

Send your letters to >

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Each month we are offering a 17in Taxan Ergovision 750 TCO95 monitor to the winner of the Letter of the Month.

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

Net Loss

Demon Internet and now Virgin Net have largely succeeded due to low price and the necessity for you to get your own content on the web. Frankly, they could put information on how to watch paint dry on their own servers as far as I care. I can watch BBC TV (for which I already pay £91.50 a year) to get

PCW replies > Our October Reliability Survey indicated that PCW readers agree with you, Kenneth: content-free ISPs are their preferred choice. We hope you enjoy viewing web sites and avoiding any unique ISP content with your star prize of a Taxan 17in monitor.

the news, weather and share prices, or I can switch on the radio. I can read newspapers at between 30p and 50p a day and magazines of any description for up to a fiver a month. In short, there is nothing, based on an ISP's own content, worth inflating my phone bill for. As long as it has information on re-configuration in case I change my email package, or something fundamental about my connection method, or a damn good 24-hour helpline, that is all I need.

KENNETH HENRY kennethh@netcomuk.co.uk

NOTE: Many thanks to everyone who has written to us with their comments on the new-look PCW. The postbags have literally been overflowing, but please keep your feedback coming. If you have any strong feelings, good or bad, about our new look, don't hesitate to contact us at newlook@pcw.co.uk.

SILLY BURGLARS

Iliked your review of CyberAngel 2.0 (*Reviews, PCW September*) but a fundamental problem springs to mind. If a "sensible" burglar were to reformat the hard disk and install the

umpteenth copy of Windows 95 off a bootleg CD before selling it on, where would that leave CyberAngel?

NICKY BIANCHI
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Conspiracy Theory

With the significant advances in hardware performance over the years, software applications should now perform at the speed of light. But thanks to Windows, this is sadly not the case. Perhaps the hardware and software manufacturers are actively or passively in league here? After all, nothing perks up the sales of hard disks, memory chips and application-software upgrades quite like the latest Windows release. A slim Windows-compatible OS, including all the best Windows features present and past but abandoning the increasing amount of dross and bloat, and enabling all of us to work faster and cheaper... now that would certainly attract my attention and my money.

RICHARD BROWNING wintonhouse@clara.nt

PCW replies > Hang on, wouldn't Windows CE fit the bill? Just imagine, a Windows 95 lookalike, complete with the pocket Office applications running adequately on a PC spec of yesteryear. It's probably understandable that Microsoft isn't keen to dish out an Intel version on floppies for us to try.

MAC THE KNIFE

Iam a Mac user. When a friend gave me a copy of your magazine with a review of Apple's new G3 PowerBook (*September*) I prepared myself for the worst. I would, however, like to thank you for an outstandingly refreshing, open and honest review. I avidly buy the two major Mac magazines, and, I am afraid to say, I doubt I will ever read a fair review like that about one of the "opposition's" products. Thank you again!

STEVEN
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Damn Yankees

As an English computer user I am becoming more and more frustrated with the IT world. Granted, the internet started in the United States and Microsoft is American, but I still don't think that the way we are treated by these companies is at all fair. We always get the latest software far later than in the US, whether it be games or simple software patches or fixes. AOL conducts general maintenance of its systems periodically, and this involves a certain amount of downtime of systems such as mail or perhaps chat and so on. However, AOL does not wish to inconvenience its American customers, so it performs this maintenance during the night, in US time zones. Unfortunately for anyone living outside the "Land of Opportunity", this occurs smack bang in the middle of the daytime. But of course, AOL does not try to develop a way of making things better by developing a parallel mail server to take over during such operations.

ANTHONY MITCHELL Anton25@aol.com

Jonathan Bulkeley, md of AOL, replies >

Upgrades and maintenance are essential to ensure that AOL provides the best possible service to members worldwide. As the

servers are located in the US, the majority of work must be carried out there, but we always try to minimise the disruption through careful scheduling. However, in looking for ways to reduce any inconvenience to members, we adopted a new policy earlier this year of rolling maintenance and upgrade work. This means that instead of all members being unable to access a particular service, only a small percentage (for example, generally around five percent for mail) is affected by the work and this tends to be for shorter periods than previously. This move has been welcomed by members in the UK and across Europe.

SHOOT THE ROUTER

Gary Wooding's letter about automatic routing on switchboards (*PCW October*) is spot on. However, he does not mention the most annoying feature of all. When you use a cordless phone with the keypad built into the handset, the call is a continuous pantomime of holding the receiver to your ear to hear what's required — thus missing the chance to press the keys for what you need — alternating with holding the receiver in front of you to press the buttons so you can't hear the recorded message, and you fail to do what's necessary. The upshot is you have to go through the whole thing two or three times as a rehearsal in order to get it right.

JOHN DEAN

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TOP TIP

Most people I know have problems with their mouse after a few months.

Invariably, the rollers have become caked with dirt, impairing the mechanism and leading to jerky, imprecise movements. I recommend using a shiny-surfaced mouse mat which is occasionally cleaned with furniture polish. It makes the mouse smoother to use and prolongs the interval between cleaning.

GRAHAM DERRICK

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THE EMAIL OF THE SPECIES

Why do organisations publish email addresses if they don't use them? I recently moved house and sent out change of address notices to all the relevant organisations that published an email address. The response? A certain mobile-phone network kept sending bills to my old address. When I rang and told them that I had informed them by email of my move, their response was: "We don't check email, another department does that". A large motoring magazine: "Oh, someone else in the parent company must have picked up that message, it's up to them whether they forward it to us." Yet another: "An email address for the membership department! What is it?" So, if you have an important message to send, don't do it by email!

DAVID BARON dpbaron@hotmail.com

MICROSOFT SOFTWARE FOR THE OVER-FIVES

Following John Skinner's letter (*PCW October*) regarding the sale and use of Microsoft products, I have a couple of points. Anyone aged five years or over in full or part-time education at a DfEE registered educational institution is eligible to



purchase the software. You will need to have your coupon verified by your school or college before Microsoft will ship the software to you, though. Subject to school offices being closed during holiday periods, there is no other reason why existing students should not be able to obtain the software before starting university or college. With regard to the disappointment expressed that very little, if any, paperwork comes with edu-pack software, take heart, John. Even the full retail Microsoft products come with very little paper-based documentation nowadays, such is the extent and perceived benefits of online help/documentation. Visual C++, for instance, has not shipped with a full set of "free" paper manuals since v1.5 in 1993.

NIGEL MELLOR nigel@osdltd.demon.co.uk

Irreconcilable Differences

I cannot believe you have the gall... the pure and irresponsible lack of concern for your readers. I loaded your cover-mounted CD-ROM, quickly browsed through the items, and just as I was about to close down

I noticed under "Audio" a header called "Rave Jay". I installed it. Well, you will soon be getting a letter from my wife, and possibly her solicitor, headed "Failure to Meet Marital Commitments". And one from my neighbours for the noise level. I can't stop myself... I'm changing career to become a full-time mixer.

ROBERT PANDORAS
@breathe.co.uk

LAUGHING ALL THE WAY TO THE BANK

Regarding Mr Wong's letter (*PCW September*), connection costs in the UK are not just bad compared to the US, which, with its 200 million population, can be expected to be far more competitive, but they're also terrible compared to Australia with its 18 million population and a couple of phone companies. You can get connected for about AU\$30 per month (about £12.50) and, aside from the 30c *only* local call fee to dial in, that's the end of the bill-paying. The range of ISPs provide everything, from pay-as-you-go to unlimited time/data downloads for this price. Since having moved to the UK, I've been shocked at how expensive it is to connect here, and at the poor speed and service of the UK's (London) ISPs. Why is it so expensive? What "extra" service is provided?

Whatever happened to the great cable revolution that was going to deliver ISDN-speed data lines, along with great cable TV and phone lines, to every home? How do the phone companies justify charging per minute when the population of users is so much larger and the technology is generally at such a low level?

TONI S tonis@dircon.co.uk

CLIVE AKASS replies > BT may offer us xDSL connections at 1Mbit/sec next year, albeit at premium rates. Cable companies got bogged down trying to flog entertainment in the satellite-dominated UK market (cable rules satellite in the US, where most of them originated). There has been a big shakeout in the cable world this year and, with competition from digital broadcasting, you can expect changes to occur thick and fast over the coming months. The hope is that this will bring prices down, too.