



The **new millennium** heralds an exciting time for personal computing.

Bitten by the bug

That Big Millennium Thing is only six months away now, and that date change will be seen by some key companies as an ideal time to start re-engineering the way we think about what personal computing means.

For us here at PCW, this Millennial Period — roughly the next couple of years — could well prove to be some of the greatest years of this title's life. Add to our unmatched pedigree the fact that the PC market will soon be going through this millennial reinvention of itself, and throw in that exciting new compound, Convergence, then we're potentially dealing with a potent mix — full of volatility, excitement and transformation. Buying a well-specced PC is an investment that more and more people can afford to make — right now. OK, in a few years the emphasis of the big PC manufacturers may change dramatically in the consumer market. The priority looks less likely to be, as it is today, on standalone machines running big applications. My guess is that we'll be buying a home network consisting of a server and low-cost

clients, which will handle an internet connection and feed it to multiple users around the house.

Applications-on-demand and network gaming will explode in popularity; home entertainment channels and

I see the PC becoming the core building block on which **NEW ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRIES AND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS** will emerge

voice communications will be more closely integrated into the computer network (will the standalone TV set and phone survive the millennial meltdown?), and high-powered PCs will be used as recording and production studios for budding amateur musicians and video artists, who will sell their wares through e-commerce mechanisms over the internet.

I see the PC becoming the core building block on which new entertainment industries and distribution systems will emerge. Convergence will be the driving force for this, and it's a two-headed beast. Voice and data, especially over IP networks, will continue to be driven together, a marriage of convenience that the big telecomms companies are vigorously promoting. Copper wire, cable, satellite and wireless networks will all have their place. Meanwhile, multinationals like Sony and Philips will forge ahead with the other face of Convergence: the coming together of home entertainment systems and PCs.

But for those of us currently considering buying a PC, the burning question remains: do we need to wait for well into the millennium to move up the PC performance ladder? I don't see why we should. Clearly, when the integration eventually comes, it will be built around embracing the existing PC user base. It won't be a matter of 'slash and burn', but building on what's there: none of the big PC companies could afford to ignore their installed base as they move on to new heights. The first big new millennial challenge for many PC enthusiasts will be networking PCs together. Fully integrated solutions will come later.

Probably much much later. In fact, it could still be many years before serious and stable low-cost networked and/or 'converged' solutions appear. Buying a new TV or phone, on the other hand...

Bobby Pickering, Editor