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CREDIT CARD PROTECTION

Always pay by credit card when ordering goods valued in excess of £100, thereby ensuring maximum protection in the event that an advertiser ceases to trade prior to such goods being actually received.

All the best buys are here

Sometimes you just want to know the names of the best products, when they were reviewed, how much they cost and where you can get them. That's where our no-nonsense buyer's guide comes in. Over the following five pages we've picked out the outstanding PCs, peripherals and software packages that we can recommend without hesitation. To make it even easier, we've included the current manufacturer's contact number and price (including VAT), as well as details of when and where we reviewed the product. For the full review, why not check out PCW on CD-ROM? Updated quarterly, PCW on CD-ROM contains the full editorial from the past 24 issues, in searchable Adobe Acrobat format — it even comes with a copy of Acrobat for viewing, searching and printing. Each CD costs just £9.95 including postage and packing, or £8.96 for subscribers.

Call 01795 414870 to order your copy or turn to **PCW Reader Offers** [p286] for further details. If you can't wait for the next quarterly CD, try out our **Faxback service** (p577) which provides 24-hour access to your favourite features and reviews.

GORDON LAING

Editor

Personal Computer World Buyer's Charter



Anthony George, our Customer Services Manager, is here to help you if things go wrong, if you have an enquiry or complaint about a supplier advertising in this magazine, or have encountered problems as a result of goods purchased. Write to him with details of the complaint, together with your full contact details, and he will endeavour to assist you.

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London W1A 2HG

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3. Have taken all reasonable steps to effect delivery or refund.
4. You have retained irrefutable proof of purchase, for verification purposes:
 - a) A copy of the original advertisement from which the goods were ordered.
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Claims must be submitted so as to arrive 'NOT EARLIER THAN TWENTY EIGHT DAYS AND NOT LATER THAN THREE MONTHS' from the official on-sale date of the magazine. Claims must be submitted to the Customer Services Manager IN WRITING, summarising the situation and lodged strictly within the time schedule stated. *Claims received outside this period will not qualify for consideration for compensation under the 'Buyers Charter'.*

Once a supplier who has advertised in this magazine has become subject to either Liquidation or Bankruptcy proceedings and upon completion of all winding-up procedures, *Personal Computer World* guarantees to expeditiously process those *private* individual readers' claims made and submitted, in accordance with those procedures outlined, up to the following limits.

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EXCEPTIONS

This guarantee only applies to advance postal payments made by *private individuals in direct response for goods itemised/illustrated in display advertisements*. It does not cover goods ordered from advertising Inserts or Cards, classified advertisements or MicroMart, or Catalogues obtained from, or supplied by, any advertiser regardless. *Similarly, protection does not exist in relation to purchases made as a result of reviews and/or editorial comment.* The 'Buyer's Charter' is designed to safeguard the *PRIVATE individual reader*. It does not provide protection to any companies, societies, organisations, unincorporated bodies or any other commercially orientated outlet of any description. Neither is cover provided for orders placed from, or to, any overseas suppliers or for goods purchased for resale.

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Readers are reminded that the Mail Order Protection Scheme was solely implemented to provide protection to the private individual when goods are ordered 'Off the Page' and paid for by post. *It was not designed for, nor will it offer any protection, in the event whereby goods are purchased via the Internet.*

DISCLAIMERS

Readers are reminded that the opinions expressed, and the results published in connection with reviews and/or laboratory test reports carried out on computing systems and/or related items are confined to, and are representative of, only those goods as supplied and *should not be construed as a recommendation to purchase*. Whilst every precaution is taken to ensure that reliability and good business practices prevail, the Publisher cannot be held responsible for the overall trading activities of any supplier referred to, or advertising within, this publication.

DESKTOP PCs

Due to the fast moving nature of the PC industry, we can only recommend particular PCs in the month we have seen them. Prices change almost weekly as component prices from third-party suppliers fluctuate according to availability. So, for this month's best PC buy, for instance, look at the group test on p134. It always pays to take a little care when buying a PC, or in fact any hardware or software. For PCWs guide to buying direct see p569. And don't forget to use the PCW order form. Obviously, everyone's ideal PC will have a different mix of components, with gamers needing a very good 3D graphics card, probably a 3D sound card and excellent speakers, and business users will need a good monitor and plenty of RAM.

ENTRY-LEVEL PCs

Budget-conscious buyers might consider going for a non-Intel processor, such as an AMD. However, be aware that if you choose a Socket 7 chip you might find it hard to upgrade in future. Similarly, if you go for a Slot 1 processor, make sure you specify a motherboard with a BX chipset which will allow for greater upgrading options in the future. We would recommend the following specification:

- AMD K6-2 350 or Intel Celeron 366 processor
- 32Mb RAM
- 4Gb hard drive
- Graphics card with 4Mb video RAM
- 15in monitor
- CD-ROM drive

You can expect to pay between **£499 and £599 (ex VAT)** for this configuration, with either a sound card and speakers or a modem. However if you have a little extra cash, take a look at our PC group test this month (p134), which features Celeron 400 PCs for £799 inc VAT.

MID-RANGE PCs

In the mid-range, around **£1,000 (ex VAT)** will get you a good all-round machine. The introduction of PIII has turned PII into a mid-range processor, both on price and performance. However, the stunning result of the K6-III, and its low price, make it worth serious consideration. For a full review of K6-III see p79. Look for a minimum of:

- Intel PII or AMD K6-III 400MHz processor
- 64Mb RAM
- 8Gb hard disk
- Good 3D graphics card with 8Mb video RAM
- 17in monitor
- CD-ROM drive
- Sound card, speakers, 56K modem

Most of all, look for a machine that is easy to upgrade, so specify plenty of slots and no on-board chips on a good motherboard, and lots of free bays in the case.

HIGH-END PCs

If you are after a state-of-the-art machine, be prepared to spend around **£1,800 (ex VAT)**. What you require at this price will be specific to your needs, depending on how you intend to use the machine. However, as a basic specification we would want:

- PIII 500
- 128Mb 100MHz RAM
- 16Gb hard drive
- Good 3D graphics card with 16Mb video RAM
- 19in monitor
- DVD drive
- Sound card, speakers, 56K modem
- Bundled office suite

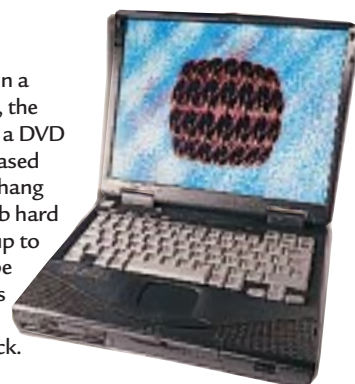
To see how PIII shapes up against PII, see next month's group test.

HIGH-END NOTEBOOK

Compaq Armada 7800

With everything you could need in a replacement to your desktop PC, the Armada 7800 even incorporates a DVD drive for movies-on-the-move. Based around a 300MHz PII it doesn't hang around and benefits from an 8Gb hard drive and 64Mb memory. With up to five hours' battery life it should be able to keep going longer than its users, and the power adapter is integrated — goodbye power brick.

► PCW March '99, p79



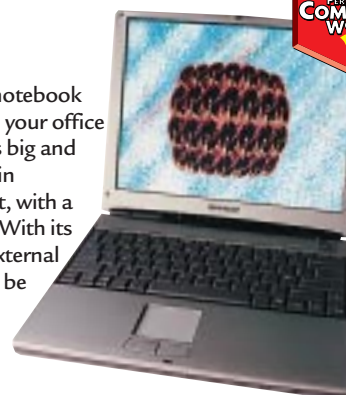
Price £3878.68 **Contact** Compaq 0181 332 3000
Also Recommended Panasonic Toughbook CF-71 **Price** £2701.32 **Contact** Panasonic 0800 444220 • IBM ThinkPad 770 **Price** £3795.25 **Contact** IBM 0870 601 0136 (both PCW March '99)

MID-RANGE NOTEBOOK

Sharp PC-A150

Light and portable, this notebook has enough power to run your office apps, and a screen that is big and good enough to be used in presentations. It is robust, with a magnesium alloy casing. With its excellent keyboard and external floppy drive it could even be used as a desktop replacement.

► PCW March '99, p183



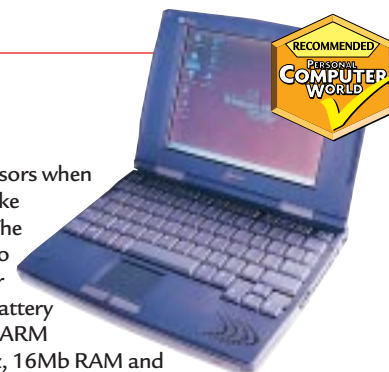
Price £2,109.13 **Contact** Sharp 0800 262958
Also Recommended AJP 1100M **Price** £1,350.08 **Contact** AJP 0181 208 9744 • Sony Vaio 505 **Price** £2301.83 **Contact** Sony 0870 2402408 (both PCW March '99)

PDA

Hewlett-Packard Jornada 820e

Fed up with ever-faster processors when all you need is a machine to take notes and check your email? The Jornada could be the answer to your prayers. You can work for a full day without fear of the battery dying and with an Intel StrongARM processor running at 190MHz, 16Mb RAM and an integrated 56K modem, it has everything you need when on the move. And its 8.2in STN screen with a resolution of 640x480 is large enough to see exactly what you're doing.

► PCW February '99, p120



Price £849 **Contact** HP 0990 474747 **Also Recommended** Psion Series 5 **Price** £429.99 **Contact** Psion 0990 143050 • 3Com PalmPilot Pro **Price** £229 **Contact** 3Com 0800 225252 (both PCW May '98)

COLOUR INKJET

Hewlett-Packard DeskJet 895CXi

For all-round excellence you can't do better than the HP 895CXi. The quality of its output for both text and graphics is impressive given the swift speed at which they are produced. Even its 'econofast' mode could be used for vital documents, saving both time and ink. It takes a huge range of papers and replacing ink cartridges is a breeze.

PCW February '99, p151



Price £292.58 **Contact** HP 0990 474747 **Also Recommended** Epson Stylus Color 740 **Price** £272.60 **Contact** 0800 220546 • Epson Stylus Color 850 **Price** £318.43 **Contact** 0800 220546 (both PCW February '99)

COLOUR PHOTO PRINTER

Lexmark Photo JetPrinter 5770

For dedicated digital photographers, this printer is ideal, with a 1200x1200dpi maximum resolution and a slot each for direct access to CompactFlash and SmartMedia cards. There's no separate black cartridge bundled, although any standard black Lexmark cartridge will fit.

PCW April '99, p86



Price £349 **Contact** Lexmark 01628 481500 **Also Recommended** Epson Stylus Photo 700 **Price** £273 **Contact** Epson 01442 261144 (PCW September '98)

BUDGET LASER PRINTER

Kyocera FS-600

This personal 6ppm laser printer easily beats all other laser printers in its class. Its speed is impressive, printing out a steady six pages per minute no matter what the paper coverage, and the quality of its output is second to none, both for graphics and text. It is easily upgradable, taking an impressive 36Mb of RAM. It has a PostScript option and there is even an ethernet port that comes as standard.

PCW February '99, p199



Price £299 **Contact** Kyocera 0118 923 0660 **Also Recommended** Panasonic KX-P6300 **Price** £257.32 **Contact** Panasonic 01344 853081 (PCW February '99)

BUSINESS LASER PRINTER

Lexmark Optra K1220

It is rare that you find a printer which is both good value and produces exceptional-quality output, yet the Optra K1220 is just such a laser printer. With a rated speed of 12ppm it produces text in good time, but most of all its outstanding quality, both for text and graphics, puts it second to none amongst laser printers.

PCW February '99, p201



Price £722.63 **Contact** Lexmark 01628 481500 **Also Recommended** QMS DeskLaser 1600P **Price** £816 **Contact** QMS 01784 445555 • HP LaserJet 4000TN **Price** £1,316 **Contact** HP 0990 474747 (both PCW February '99)

MULTIFUNCTION DEVICE

Hewlett-Packard LaserJet 3100

Good laser print quality from this quiet machine. It's intelligent enough to detect a document dropped into its feeder and it will launch an idiot-proof menu for scanning, copying and emailing. Fast, accurate OCR and 2Mb memory for incoming faxes when the paper supply is exhausted, make the 3100 an ideal multifunction device.

PCW June '98, p83



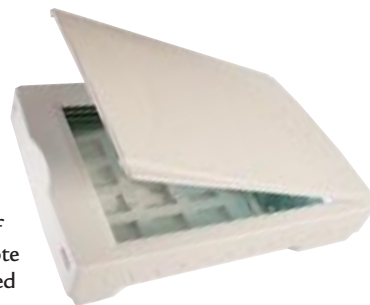
Price £629 **Contact** HP 0990 474747 **Also Recommended** Canon MultiPASS MPC20 **Price** £370.13 **Contact** Canon 0181 773 3173 (PCW January '98)

FLATBED SCANNER

Umax Astra 610P

Once again, the Umax Astra 610P parallel-port scanner has won our budget flatbed scanner group test, boasting an unbeatable combination of performance and value. Note that our three recommended scanners require enhanced parallel ports found only on modern PCs, so users wanting top performance, or those with older systems, should stick to SCSI.

PCW September '98, p229



Price £69.33 **Contact** Umax 01344 871329 **Also Recommended** Agfa SnapScan 310P **Price** £116.50 **Contact** Agfa 0181 231 4200 • Microtek Phantom 330CX **Price** £75.95 **Contact** Microtek 01908 317797 (PCW Sept '98)

DIGITAL CAMERA

Canon Powershot Pro70

This good-looking camera takes amazingly good, natural-looking pictures and has enough features to keep any SLR user happy. Its dual Compact Flash slots make for extended periods without having to download, while its 1536x1024 pixel resolution will give you superb prints.

PCW May '99, p199



Price £999 **Contact** Canon 0121 666 6262 **Also Recommended** Ricoh RDC-4200 **Price** £499 **Contact** Johnson's Photopia 01782 753355 • Olympus C-900 Zoom **Price** £649.99 **Contact** Olympus 0171 253 0513 (both PCW May '99)

MONITOR

CTX PR710T

Not only does the PR710T look gorgeous, its performance is stunning. It sports a genuine Sony Trinitron tube, which is always a good sign. Power regulation, resolution, colour alignment and colour purity are all of the highest order, leading to a display that you can see is special straight away.

PCW April '99, p182



Price £363.08 **Contact** CTX 01923 810800 **Also Recommended** ADI MicroScan GT56 **Price** £351.33 **Contact** ADI 0181 236 0801 (PCW April '99)

MODEM

Diamond SupraExpress 56e Pro

With ever-shifting goalposts, it makes sense to go for a modem which supports all the current standards, as well as simultaneous voice and data. Combine this with a roaring speed, superb ease of use and a low price, and you have the best-value modem around.

PCW December '98, p211



Price £75 **Contact** Diamond Multimedia 0118 944 4401 **Also Recommended** Zoom FaxModem 56Kx **Price** £89 **Contact** SCS Data Communications 01494 748904 (PCW December '98)

REMOVABLE STORAGE

Sony HiFD

With the same form factor disks as a 3.5in drive, this could replace your floppy but crams a whopping 200Mb onto each disk. Early units will be parallel-only affairs, but will soon be joined by internal ATAPI and PC Card versions. It's a little slow but easy to use.

PCW March '99, p91



Price £149 **Contact** Sony 01932 816660 **Also Recommended** Iomega Jaz 2Gb **Price** £270 **Contact** Iomega 0800 973194 • Imation SuperDisk 120 **Price** £105 **Contact** Imation 01344 402200 (both PCW, August '98)

SOUND CARD

Creative Labs Sound Blaster Live!

SoundBlaster cards have long been the best choice for non-professional users. The SoundBlaster Live! ups the ante, providing near-professional quality sound at a bargain price. And, it comes with an impressive bundle of dedicated digital I/O daughtercard, speakers, subwoofer and games.

PCW December '98, p92



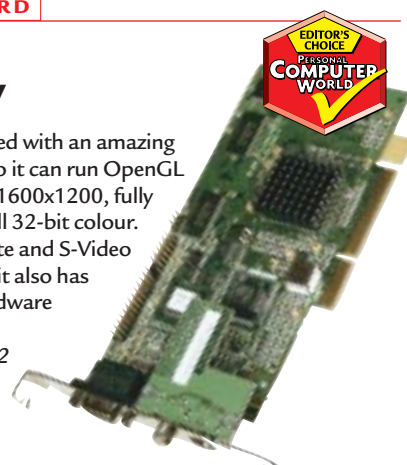
Price £149 **Contact** Creative Labs 01189 344744 **Also Recommended** Terratec EWS64 S **Price** £149.23 **Contact** Terratec 01600 772111 (PCW July '98)

GRAPHICS CARD

ATI Rage Fury

The Rage Fury is fitted with an amazing 32Mb of SDRAM, so it can run OpenGL accelerated apps at 1600x1200, fully Z-buffered and in full 32-bit colour. Fitted with composite and S-Video TV-out connectors, it also has integrated DVD hardware decoding.

PCW May 99, p82



Price £159 **Contact** ATi 01628 533115 **Also Recommended** Voodoo3 3000 **Price** £175 **Contact** 3Dfx Interactive 0171 544 6812 (PCW May '99) • Diamond Viper 550 **Price** £150 **Contact** Diamond Multimedia 0118 944 4400 (PCW November '98)

ACCOUNTING

Intuit Quickbooks 6

Touted as the easiest accounting package for small businesses, QuickBooks has a long history and a large user base. Version 6 is the first 32-bit incarnation. It even monitors company performance and sounds the alarm should you fall behind.

PCW March '99, p92



Price £199 (Pro version) **Contact** Intuit 0800 585058 **Also Recommended** MYOB **Price** £229.13 **Contact** Bestware 01752 201901 • TAS Books **Price** £116.33 **Contact** Megatech 01372 727274 (both PCW, June '98)

PERSONAL FINANCE

Microsoft Money Financial Suite 99

Microsoft Money Financial Suite 99 is our choice for personal finance. It offers online banking and updating facilities, as well as Sage compatibility, all at a bargain price.

PCW February '99, p80



Price £49.99 **Contact** Microsoft 0345 002000 **Also Recommended** Quicken 98 **Price** £39.99 **Contact** Intuit 0181 990 5500 (PCW, June '98)

DATABASE

Microsoft Access 97

This industry-standard database application is also the best. With its wizards, infamous Office Assistants and standard Windows interface, Access 97 is relatively easy for the novice. And its powerful relational features and VBA integration make it suitable for developers, too.

PCW November '98, p220



Price £299 **Contact** Microsoft 0345 002000 **Also Recommended** FileMaker Pro 4 **Price** £169 **Contact** FileMaker 0845 603 9100 (PCW, November '98)

DTP

Serif PagePlus 5

Inexpensive, easy-to-use and surprisingly well equipped, PagePlus 5 offers extremely capable desktop publishing. Those wanting the choice of professional publishers will have to fork out more for Quark XPress 4x.

PCW June '98, p132



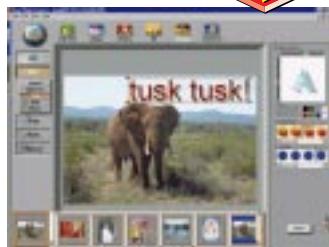
Price £99.95 **Contact** Serif 0800 376 7070 **Also Recommended** Quark XPress 4 **Price** £1,169 **Contact** Quark 01483 454397 (PCW, June '98)

IMAGE EDITING

Ulead PhotoExpress 2.0

Ulead has succeeded in removing the frustration factor often involved in getting to grips with digital pictures. PhotoExpress 2.0 is a pleasure to use, with a great, clearly structured interface and fast, in-depth tools. It has pre-set editing modes for the novice and custom adjustments for each editing function, so the power user will be kept happy, too.

PCW January '99, p202



Price £34.95 **Contact** BIT 01420 83811 **Also Recommended** Adobe PhotoDeluxe 3 **Price** £45.83 **Contact** Adobe 0181 606 4001 • Paint Shop Pro 5 **Price** £69.95 **Contact** Digital Workshop 01295 258335 (both PCW, January '99)

DRAWING

Corel CorelDraw 8

Not one of Corel's classic years, but this is still the Windows drawing package to own. Version 8 of this giant suite boasts better drawing and new interactive tools. Artists on a budget should check out Micrografx Windows Draw 6.

PCW October '98, p203



Price £464.13 **Contact** Corel 0800 581028 **Also Recommended** Adobe Illustrator **Price** £351.32 **Contact** Adobe 0181 606 4000 • Freehand **Price** £327.82 **Contact** Macromedia 01344 458600 (both PCW, October '98)

INFORMATION MANAGERS

Starfish Sidekick 98



The best personal information manager boasts wide customisation abilities as its greatest strength. For heavyweight contact management, you need look no further than Goldmine 4 (see the details panel, below).



PCW August '98, p204

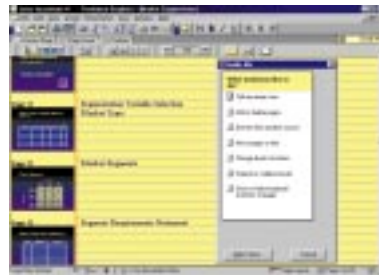
Price £39.99 **Contact** Starfish 0181 875 4455
Also Recommended Goldmine 4 **Price** £229 **Contact** AVG 0171 335 2222 (PCW August '98)

PRESENTATION GRAPHICS

Lotus Freelance 97



This is our choice for electronic presentations. For you, it may also come down to which office suite you own or are considering, but as part of Microsoft Office 97, PowerPoint won't let you down.



PCW March '98, p200

Price £49.35 **Contact** Lotus 01784 445808
Also Recommended MS PowerPoint 97 **Price** £325.47 **Contact** Microsoft 0345 002000 (PCW March '98)

REMOTE ACCESS

Traveling Software LapLink Tech

The high-end version of this extremely versatile product, LapLink Tech, has all the features of the standard version but also lets you print from the host machine onto a remote printer, or vice versa, and talk to whoever is using the host machine. It includes anti-virus and hard-disk cloning utilities.



PCW December '98, p233

Price £169.95 **Contact** Traveling Software 01344 383232
Also Recommended Symantec pcAnywhere **Price** £75.08 **Contact** Symantec 0171 616 5600 (PCW December '98)

WEB DESIGN

Macromedia Dreamweaver 2



An attractive and easy to use interface make this great for those looking for something with a little more power. Good table handling, and extensive formatting options on a single, centralised property inspector, make it a joy to use.



PCW April '99, p103

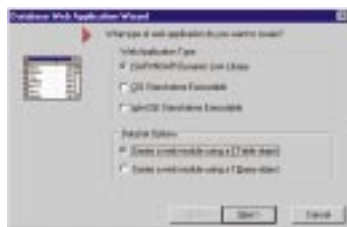
Price £229 **Contact** Computers Unlimited 0181 358 5857
Also Recommended Adobe PageMill 3.0 **Price** £92.83 **Contact** Adobe 0181 606 4000 (PCW March '99)

PROGRAMMING TOOL

Inprise Delphi 4



Delphi is not a cross-platform product, but does let you build browser-independent web applications. It reaches all the way from RAD business applications to fast graphics using DirectX. It beats Visual C++ on ease of use, and Visual Basic on performance.



PCW April '99, p198

Price from £92 to £1845 **Contact** Inprise 0118 932 0022
Also Recommended Symantec Visual Cafe **Price** £217 or £580 **Contact** Symantec 0181 317 7777 (PCW April '99)

ANTI-VIRUS

Norton AntiVirus 4.0



Norton AntiVirus 4.0 is our choice for protecting your PC. It offers the best combination of features, ease of use and performance. Its virus detection rate is first class and there are free online updates for the life of the product.



PCW April '98, p124

Price £49 **Contact** Symantec 0171 616 5600
Also Recommended Dr Solomon's HomeGuard **Price** £29 **Contact** Dr Solomon's 01296 318700 (PCW April '98)

Faxback Service

Missed a feature or a review? Try our 24-hour faxback service.

Updated every month, our easy-to-use Faxback service gives you instant access to a complete range of product reviews, features and workshops via your fax machine. To use the service, simply follow the instructions below. Calls are charged at 50p per minute at all times, with an average duration of four minutes.

Our service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
(The faxback service is not available outside the UK).

- 1 From the choices below, select the article(s) you wish to receive. Note the number of pages in the article.
- 2 Using the handset on your fax machine, dial 0660 600632. If you do not have a handset, press the fax machine's On Hook or Telephone button, then enter 0660 600632 on the keypad.
- 3 There will be a vocal introduction to the Faxback service which will ask you to enter the code of the article(s) you require. The voice will then ask you to press the Start / Send button on your fax machine.
- 4 The article(s) you have requested will then come through your fax machine.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

For the faxback service to work correctly, you must be referring to the current issue of *Personal Computer World* and have your machine set to use tone dialling (you may need to switch your machine from 'pulse' to 'tone').

If you have any problems with the *Personal Computer World* faxback service, please call 0171 412 3795. This helpline is open from 9:00am to 5:30pm Monday to Friday and calls are charged at the standard rate.

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Notebooks (budget, high-end & ultra slim)	March-99	9	2008
Pentium III PCs	April-99	5	2009
HARDWARE GROUP TESTS	ISSUE	PAGES	CODE
PDA's and handhelds	May-98	14	2103
Sound cards	July-98	11	2104
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Budget flatbed scanners	September-98	9	2107
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PCW Faxback number: 0660 600632

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Building a small network	September-98	5	2402
E-commerce for small business	October-98	5	2403
Building your own web server	November-98	6	2404
Marketing your web site	December-98	4	2405
The euro and your business	January-99	4	2406
Hubs and network starter kits	February-99	4	2407
Firewalls and net protection	March-99	3	2408
IT training for your small business	April-99	4	2409

GENERAL FEATURES	ISSUE	PAGES	CODE
PCs for home entertainment	March-98	5	2504
Education and IT	March-98	4	2505
Virtual museums	April-98	4	2506
PCW 20th Anniversary Special	May-98	36	2507
Computers against crime	August-98	3	2511
PCW service & reliability survey	October-98	12	2513
Wireless technology	December-98	5	2518

PCW Faxback number: 0660 600632

SUPPLIER'S DETAILS

COMPANY

SALESPERSON'S NAME

ADDRESS

.....

.....

..... POSTCODE

DATE OF TELEPHONE ORDER / / TIME

ORDER REFERENCE NUMBER (IF QUOTED)

DISPATCH REFERENCE NUMBER

CUSTOMER DETAILS

NAME

COMPANY

ADDRESS

.....

.....

..... POSTCODE

DATE OF TELEPHONE ORDER / /

ORDERED BY: ☐ TELEPHONE ☐ FAX ☐ POST

ADVERT APPEARED IN PCW:

ISSUE DATE PAGE

QUANTITY	DETAILS OF ORDER	UNIT COST £	TOTAL £
.....
.....
.....

METHOD OF PAYMENT

☐ PERSONAL CHEQUE ☐ PURCHASE ORDER ☐ CREDIT CARD

☐ C.O.D ☐ DEBIT CARD ☐ OTHER (SPECIFY)

CARD COMPANY

ISSUE NUMBER (debit cards only)

START DATE / / EXPIRY DATE / /

CARD NUMBER (below) / /

SUB-TOTAL

DISCOUNT

CARRIAGE

SURCHARGES

VAT

TOTAL

SIGNED

DATE/...../.....

DAYTIME TELEPHONE NUMBER

DELIVERY ADDRESS

.....

..... POSTCODE

AGREED DELIVERY DATE / /

PCW Purchasing Guidelines

There are several steps you can take to make sure the buying process is smooth and trouble free.

➤ **When you phone a supplier, make a note of name of person you are speaking to.** Note down any claims they make for the product you are interested in, or any specifications they mention. If you aren't sure if what they are offering is right for the task, then ask. Check what is included: for example, when buying a printer, are all cables and cartridges bundled in? Before you place an order for a PC, insist on being faxed or emailed a full specification, detailing all components and peripherals. Also make sure you get a warranty that suits your needs. If you need swift repairs, consider paying extra for an eight-hour repair service. Also make sure you understand what service you can expect to receive, including who pays for couriers if your machine has to be returned for repair.

➤ **When you place your order, use a credit card.** The Consumer Protection Act ensures that credit card purchases between £100 and £15,000 are covered. Check the address to which the goods will be sent. Often, if you buy with a credit card you can only receive the goods at the address on the card. If you are buying over the internet, make sure you are using a secure server, sometimes denoted by the prefix 'https'.

➤ **Set a delivery date, so you have some come-back if the goods are not delivered on time.** When the goods arrive, check the packaging before you sign for the goods, to guard against damage in transit.