

# letters

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

or email > [letters@pcw.co.uk](mailto:letters@pcw.co.uk)

or fax > 0171 316 9313

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## JUST THE FAX

On the subject of faxing from Windows [Letters, PCW May], the Microsoft Fax program is on the Windows 98 disk, it's just deep down in the bowels. If you double-click on Tools, then Oldwin95, then Message, then US, you see WMS and Awfax. Double-click on WMS, and Windows Messaging will be installed. Follow that up with a double-click on Awfax and, hey presto!, Microsoft Fax is back.

MARTIN GIDDINGS  
[martin.giddings@virgin.net](mailto:martin.giddings@virgin.net)

## MINIDISC BECOMES A MEDIA STAR

I keep seeing MiniDiscs (MD) being used as computer disks on loads of American films and TV programmes. Can you get MD players for computers? If not, why not? MiniDiscs would be an excellent replacement for the 1.44Mb disk for which so many companies are fighting to find a replacement, and they would be able to record around the same

amount of information as all the other competing formats.

ANDREW NATHANSON  
[Andrew@nathanson42.freemove.co.uk](mailto:Andrew@nathanson42.freemove.co.uk)

**PCW replies >** Back in 1995 we reviewed the one and only MD Data product to be released in the UK. A portable SCSI device, it could store up

to 135Mb per disc using Sony's proprietary MDFS file system, and could also play audio titles. The MD Data format, however, failed to take off due to its relatively high price and slow performance. We are unaware of any MD Data products stateside, although Sony does produce alternative optical storage PC products. Sony is, of course, also involved in the battle for the floppy's replacement, although its HiFD superfloppy drive doesn't look like it will show its face much before the millennium.

## LETTER OF THE MONTH

### Private lives



Clive Akass' suggestion in *Point of View* [News, PCW May, p30], that civil liberties groups are over the top in the substance of their criticism of the Pentium III ID number, is at best parochial. Apart from all the other things for which a computer can be used, it has become a powerful means of disseminating and receiving ideas that may not always be welcomed by those in authority. And those in authority can be very interested in who is disseminating which ideas. To give an example, it's a fact that during the seventies in Romania, any person who possessed a typewriter had to leave a typewritten sample with the police. The author of any piece of writing critical to the regime could thus be traced. Intel may well have given us a utility to switch off the ID number, but as sure as the sun rises in the east, there will be a 'utility' or a 'bug' that switches it back on again — doubtless without the user's knowledge.

If, as claimed, the Pentium III ID number is intended to help network administrators, it should be dismissed as the marketing ploy it is, intended to further bind companies to Intel. Presumably, networks that require the ID number will not function well with computers containing CPUs of other manufacturers. For private users, the ID number brings no tangible advantage but does involve some danger in the potential loss of privacy, the more so the more repressive the ruling regime.

The other suggested benefits, such as more secure credit card transactions or proof of authorship, can, and should, be achieved by methods such as encryption that will work for all users, not just those who happen to possess the newest Pentium computer. A very clear message should go out to Intel: 'ID number? No thanks!'

MICHAEL GROVES [mikegroves@yahoo.com](mailto:mikegroves@yahoo.com)

### Clive Akass replies >

*The thrust of my argument was that we feel less threatened by the ID number in Britain because we do not live in an oppressive society. I made an analogy with video surveillance, which has come to be accepted here despite its potential for abuse — and may, since I wrote the article, have helped end a spate of horrible bombings in London. True, I might feel differently about the ID number if I lived in Ceaucescu's Romania, but lunatic regimes are sadly not the only threat to our wellbeing. You might think differently if the ID had stopped a fraudster running through your bank account.*

## HARD FACTS ABOUT SYSTEM SWAPS

The article about choosing and installing a motherboard [Group Test, PCW May] was the most interesting so far this year, and extremely relevant. Most people wishing to upgrade their system would like to swap their motherboard for a higher-performance version, rather than go out and buy a whole new system. The advice given, however, seems to be rather simplified.

I would have thought that there would be a major problem pulling out one motherboard and substituting a new, higher-performance model with a completely different hardware configuration, especially with regard to the system registry stored within Windows 95/98. Changing the hardware configuration is likely to cause the system some major headaches and hangups on re-boot.

Is this not a major barrier to people re-investing in upgrading their system? You can't just pull out your old hard drive from one PC and install it in another without having to re-install all your applications. For instance, software such as Winfax (Pro), Eudora (Pro) and many others have their data files stored within the installation folders and are not relocatable.

Is there some smart software available which can handle this? Powerquest Disk Copy is great for copying from one disk to another within the same system hardware configuration, although not between different system hardware configurations. Any advice you could offer would be appreciated.

DAVID CUTLER

[david\\_cutler@music-ic.com](mailto:david_cutler@music-ic.com)

*Ian Robson replies >*

*To simplify matters further, you could even consider a motherboard installation to be rather crudely likened to that of a graphics adapter.*

*The main difference would be that most of the many drivers required to complete the motherboard installation would be legacy and contained within the database of the Windows 9x operating system. There would of course be some specific drivers (one or two) but these would be supplied, just like those for a graphics adapter, on a disk.*

*All hardware configurations should be updated quite smoothly in the system registry as the Windows Plug-and-Play automation takes over. I have changed one system's motherboard on 40 occasions with no system hangs.*

*In some respects, this should answer your second query. When transferring a hard disk to a new system, you shouldn't have to utilise any third-party software assistance. Just plug your hard disk into the new system, configure it through the BIOS and then boot from it. You will have to install drivers for the new hardware setup, but if you remember to work from the base components upwards — i.e. motherboard drivers, graphics adapter and then the rest — the Windows registry should follow suit.*

*There will be some hardware configurations which may cause a bit of a headache, but that just adds to the pleasure and satisfaction of upgrading!*



## BEST FEATURES, NOT SOFTWARE BLOAT

In his *Business Matters* column [PCW, June] Brian Clegg extols the virtues of feature-rich monolithic applications, claiming that someone, somewhere, will need any particular feature. This may be true; but why should everybody else have to buy those features as well? Not only this, but one particular user may desperately need a feature, yet is in such a small minority that the application writers do not feel that it would be cost-effective to include it.

A much better technique is shown in Netscape Navigator modules — or plug-ins, as they're called in this case. Here, a central core program is produced with the facility to have other mini-programs linked-in to carry out specific tasks. The user would buy the core program and a standard set of modules for common tasks. In the future, other modules may be bought —

or downloaded for free — in order to carry out other functions. Built-in functions in monolithic applications also lead to a related pair of problems: duplication, and lack of interoperability. Have you tried using the MS Word spell-checker dictionary for checking other types of file? To use Mr Clegg's example of the word-count function, you could try looking at the Unix/Linux function 'wc'. This returns the number of bytes/words/lines in any text file and is an example of a tool for a specific job which can perform that task in any number of scenarios. The big problem with this software model is that companies would not be able to justify charging us hundreds of pounds (for the upgrade) for an application, of which we already own 90 percent. Mr Clegg also states that with hard-disk prices the way they are today, size isn't really a problem. Has he tried backing-

up his system recently? Even fast tape drives take an age to stream off the contents of a large hard disk.

NICK ELLERBY

[solo@cableol.co.uk](mailto:solo@cableol.co.uk)

*Brian Clegg replies > I was saying nothing about whether an application should be monolithic, or be made up of components: in fact, the 'monolithic' Word program has components you can select on installation as well as third-party add-ins. Neither was I saying anything about the business model for selling those components. I was stating that I appreciate getting lots of new features on a regular basis — an entirely different concept. Nick may fancy running a separate program (typing in the filename etc.) every time he wants a word count, but I don't. I'd be surprised if wc gave a meaningful response on any formatted file (like RTF or HTML). As for backups, I make one every night. But as I only backup my data, software bloat doesn't enter into it. □*