08 (£229 ex VAT), upgrade £116.33 (£99 ex VAT)

★★★★★

Fireworks 3

Price Fireworks full product £163.33 (£139 ex VAT), upgrade £116.33 (£99 ex VAT)

Owners of both Dreamweaver 2 and Fireworks 2 can upgrade to Studio for £175.08 (£149 ex VAT)

Owners of either Dreamweaver 2 or Fireworks 2 can upgrade to Studio for £210.33 (£179 ex VAT)

Contact Computers Unlimited
0181 358 5857

www.macromedia.com

System requirements

Dreamweaver 3: Windows 95, 98 or NT4, 120MHz or faster processor, 32MB RAM, 20MB free hard drive space, 256 colour monitor with a resolution of 800 x 600, CD-ROM drive

Fireworks 3: Pentium processor (Pentium II recommended), Windows 95, 98, or NT (with Service Pack 3) or later, 64MB of available RAM, 640 x 480, 256-colour display (1,024 x 768, millions of colours recommended), 100 MB of free hard disk space, Adobe Type Manager Version 4 or later with Type 1 fonts

Conclusion Upgrade to either or both and you won't be disappointed



You can now create your masterpiece with even more confidence

Microsoft Money 2000

Money's **latest attempt to jump ahead** of Quicken in the personal finance arena doesn't come cheap.

Microsoft Money and Intuit's

Quicken are the two important contenders in the market for personal finance managers, and for the past couple of years they have been roughly neck-and-neck. So, with the release of Money 2000, has Microsoft managed to put any clear blue water between them?

Three editions of Money are now available. As with Money 99, Standard is aimed at home users, while Financial Suite adds greater planning facilities. The new entrant, Personal and Business, is aimed primarily at sole traders. Using Money for the first time is an extremely simple process, with a straightforward setup assistant.

The program is based on a web interface, and is integrated with Internet Explorer 5, which comes on the same CD-ROM. Money's home page – the screen that opens when the program is loaded – has been improved significantly, fitting in more information.

However, for many users, the most commonly visited screen will be the transactions view. As in previous versions, this looks a little like a spreadsheet, displaying each of the transactions for a particular bank account one after another down the page. Entering new transactions can be done either by filling out a form at the bottom of the screen or more directly as you would with a spreadsheet.

The Financial Suite comes with a number of integrated worksheets that, for example, let users create a Will and evaluate the benefits of a company car. Additionally, it offers planning facilities to help the user create and keep to a strategy for paying off loans or saving for school fees.

With the Personal and Business edition, Microsoft has, for the first time, made a serious attempt to attract small-business users to Money. While not offering the sophistication of a program such as QuickBooks, it may be a better



MONEY EXPRESS WARNS ABOUT FORTHCOMING AND OVERDUE BILLS

In addition, Money Express permits simple transactions to be entered without loading Money itself.

The fact that Money 2000 is not a radical improvement suggests that the personal finance management market is beginning to mature. Money 2000 is an excellent product, but we are not sure it

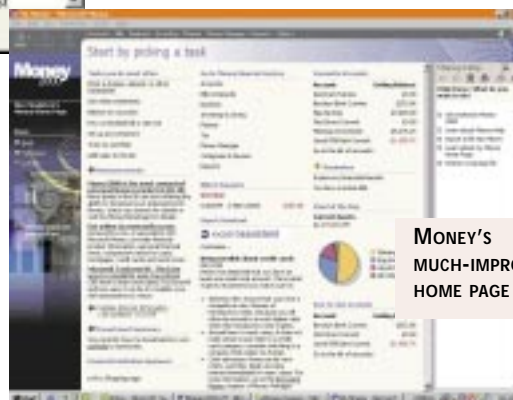
option for sole traders wanting a simple program to track both personal and business finances. It has fair invoicing facilities, although as in previous versions, the lack of an invoice designer is disappointing.

Additionally, Money will produce quotations, credit notes and pro-forma invoices, the latter being something that many of the so-called business accounts packages lack. For the first time, VAT is now tracked, making Money suitable for VAT-registered traders.

It is worth bearing in mind the price. At £69, it is £20 more expensive than Quicken Deluxe, despite offering roughly equivalent business features. Additionally, Quicken Deluxe is bundled with a program for producing self-assessed tax returns, whereas Microsoft's equivalent program will set you back a further £25. For these reasons alone, Quicken may be a better option.

However, if you are likely to want online banking, Money may be the only option. It currently supports eight high-street banks, whereas Quicken only caters for NatWest customers. While bank statements can be downloaded automatically in both packages – saving the time and hassle of entering them manually – only Money has a facility to pay bills automatically.

Of course, remembering to pay bills on time can be a problem, and Money goes a long way to solving this. A bundled utility, Money Express, will warn about forthcoming bills when you switch on the computer, so long as the bill has been entered into Money's bill calendar.



MONEY'S MUCH-IMPROVED HOME PAGE

is worth paying to upgrade (there is £20 cashback for existing users).

For new users, there is not a lot to separate it from Quicken. However, if you are looking for a package for personal use, we would recommend Money, if only because Quicken is way behind in terms of online banking. On the other hand, sole traders wanting to look after small business accounts and calculate their tax will find Quicken Deluxe is better value for money.

ALEX SINGLETON

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★



Price Standard £29.99 (£25.52 ex VAT), Financial Suite £49.99 (£42.54), Personal and Business £69.99 (£59.57)

Contact Microsoft 0345 002 000
www.microsoft.com

System requirements Pentium 90MHz, Win95, 98 or NT4, 16MB RAM (or 24MB for NT4), 70MB disk space (or 175MB if IE5 is not installed).

Good points Ease of use, excellent online banking facilities

Bad points No bundled tax form software, lack of invoice designer

Conclusion Outstanding for the home user, but the sole trader will find Quicken Deluxe better value

Adobe PhotoDeluxe HE 4

Home users who don't need an **industry-standard photo-editing suite**, now don't need to pay for it.

There are times when using Photoshop is overkill. It's unbeatable when it comes to digital photo-editing, but if all you need to do is organise your snaps and the occasional bit of tweaking then you can happily settle for something a lot less powerful. Adobe is aiming PhotoDeluxe Home Edition at that market.

With a friendlier and easier-to-navigate menu system, many Photoshop tools have been either removed or disguised as a series of project icons running along the top of the screen.

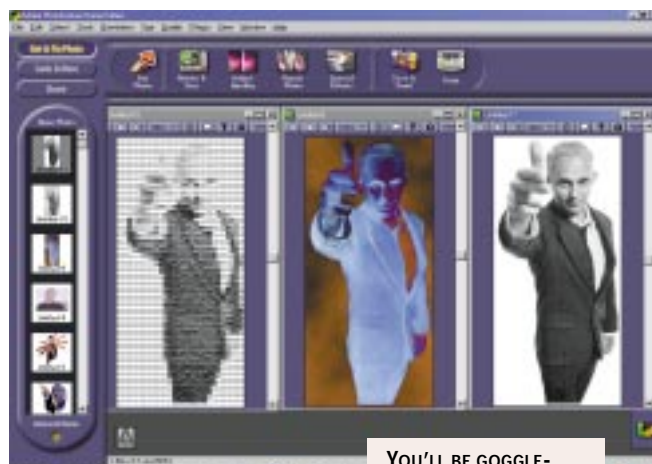
Hit 'advanced menus', though, and you'll find many familiar options return for advanced editing. Poke around a bit more and you might be surprised to discover that, like Photoshop, PhotoDeluxe is layers-based, letting you apply edits on separate layers, to avoid ruining work already completed.

The package launches with a short video guiding you through its most important areas, and when you're actually using the package the emphasis seems more on fun than business. Click on any of the menu icons and you will be led, step by step, through projects for creating calendars, greetings cards, labels and various other novelties using your own images. Considering the release date, we were a little surprised that the calendar activity could only cope with the years 1999 to 2003, especially as 1999 is over.

Images themselves can be stored in a virtual album for easy organisation, making this a good choice for first-time digital photographers who are still having difficulty organising obscurely named files.

We were disappointed that unless we activated the 'advanced menus' the smallest increment by which we could rotate our images was 90 degrees, which is no good if all you want to do is straighten up a slightly off-kilter horizon.

Another downfall is the way in which it handled resizing. Although you can scale your images by dragging handles on each corner, the canvas will not resize to accommodate your alterations unless



YOU'LL BE GOGGLE-EYED AT SOME OF THE WEIRD EFFECTS YOU CAN ADD TO YOUR SNAPS



you once again navigate the 'advanced menus', so less experienced users could find themselves unwittingly lopping off edges. On a positive note, it includes a range of pre-set photo sizes enabling instant cropping for frames or wallets.

A range of one-click functions will apply pond ripple, spherical distortion, twirl, diffusion or pinch effects. Similarly, easy-to-use tools zap red eye and remove dust and scratches from battered photos.

It's easy to see how they achieve this latter option as one of the most visible effects is blurring, so if you're thinking of touching up your old family photos in this way for reprinting, then you might achieve better results if you opt for the more advanced tools of Photoshop LE and tackle the job manually.

Artistic effects will turn your image into an impressionist painting or a piece of curled paper, and even disguise your face by slapping on clip art noses and moustaches. This is more of a fun novelty than a practical application, though, and is unlikely to fool anyone.

Perhaps the most ambitious function

is the 3D clip art in which your images are applied to the sides of 3D lorries, books, airships and so on. These can in turn be dropped onto a static background and then sent to friends, along with a browser in which they can be viewed and rotated.

If all of this seems a little too ambitious, then an alternative,

PhotoDeluxe's PhotoParade option, links images, sound and movement into a multimedia presentation, again with its own integrated viewer.

In all, PhotoDeluxe is an easy-to-use and fun way of manipulating and storing images. Novice users will welcome the project-based, step-by-step approach to achieving common tasks, while those with more experience should find much of what they need on the 'advanced menus'. £45 all in is a good price to pay, but for another £30 you can get your hands on a copy of Photoshop LE, which for the more advanced user may be a more suitable buy.

NIK RAWLINSON

PCW DETAILS



Price £45.83 (£39 ex VAT)

Contact Adobe Systems
0131 458 6842

www.adobe.co.uk

System requirements 233MHz processor, Windows 95/98 or NT4 with Service Pack 5, 32MB RAM (64MB RAM for NT), 100MB hard-disk space, Colour monitor with 800 x 600 resolution and 16bit colour, CD-ROM drive

Good points Easy to use, project-based, surprisingly powerful

Bad points Inexperienced users may be daunted by the need to slip into the 'advanced menus'

Conclusion Great for simplistic editing, but Photoshop or Photoshop LE may be more suited to most tasks

NU 2000 and Systemworks

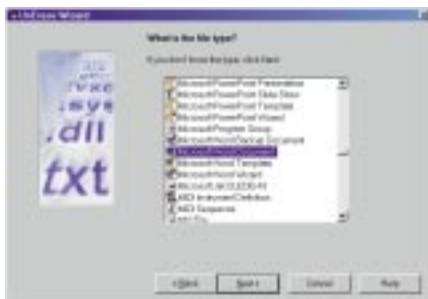
Workhorse utilities packages may not **set your pulse racing**, but preventing a hard disk crash will.

Norton Utilities (NU) made its name in the early days of the PC and seemed doomed when its key features began to show up in operating systems. Undelete, which had made NU a must-have, turned up first in MS-DOS and then as the Recycle Bin in Windows.

But NU is still going strong and Undelete is still a major reason for buying it. This is because the Recycle Bin caches only files you delete yourself: a Word or Excel file that you close by accident might still be sitting intact on your hard disk but the bin won't see it.

Norton will find it – if you dig into the less obvious options; and it needs to save your bacon only once to justify its price.

Other facilities include a system



usual DOS prompt. Norton System Doctor, which you can choose to load on start-up, offers a choice of metrics of system performance.

SystemWorks 2000 integrates NU under a common interface with three other major Norton products: AntiVirus, CleanSweep and CrashGuard.

The first is the best-selling anti-virus package, with a year's free online updates; further updates cost £2.50 a year; CleanSweep keeps your disks free of Internet clutter and monitors Uninstalls; and

check and speedy disk optimisation; a new feature is the ability to use a Zip or Jaz cartridge as a rescue disk, producing your familiar Windows environment rather than the

CrashGuard protects against crashes.

For £20 more you get a Professional version offering Norton Ghost, a disk cloner, and Y2K debugging.

CLIVE AKASS

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Prices Norton Utilities 2000 £46.99 (£40 ex VAT), SystemWorks 2000 £85.99 (£73 ex VAT) or £105.99 (£90 ex VAT) for the Pro version

System requirements Windows 9x, 86/66 PC or higher, 16MB RAM, 95MB hard disk space 2x CD drive or faster

Contact Symantec 01628 592222
www.symantec.com

Good points Both packages offer very useful utilities

Bad points Undelete interface slightly cumbersome

Conclusion Norton Utilities still good after all these years; but SystemWorks 2000 is better value in terms of bangs-per-buck

Adobe PressReady 1.0

Colour proofing from the desktop which may let you **strike the bureau off your list** of overheads.

Professional colour-proofing is an expensive business. Recently, chemical-based processes such as Dupont's Cromalin and 3M's Matchprint have been superseded by inkjet technologies, but prices are still in the £15

per A4 page range. So Adobe's PressReady will be viewed by designers as a cash-saving miracle. Small-business users who produce their own colour marketing materials will also benefit.

PressReady turns an inexpensive inkjet colour printer into a professional colour-proofing system. Too good to be true? Well, it depends. The quality of any system depends on careful setup, and maintenance, as well as using the right materials. Colour management is far from an exact science and output quality



can vary enormously. But PressReady can give you an output difficult to distinguish from a bureau-produced proof.

PressReady works by creating a colour-calibrated PDF using the

PressReady printer driver. Prior to printing you can set an ICC profile for your printer to simulate press output.

Once you've set things up, PressReady works transparently. You just choose printer settings for each job from within your design application using file/print/properties. The PressReady properties panel allows you to set paper type, size and so on.

PressReady can also be used to produce colour-calibrated PDFs using the Create Adobe PDF applet. These can

be distributed to clients who, providing they have a supported printer, can produce the hard copy proof themselves.

PressReady already supports an impressive array of printers, and more will be added, presumably when Adobe gets around to producing ICC profiles for them.

KEN McMAHON

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £105.75 (£90 ex VAT)

Contact Adobe 020 8606 4001
www.adobe.co.uk

System requirements Pentium processor, Win95, 98 or NT4 48MB RAM, 280MB disk space

Good points Inexpensive, easy to use
Bad points Accuracy relies on correct setup and maintenance

Conclusion Cheap colour proofing for the masses

McAfee Office 2000 v 2.0

Six programs in one **may seem like good value** but it could be a case of a few bad apples...

The latest version of McAfee Office 2000 is a collection of six different programs that the company sells separately, bundled together in one easy-to-access suite. The six products are: VirusScan, First Aid, Nuts and Bolts, Y2K Survival Kit, Oil Change and Uninstaller. McAfee has designed a good central interface, Office Central, from which you can access each of these programs, or update them to the latest version in one click.

The best of the six is definitely the excellent VirusScan. Once installed it runs in your system tray, scanning your files for known and undiscovered viruses. What makes this virus checker so good is that, unlike some, it scans for hostile ActiveX and Java code on the web pages you visit and checks files and email attachments for viruses as you download. McAfee offers a weekly update service which includes the ability to update the scanning engine as well as the virus definition files.

Another useful program is Uninstaller. Although most programs have their own uninstallation functions, they do not always remove all the files and registry entries that it created. You can uninstall programs through its interface: if the targeted program already has an uninstallation feature of its own it will launch that. Afterwards, however, it will check that all the necessary entries have been removed.

There is also a separate function that scans your hard drive and registry looking for files and entries that are no longer used and are slowing your computer down. You can archive applications to save disk space, move them to different directories or drives, and free up hard disk space by deleting things such as help files and multimedia files if you get desperate for space.



We reviewed First Aid in our November issue, and were not impressed. It is little more than a consolidation of the features already available in Windows. In its favour it has an easy-to-use interface – you just ‘click where it hurts’ to solve the problem you’re having. There is an extensive knowledge base, although it is not much better than the information contained in

the Windows help files and Microsoft’s Knowledge Base on the web.

The novice may find it

useful, but be warned, when we tested various versions of this program it sometimes caused more problems than it solved, crashing at various points.

Nuts and Bolts is a more powerful version of First Aid. However, most of its best features are duplicated in the uninstaller program above, and some of the rest can be achieved using Windows anyway. Disktune, for example, is simply another version of disk defragmenter that you can find in the system tools section on your start menu.

Other features include Discover, a utility that allows you to drill down into your system, displaying information about your hardware and operating system and enabling you to look at the

amount of resources each program currently running is using.

An undelete feature helps you out if you’ve emptied your recycle bin and need the file back, Shredder permanently deletes sensitive files and Fortress encrypts files with a password to prevent others opening them. Again, this showed signs of instability, crashing our test

machine completely when we used its quick copy feature.

Y2K survival kit did not impress us. It claims to check all of the relevant clocks and scan the hard drive, reporting on the year 2000 status of your applications. It crashed constantly on our test machine, however, and you would be better off using one of the many other products on the market. Oil change is a program that updates your programs from the web.

Overall, there are only two programs worth having, which makes the £50 price tag seem steep, but it could be of use if you don’t already have virus protection and your hard drive has become bloated through months of installing and removing cover disc software.

JASON JENKINS

This virus checker scans for hostile ActiveX and Java code

PCW DETAILS

★★★★

Price £49.99 (£42.54 ex VAT)

Contact Network Associates
01753 827 500
www.mcafee.com

System requirements Windows 95/98, 486 processor, CD-ROM, 140MB Hard disk space, modem

Good points VirusScan and Uninstaller are stable and useful...

Bad points ...but the others aren't

Conclusion If you lack virus protection software and your machine is slow, then this could be useful. Otherwise you may be disappointed

Omnipage Pro 10

Powerful and versatile OCR software that will **quickly make itself indispensable** – as an upgrade.

Going strong since 1988, Caere Corporation has long been the recognised market leader in OCR (optical character recognition) software. This latest version of its best-selling package is the product of a merger with two competing companies. OmniPage Pro now offers the combined and refined power of three independently developed OCR engines.

The interface is certainly a delight, intuitive enough to get a novice up and running with barely a glance at the manual. Operational options include fully automatic (one click and you're done), manual (where you specify, for example, which areas of the page should be treated as tables, which as columns



etc) and Wizard (for that extra helping hand). A system of algorithms attempts to come up with the correct word when in

doubt, and the proof-reading tools let you correct text within the application before the final version is exported, in fully editable form, to a word processor.

Page formatting can be ditched altogether, partially preserved or, if you select the True Page feature, OmniPage Pro will attempt to retain every detail of the original document's layout. Graphics are captured in colour or greyscale, and a nice touch is the read-back feature which speaks aloud the finished text.

If you've tried the OCR software that came bundled with your scanner and found it wanting, OmniPage Pro 10 is the upgrade of choice.

KYLE MACRAE

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £79 (£67.23 ex VAT) as an upgrade to any OCR software; otherwise £395 (£336.17 ex VAT)

Contact Caere Corporation
0870 870 8085
www.caere.com/uk

System requirements A Pentium processor, Windows95/98/2000 or NT4, 32MB RAM, 50MB hard disk space (90MB recommended). A scanner and sound card are both optional

Good points A dream to run yet fully-featured under the hood

Bad points The pricing is absurd, nobody should pay more than the upgrade option

Conclusion Superb OCR, sophisticated formatting tools, and a simple interface.



ZipMagic 2000

Downloads getting you down? **Cramping your disk's style?** Allow ZipMagic to cast its spell.

When hard disks were tiny, over-burdened affairs, Zip programs offered a smart solution where seldom-used files could be compressed to a fraction of their former size. But with today's cavernous disks, the future of

Zips is assured by the growth of their use on the Internet. Many files can now be downloaded only in zipped format.

Data archived in a Zip is trapped in a virtual limbo. If you fiddle around with a zipped file, first you must extract and uncompress it using a Zip program – a tedious and sometimes confusing business. ZipMagic does away with this nonsense by fooling Windows Explorer into treating a Zip as a regular folder rather than an impenetrable storehouse.



The files within behave just like any others, perfectly happy to be opened, changed, closed,

dragged and dropped, copied and pasted. ZipMagic performs its clever trickery behind the scenes without any visible intervention. The result is smooth, quick and seamless Zip file manipulation.

Email integration and a built-in graphics viewer add to the appeal, and a stop-start download manager protects against interrupted file transfers. This is an impressive Zip utility for its ease of use alone. However, as a download typically requires no further attention once

unzipped, ZipMagic 2000's main innovation will appeal most to those who work with home-made archives.

KYLE MACRAE

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Price £29.95 (£25.49 ex VAT)

Contact Mijenix Corporation
01297 552 222
www.mijenix.com

System requirements A 486 processor or better, Windows9x or NT, 8MB RAM (16MB recommended), 11MB hard disk space

Good points Allows easy access to zipped files

Bad points Limited appeal to those who only unzip the odd download

Conclusion If you're short of disk space, a seasoned surfer or just obsessively tidy, ZipMagic 2000 offers power, flexibility and features aplenty – with an added twist of true inspiration

Learning Red Hat Linux

If you're new to Red Hat Linux this clear, **comprehensible book** could be the one for you.

It's easy to quantify the size of the market for *O'Reilly's Learning Red Hat Linux*. It's the six million – and more – people who began to use Linux after it shot to fame in late 1996. They represent a vast new readership that needs an introduction to both Linux and the underlying Unix-like concepts. For them, author Bill McCarty has compressed a beginners' guide to this most complex operating system into 351 pages, leaving out the incomprehensibility that characterises other Linux guides.

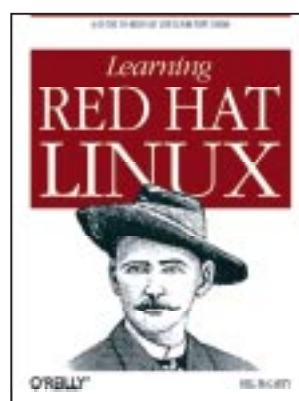
Learning Red Hat Linux occasionally assumes too little knowledge. The 73 pages on installing the OS repeat much of the material in Red Hat Linux's own vastly improved installation manual. While the book adds a little – the section on using the *fips* utility to resize partitions, for example – the content of these 73 pages doesn't really justify their existence here.

The book really comes into its own from page 74 onwards, where its comprehensive look at Linux's data system includes a well-pitched explanation of its device partition and

basic Unix tools such as *tar* and *gunzip*.

From the 'lpq' printer queue query to mounting floppy drives, from compressing files to making symbolic links, it manages to include the essentials that other books leave until too late. Knowing, for example, how to check partition space immediately after installation is an essential troubleshooting routine if, say, you plan to run space-hungry Office suites like *StarOffice*.

Beginners' books on Linux have become possible because tools like *linuxconf* and *Gnome* hugely simplify configuration. *Learning Red Hat Linux* capitalises on this by minimising command line configuration and concentrating on getting systems up and running. As a result it has excellent chapters on setting up Linux LANs, WANs and configuring *Samba*.



On the way it passes through the stuff you bought Linux to do: running the Apache web server and sendmail email, and using the system as a LAN router.

It's all spot on in tone and technical detail, but what really sets this book apart are the final two chapters on using the shell and shell scripting. They are clear

and comprehensible – an excellent introduction to one of the most intimidating aspects of Linux, and a great springboard for more advanced study.

LEE KIMBER

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Author *Bill McCarty*

Publisher *O'Reilly*

Price *£23.50*

ISBN *1565926277*

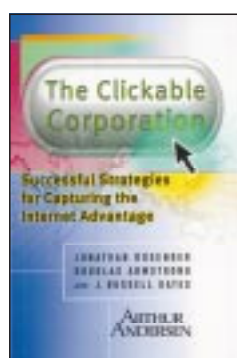


The Clickable Corporation

Find out what **major companies are doing on the web** and how you can follow in their footsteps

Your liking of this book depends largely on whether you are happy to believe the expert analysis of Arthur Andersen. Regardless, it is an insight into 25 well-known companies engaged in ecommerce, including Dell, Federal Express and Charles Schwab.

Instead of having one chapter on each company, however, the book takes a practical approach to helping the 'netrepreneur' build a successful online venture. Chapter one covers the benefits of being online and the pitfalls of ignoring it; chapter two demonstrates how sharing knowledge with competitors and partners can benefit rather than damage you; the third



chapter covers helping consumers make a choice, while chapter four looks at offering convenience. We then drift through customisation, making savings, creating customer communities and boosting profits by using entertainment.

Each chapter's topic is enhanced by a look at two or three companies, with a quick summary. This makes the book as easy to browse as it is to read in full.

The Clickable Corporation is aimed at the business strategist, as the Arthur Andersen tag might suggest, rather than the webmaster. It will help you understand how to effectively turn your business into a modern, online, cost-

saving, profit-making entity, and it won't blind you with nerdy jargon.

The easy style and good organisation of this book, coupled with the fact that it centres on the experiences of 25 proven online ventures, make it a most enjoyable read. It is one we highly recommend.

STEVE MASTERS

PCW DETAILS

★★★★★

Authors *J Rosenoer, D Armstrong and JR Gates*

Publisher *Free Press*

Price *£17.99*

ISBN *0684855534*

For more book reviews visit the VNU website at www.vnunet.com





All-in-one machines vs answerphone, fax and modem

With office machines taking up **a lot of desk space**, does it make more sense to combine them?

If you work in a large company's offices, take a look around you and note just how much equipment is scattered about. There is probably a fax, a printer and a photocopier, not to mention a scanner, voicemail on your phone and a connection to the Internet via a modem or the internal network. Then just think about squeezing all that equipment into your back bedroom, which is what you would have to do if you wanted to set up a home office. You also need to think about the cost of buying each of these separately – the expense will undoubtedly eat into a fair chunk of your business start-up funds.

One way to cut down on both clutter and expense is to use all-in-one machines.

Fax/printer/scanner combos have been around for a while and are reasonably good at performing each of their functions. Another option to consider, however, is to combine the functionality of a fax, modem and answerphone all in one machine. While you can buy modems with voice functionality that can also act as answerphones and fax machines, these require the PC to be at least in stand-by mode, ready to receive faxes and voice messages as they come in.

However, one alternative is the self-memory modem, which stores faxes and voice messages even when your PC is turned off. Self-memory modems differ from ordinary voice-capable modems, in that they have a certain amount of RAM

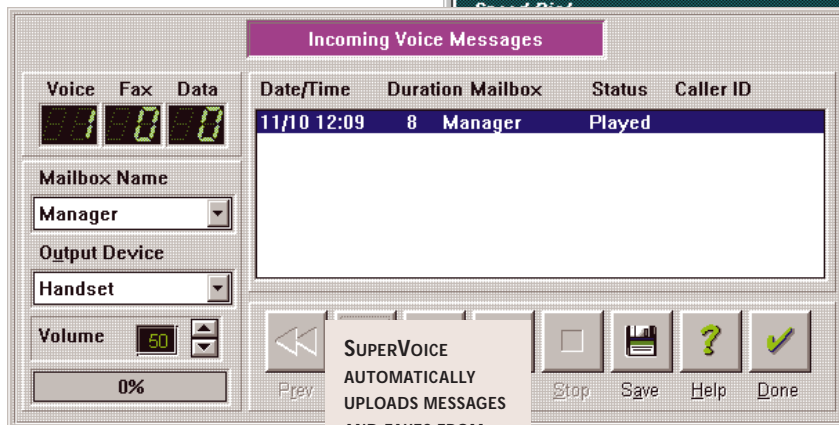
to store incoming faxes and voice messages. The amount of RAM on self-memory modems differs from modem to modem, with most able to store anything between seven and 20 minutes of messages, or 40 to 50 fax pages. However, some models allow you to add additional memory, should you find yourself running out of space.

While some self-memory modems are controlled by software from the PC, better ones will have buttons on the front to allow you to listen to your messages without turning on your PC, giving them more of the flexibility and functionality of an answerphone. Faxes, of course, still have to be retrieved and printed via the PC.

All-in-one or standalone?

Before you rush out and buy an all-in-one device, you should consider your needs and whether you are better off with separate bits of equipment. If you prefer to have your faxes printed out on paper, rather than having to mess around with software packages before you can view them, you would do better with an actual fax machine. Also bear in mind that if you receive faxed forms that have to be signed and returned, receiving them electronically can be more trouble than it is worth. In this case the electronic fax has to be printed, signed and scanned before it can be sent again in electronic form. Of course, if you have a fax machine all this can be eliminated, as you simply sign the fax and send it back via the fax machine.

Also think about the number of faxes you are likely to receive. If you receive a 30-page report by fax while you are out,



will the self-memory modem run out of RAM before the document is finished, leaving you with only half a report? In this case it may be better to have a fax machine, although you can use a fax-modem, but simply leave your PC in sleep mode and set to wake up when a fax comes in, so the fax can at least be saved to your hard disk. Good self-memory modems should have expandable memory, so you can add more RAM to store additional voice messages and faxes.

However, there are several advantages to having faxes in electronic form. You can move one step closer to the paperless office, so your faxes can be easily filed away and stored with your other PC-created documents. This means no more ferreting around under piles of paper trying to find that important fax. But you might want to invest in some more hard disk space if you are going to be storing a lot of faxes. Receiving faxes electronically also makes optical character recognition

(OCR) a doddle, as the document can be passed over to the OCR software directly and does not have to be scanned. Cutting out this scanning of faxed pages should also increase the accuracy of the OCR, as characters will be less distorted than scanned fax characters.

Self-memory modems also upload voice messages to your PC. This is a distinct advantage if you want to store various messages. For example, if one of your customers places a complicated order on your answering service you may want to save it to be checked later. Or should you happen to be in a dispute with a customer or supplier, you may find it worthwhile to keep a copy of that message safely on your PC. Digital answer machines can often let you choose to

save individual messages while wiping others, but standalone machines can't then upload these messages to your PC. The software on the self-memory modem we were testing opted for a belt-and-braces policy of always playing the message to you before it could be deleted, so you cannot accidentally delete the wrong message.

However, as with all multi-function devices, you should stop to think about what would happen if the modem went wrong. Would you then be left high and dry with no chance of receiving faxes or recording messages until the problem is resolved? If you are out the office for much of the time and depend on your voice messages and faxes to keep on top of your business, this is going to be a major headache.

Self-memory modems

If receiving faxes is a priority for you and you don't fancy using a self-memory modem, there is another way of picking them up as and when you want them, and from wherever you are. Fax-over-email services are springing up all around us. These services are run by ISPs and specialist providers such as FaxServe. The user is allocated a fax number and then anyone sending a fax will dial this number in the same way they

You should stop to think what would happen if the modem went wrong

SUPERVOICE'S MAIN WINDOW CLEARLY DISPLAYS HOW MANY VOICE, FAX AND DATA MESSAGES YOU HAVE

SUPERVOICE AUTOMATICALLY UPLOADS MESSAGES AND FAXES FROM THE MODEM'S MEMORY WHEN THE PC IS NEXT BOOTED

would dial the number of any fax machine. However, instead of going directly to the recipient, the fax is bounced to the service provider's servers, where it is converted from a fax image file into a PC-compatible image file, usually a .tif file. This image file is then forwarded to the recipient's email account. Check with your ISP if they offer the service, or contact FaxServe at www.faxserve.co.uk.

When choosing a self-memory modem, you should look carefully at its functionality. Do you want to use it much as an answerphone, able to listen to the messages when the PC is off? Then you will need to look for one that has buttons on the front to play, fast-forward, rewind and delete messages and one that has a speaker built in.

If you are working with more than one person in an office, or working from home and want to separate work and personal messages, you may want to find a modem that can handle multiple voice mail boxes. This allows each person to control their own voice messages, ensuring privacy and that the messages are not erased before the intended recipient can listen to them. Mailboxes can be protected with a PIN for increased security.

Also look for a modem from which you can retrieve faxes and voice messages remotely if you are going to be away from the office for long periods of time. After all, you don't

want to remain out of the loop for too long. Many fax-

modems have this functionality and it allows you to listen to your voice messages from a touchtone phone and retrieve your faxes to a remote fax machine or a PC with a fax-modem. In most cases you will be able to set the modem to automatically forward faxes to a specific fax machine, or set it to fax back, that is to send the fax to you, wherever you are, when you call the modem.

Look carefully at the amount of memory the modem has, if it will be enough for your needs and whether you can increase the memory if necessary. For example, if your business expands and

If your business expands, you will need to add to the modem's memory

you take on more staff, each with their own voice boxes and faxes coming in, you will undoubtedly need to add to the modem's memory.

Putting it to the test

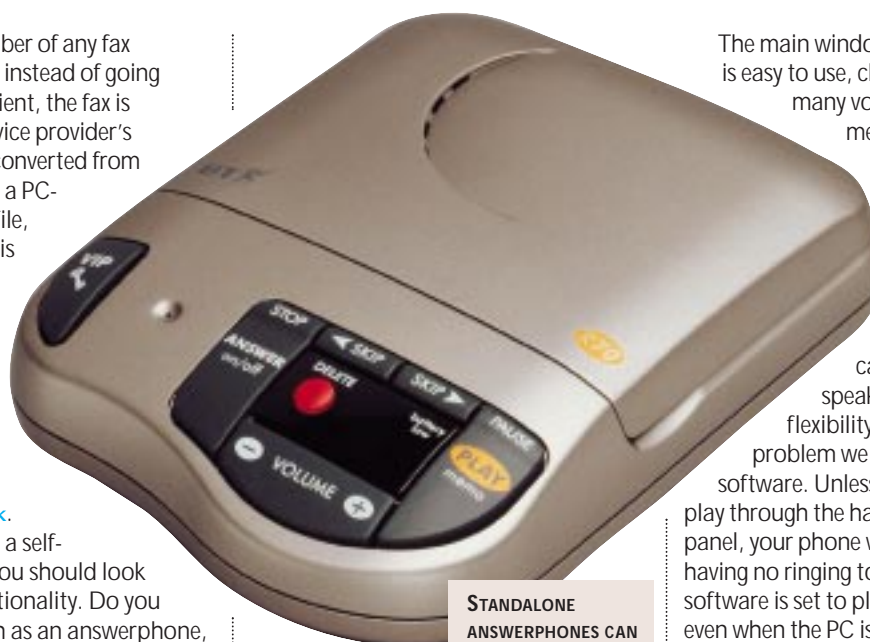
To see how self-memory modems matched up against separate devices, we tried out 3Com's 56K Professional Message Modem. As with all self-memory modems, it is an external machine, which draws its power separately.

On the front of the device is a large speaker and a microphone, so you can listen to your messages without switching on your PC and record your outgoing message. There are also buttons to switch the speaker off and turn the volume up or

down, as well as to play, fast forward, rewind, record and delete messages.

The modem connects via the serial port and comes with a two-port telephone jack, so you can plug in your modem and your phone at the same time. It has enough memory to save 20 minutes of messages or up to 50 fax pages.

The modem is easy to set up. The drivers installed without any problems and the bundled SuperVoice 2.2 software was equally hassle-free. SuperVoice has been modified for use with this modem and so any messages and faxes left on the modem's memory will be automatically uploaded to the PC when the software is next booted.



STANDALONE ANSWERPHONES CAN HANDLE MESSAGES BUT MUST BE SUPPLEMENTED BY A FAX MACHINE

The main window for the application is easy to use, clearly displaying how many voice, fax and data messages you have.

Voice messages can be played back through the modem's speaker, through your phone's handset or through a sound card to your PC speakers. This very flexibility caused the only problem we found with the software. Unless the software is set to play through the handset in the control panel, your phone will not work properly, having no ringing tone. Similarly, if the software is set to play to the handset, even when the PC is switched off, you will not be able to listen to your messages via the modem's speaker. However, should you want to you can use the modem as a hands-free device, allowing you to bin your phone altogether.

The software is able to detect the difference between voice calls and faxes and will display a fax icon on the screen when a fax comes in, so you don't pick up the phone to the squeal of a fax.

Voice messages can be saved as .vox files in any location you choose. This means that you can keep important messages from specific clients or suppliers in folders with your other communications from these companies, making sure you do not lose any information.

We found the modem was just as easy to use as having separate pieces of equipment. The ability to leave the PC turned off, while being sure of receiving faxes and voice messages was a distinct advantage. All the functionality was on a par if not better than having separate pieces of equipment and saved a considerable amount of space – the Professional Message Modem is just 7 x 6in and 2in tall. And it worked out considerably cheaper than buying an answerphone, fax and modem, coming in at just £99 ex VAT.

However, the modem offers little more than other voice-compatible fax-modems. The ability to use it when the PC is switched off is an advantage in certain situations. But many would rather keep their PC switched on and save themselves the extra £40 that these modems cost when compared to other voice-compatible internal modems.

ADELE DYER