



You can't go far wrong in **buying a PC** as long as you take precautions.

Don't put it off

In my job there's a major occupational hazard to contend with. Just as doctors, when out for a spot of socialising, are often asked to pronounce on some stranger's medical symptoms, or car mechanics are required to undertake a deep analysis of the internal combustion engine, so my confession, 'I edit a PC magazine', inevitably leads on to the inquiry: 'So what's the best PC to buy at the moment?'

I put on my shocked expression. 'What! Only buying one PC?' I exclaim incredulously. 'You should be buying the beginnings of a network. Buy as many as you can for all the rooms in the house, and then worry about hooking them all up later!' This approach tends to knock 'em back a bit.

I pepper my rant with references to things like the Home Phonenumber Networking Alliance — something that Intel, Microsoft, Compaq and others are cooking up between them to connect networks across phone cables — BT's trials of xDSL technology, and the latest initiatives of networking leaders such as 3Com and Cisco. If they start looking dazed or confused, I like to throw in some reassuring words about the tentacles of the internet.

'Soon, we'll all be needing information and access points throughout the house,' I say. 'They'll be as ubiquitous as light switches and electricity sockets.'

When I've run out of steam, my fellow guests may insist on pressing the point. 'Yes, but which is the best manufacturer?' they want to know. To which I always respond: 'Any of them. Any of them in my magazine, because we have a

Buyers Charter. But when you're buying a PC, you should always anticipate it all going horribly wrong. Even the very best of vendors could supply you with the one machine in a thousand that has some kind

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of hitch, so what you need is good back-up and protection.' (By the way, check out our Charter on page 291, if you've never read it.)

Sometimes, the conversation might veer off in another direction, along the lines of 'Things move so quickly with chip manufacturers these days that I'm waiting for the 666MHz version for maximum power.' To which I reply that people still flew across the Atlantic in the 1960s even though they knew Concorde was in development. 'Never put off until tomorrow what you can enjoy today,' I advise.

I remind them that a good way to solve the millennium bug issue is to buy today — and make sure you quiz your supplier on both hardware and software compliance. Besides, the more processing power you have, the more you can assist Berkeley University in its Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence programme (SETI). This is a global attempt to harness PC processing power to analyse radio signals from outer space. Check it out at <http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/>.

Hell, buying a new machine today is not just the sensible thing to do; you also owe it to mankind!

Bobby Pickering, Editor