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The business uses of the Internet are legion but it's the use of the World-Wide Web as a source of facts and figures that offers the potential to streamline businesses' information sourcing, replacing shelves of regulations, directories, handbooks and catalogues. So why isn't it happening, here in the UK? There are three handicaps, all aspects of the Internet delivery system.

The first is the software – the browsers. It certainly seems that most of the development is going into what are often, to business, peripheral features. Yes, graphics can be important, though sound and animation are less so, but what is more vital is access to the factual data, an easy way of finding it, navigating to it and saving it to one's own hard disk. Yet these are the very features which seem to take second place to the multimedia entertainment.

The second handicap is put up by some of the Internet service providers. Perhaps the ideal way of getting to a particular Web site is to click your mouse on an entry in your database or PIM and have the system dial up that page for you. It can be done, using software from the likes of Netmanage or Quarterdeck. Try this on some servers without dial-on-demand though, and you'll find your way barred by a manual dialler which – when it does let you through – will, in all probability, have forgotten where you want to go and dump you on its own home page instead.

But the biggest drawback to using the Internet is the cost, at least here in the UK. In the USA and some other countries, local calls are free. Businesses there can sit connected to the Internet all day, using it as an extension to their filing cabinets. This may not be that much of a commercial benefit now, but in a few years it will give them an immense advantage. In the UK, the only telephone service providers doing anything about this are the cable companies, who will give their customers access to other cable lines at the weekend for a ha'penny a minute. This doesn't do much for businesses of course, and not that many Internet service providers are connected to cable yet.

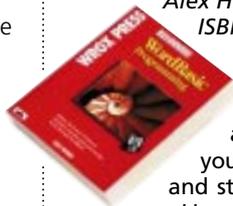
So come on, BT and others. At least make it an optional package. Let's get those modems on line. It's good to squawk.

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Beginning WordBasic Programming

Alex Homer. 622 pages. Wrox Press. £37.49. ISBN: 1-874416-86-9



Word's built-in macro language, WordBasic, is a powerful programming language in its own right. With a little perseverance, and not much code, you could be writing sophisticated utilities and standalone applications. While not for total beginners, this book is a good introduction to WordBasic programming. Starting with the fundamentals of the language and the way WordBasic interfaces with Word, it goes on to cover creation of electronic forms, Wizards and Help files, object orientation, mail merge, and more. There are plenty of illustrations throughout, as well as example listings, all of which you'll find on the included floppy disk. Although £37.49 isn't cheap, this book provides everything you need to become a proficient WordBasic developer.

PC Photography – Digital Photos Made Easy

Heinz von Buelow and Dirk Paulissen. 287 pages. Abacus. £33.02. ISBN: 1-55755-293-2



Digital imaging has had a great impact on a variety of everyday imaging tasks but it also allows images to be manipulated in ways that were not only impossible ten years ago, but literally undreamt of. If you want in on this burgeoning field, then this book could be of great use to you as it's a guide to almost everything to do with digital imaging. We say everything, as it focuses mainly on Eastman Kodak's Photo CD system, but that still allows for plenty of scope.

It covers such things as installing a CD-ROM drive in a PC, photography basics, Photo CD production and image-processing software. The style is mostly non-technical, and although some chapters are a little dry, the book provides a useful and informative overview of digital imaging in terms of both hardware and software. Illustrations and photographs are used throughout but the lack of colour means that some of the pictures of manipulated images are not as clear as they could be.

PC Photography – Digital Photos Made Easy is sold with a CD-ROM that contains an assortment of utilities, demo programs and Photo CD images that accompany the book's tutorials.

The Which? Guide to computers

Richard Wentk. 288 pages. Penguin. £10.99. ISBN: 0-85202-629-3



Buying a PC is never as easy as it should be, and for the first-time buyer choosing the right system can be an absolute nightmare. *The Which? Guide to Computers* is written to help potential purchasers make the right choice.

Split into 12 sections, the guide takes you step by step through the many things you'll need to consider before splashing out. Sensibly, much of the emphasis is on choosing the right software – it's no good having the world's fastest PC if you don't have the right programs to run on it. What to look for in PCs and peripherals is also covered in detail, with comparisons of popular IBM compatible and Apple products. The guide falls down in some areas, mainly in the lack of useful illustrations, but there's a lot of sensible buying information.

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Drawing software

From professional products, such as Adobe Illustrator and Corel Draw, to easy-to-use packages for the total beginner, we take a detailed look at the latest Windows drawing software.

Budget PCs

Not everyone can afford the latest 200MHz Pentium PC, but that doesn't mean you can't get a good machine on a budget. We round up a selection of complete systems for under £1,200.

Document scanners

Small but perfectly formed, document scanners are a great way of moving information from paper to PC. We put the leading models head to head, and look at a range of hand-held alternatives.

17in monitors

If you use Windows every day a 17in monitor gives you more room to work, and is less strain on the eyes. We look at the latest models to find out if bigger really is better.

Upgrading: part 3

Paul Wardley continues his guide to improving your PC with a look at memory and processor upgrades.

Making music

Your PC's sound card isn't just for the latest games – with the right software you can use it to compose music. Steve Helstrip guides you through the magical world of MIDI, synthesisers and sequencing software.

What CD? 6

As always, our sensational free CD brings you over 600Mb of the latest software, videos, games and interactive multimedia.

On sale 7th November

(contents subject to change)