

Products covered in our concise reviews this month include: a fax/modem and sound card, an external magneto-optical disc for notebook PCs, a new touchpad device, a font management tool, a postcode utility, a scanner within a keyboard, a 220Mb SyQuest drive, and a genealogy program with multimedia capabilities

miroMEDIA Online

The miroMEDIA Online is both a fax/modem and sound card. The modem adheres to the V.34 standard, providing data communications at 28.8Kbps. It is also equipped with voice chips which, with the Microsoft Phone software supplied, enable it to be used as an answerphone or voice-mail system.

The sound card features wavetable synthesis for realistic reproduction of musical instruments from MIDI files, and a microphone is supplied for you to record messages or use the miroMEDIA as a speaker phone.

The fax/modem element functioned perfectly for logging onto data services and the Internet and for sending and receiving faxes. Sound in Windows 95 was fine but we had problems running some games in DOS mode. The sound card does function in DOS but you have to fiddle with a utility provided by miro to find the right settings for different types of software.

Three miro CDs are provided: one to set up Windows, one containing a communications program and the other to link the miroMEDIA Online with other miro cards such as TV and radio tuners. Setting up the miroMEDIA Online is not complicated (at least not under Windows 95) but the plethora of multilingual booklets and CD-based manuals make it seem harder than it is.

The miroMEDIA online is good value if you want to upgrade to a modem and sound at the same time. The internal fitting means older PCs can achieve fast data transfer without upgrading serial ports.

MiroMEDIA Online

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

- £198.58 (including VAT)
- miro: 01494 510250



Cirque GlidePoint Touchpad 2

Since its invention by engineers at Xerox's Palo Alto Research Centre (PARC), the mouse has become the most common pointing device in use on desktop PCs. If, however, you prefer to point by just using your finger rather than your whole hand, then the new Touchpad 2 from Lindy Electronics could be for you – it's a tablet that lets you perform mouse operations with your fingertip.

Touchpad-like devices are becoming increasingly common in notebook PCs because they offer an intuitive way of pointing within a confined space. The Touchpad 2 is slightly larger than the ones found in notebook PCs but it still extremely compact, measuring just 111mm(w)x102mm(d)x10mm(h).

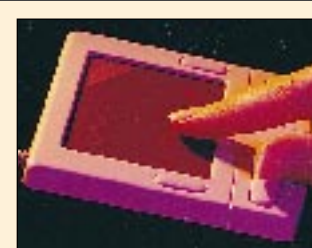
The Touchpad 2 plugs into any PC with an available 9-pin serial port or a PS/2 mouse port and is ready to use as soon as you've installed the accompanying driver software. As well as providing a tutorial on its use, the software allows you to tailor the Touchpad 2's functions to your personal preferences. The Touchpad isn't quite as good as a mouse when it comes to accurate positioning of the pointer, but it's intuitive in use and tapping the pad to trigger a mouse click is handy.

The Touchpad 2 will not appeal to everyone, but we found it to be a comfortable alternative to a mouse – and it can be used ambidextrously.

Cirque GlidePoint Touchpad 2

Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

- £69.33 (including VAT)
- Lindy Electronics: 01642 765275



Fujitsu DynaMO230

Users of modern notebook PCs rarely have to miss out on the latest peripherals. Most external devices, even hard disks, can now be bought in a form that will connect to a notebook's PC Card (PCMCIA) socket. The DynaMO230 drive is just such a device and it can store up to 230Mb of data onto relatively cheap, rewritable magneto-optical discs.

Installing the DynaMO230 is a simple process of plugging it into a Type II (or Type III) PC Card socket and installing the accompanying drivers; after this, the DynaMO230 appears as just another drive letter on your notebook. Indeed, you use the DynaMO230 exactly as you would a floppy drive – insert a disc, format it, copy files to and fro as you wish, and then remove when finished.

Magneto-optical discs look very much like normal CD-ROMs, but the difference is that the former can be written to, as well as read from. The performance is not earth-shattering – we managed a transfer rate of around 60Kbps (kilobytes per second) when writing data, and 257Kbps reading during our tests – but the advantage of having 230Mb of cheap storage on hand easily outweighs this.

If you've got a notebook PC and the hard disk is nearing capacity, the Fujitsu DynaMO230 is an excellent way of gaining some extra storage space.

Fujitsu DynaMO230

Build quality	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

- £399 (expected street price including VAT)
- Fujitsu: 0181 573 4444



Quicken Family Lawyer

From its title, you might think that Family Lawyer is the solution to all your family's legal problems. Not so. It is, however, a very useful tool for packaging your after-death wishes into legally binding documents.

You start Family Lawyer by selecting which of the two documents types – a will or a power of attorney – you wish to prepare. You then proceed by filling in your responses to a long series of questions and open statements. The wording and format of the document changes according to the content of your responses, and it is therefore important to read each completed section very carefully to ensure overall coherency. Once you've completed all the necessary details and statements, the document can be dated and printed in readiness for your witnessed signature.

On the whole, Family Lawyer is very easy to use and its pop-up help files are very informative, but we are a little disappointed by the absence of printed instructions. Our only other criticism is that there are a few minor grammatical errors in some parts of the documents.

'Family Lawyer' is a misleading title for this package. 'Prepare your will at home with ease' would have been a more fitting name.

Quicken Family Lawyer

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

- £29.95 (including VAT)
- Guildsoft: 01752 895100



Max Software Font Consultant 3.0

This updated Windows 95-compatible font management utility adds all the functionality that Microsoft left out of the operating system.

After a simple installation, Font Consultant enables you to scan your drive selectively or in its entirety in order to find whatever fonts are present on your machine. Once this is done, it then allows you to group the fonts by type (for instance, italic, decorative and so on), or by your own classification.

Once you have classified and grouped your font database, you can then install or remove fonts either singly or in groups, depending on what you want to do. This is done on the fly, without the need to restart Windows, and carries the benefit of allowing you to hold considerable numbers of fonts on your system but to use them selectively. Fewer installed fonts result in a quicker Windows load time and better overall performance.

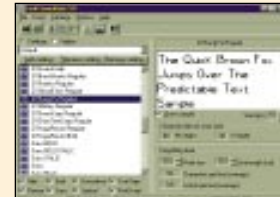
In addition to the grouping and install/remove functions, Font Consultant can also move, copy and delete font files, so it can be used as a one-stop font manager, with no need to call in Explorer or File Manager.

With its extensive viewing, file management and font management tools, Font Consultant is an excellent way of handling an extensive font collection, although it is rather pricey.

Font Consultant 3.0

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

- £82.00 (including VAT)
- Max Software: 01902 374858
- Demo download – <http://www.marches.county.net/fonts/>



Lotus Companions, Travel – Western Europe

'Companions' are add-in files for Lotus Organizer. There are two titles: Travel – Western Europe and World Citizen; and a range of specialist titles will be available later in the year. They are intended for use on a laptop PC, and will soon be available for several popular palmtops.

Travel – Western Europe provides extremely basic, practical tourist information on airports and public transport, postal services, telephone procedures, emergencies, entertainment and restaurants. The focus is on the major cities of each country, but there are inconsistencies. For example, there's a (condensed) London Underground map, but no equivalent for the Paris Metro.

Travel – Western Europe is a useful product if used as a cursory introduction to the country you are visiting. The annual updates, available by subscription, would be essential. There are lots of facts and phone numbers, but none of the fun or quirky details that can be found in many printed guides.

The Companions are crammed with facts and information on the bigger European cities. They don't provide useful opinions, or details on regions away from the big business centres, but they are good value.

- Price: £6.60 (including VAT, plus postage and packing of £1.30)
- Onboard Info: 0171 370 0307

Lotus Companions

Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



AFD Software Postcode

With a correct postcode the Post Office can, in most cases, narrow down an address to a single street anywhere within the United Kingdom. AFD Software's Postcode is a program that lets anyone do the same from their desktop PC.

Postcode occupies a small window that has entry fields for postcode, street name, locality, town, county and STD (standard trunk dialling) code. Enter a postcode and the other fields fill, almost immediately, with the appropriate address information.

Addresses can be inserted directly into your chosen application by selecting the target from a drop-down list. Alternatively, you can type a house number followed by the postcode into your application, then highlight it and have Postcode covert it to a full address.

AFD has not splashed out on printed instructions; a CD-sized page of photocopied installation instructions is all you get, but a full manual is supplied in electronic form on the CD.

Some of Postcode's more useful attributes are not particularly intuitive, but overall this program is fast and could save you a lot of time – if you type an awful lot of addresses.

- £181.00 (including VAT)
- AFD Software: 01294 823221

AFD Postcode

Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Colorgraph SOFT copy

If the promise of colour photocopying for under £50 sounds too good to be true, it is. SOFT copy from Colorgraph relies on you already having a colour printer and scanner. All SOFT copy does is make them easier to use together by putting up an image on the screen that looks like the standard set of buttons on a real colour copier. You can then control the copying process with these buttons.

The software should work with any TWAIN scanner, though Colorgraph asks you to check with them if you have anything other than an Epson, HP, Umax, Agfa or Microtek device. Special fast printer drivers are included for Canon BJC600, Epson Stylus and HP500 series printers but any printer installed in Windows can be used.

SOFT copy gives you a certain amount of control over colour and brightness, but you can't see the effect of any changes until you print a copy – a screen-based interactive facility would have been nice. On the other hand, the controls enabling you to scale copies in small or large increments or to select only a portion of the scanned image for printing are exceptionally easy to use.

You'd be pleased to get SOFT copy thrown in with a scanner but the price is a bit steep for a simple utility program. It doesn't do anything you can't do (more laboriously) by other means.

- £57.58 (including VAT)
- Colorgraph: 01734 819435

Colorgraph SOFT copy

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Visioneer PaperPort ix

Not content with having a document scanner barely wider than the A4 pages it's designed to scan (the PaperPort Vx), Visioneer has now gone a stage further and integrated it into a keyboard.

Barely larger (though considerably heavier) than a normal keyboard, the PaperPort ix retains exactly the same functionality as the Vx, but in a more convenient package.

Obviously, an integrated scanner/keyboard is going to need more than just a keyboard socket for connection but the PaperPort ix manages to keep the cabling to a minimum. A single thick lead emerges from the back of the unit and this then splits into three thinner leads – a PS/2 keyboard cable, a serial cable and a lead that goes to the external mains adaptor.

The scanner consists of a bulge at the back of the keyboard with a wide slot into which paper is fed. To make a scan, you simply insert a page in the slot – the scanner then springs into life and quickly scans the page, which then appears on screen in the versatile PaperPort document management application. Scans at up to 400dpi are possible, though they are limited to 8-bit greyscale.

If you're short of deskpace and need a document scanner, then the PaperPort ix is ideal. It's a little expensive but the document management software is nothing short of excellent.

- £323.13 (including VAT)
- Ingram Micro: 01908 260422

Visioneer PaperPort

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



SyQuest EZFlyer 230

SyQuest's EZFlyer 230 provides 220Mb of storage on a removable hard disk cartridge costing £23.50. The '230' in the name refers to the millions of bytes in 220Mb, so SyQuest is being slightly naughty.

The drive plugs into a PC's parallel port and there's a connector on the back so you can use your printer at the same time. The removable hard disk is fractionally bigger than a 3.5in floppy disk and about three times as thick. In use, it works just like a hard disk too but the slowness of the parallel port means that data transfer is nowhere near as fast. In other words, copying large files onto a SyQuest disk can take two or three times as long as to a conventional hard disk, but it's still very much faster than tapes or floppies.

One removable disk is included with the drive, along with a power supply, parallel cable and driver disks for DOS, Windows and OS/2. Installation is very straightforward and you can test that the drive is working by quickly deleting the three 'free' programs stored on the disk – a trivial game, a US zip code finder and a demonstration Web page designer.

A reliable and fast way of safely working with and storing big files, but the removable disks don't really hold enough data to be used for backing up large hard drives.

- £242 (including VAT)
- SyQuest: 0800 526559

Syquest EZFlyer 230

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Family Tree Maker v3.01

From being Cinderella software, genealogy programs have become richer relatives altogether. Able to record dozens of disparate family facts, notes, references and sources, such programs can analyse the information and present it in a large variety of charts and reports. Family Tree Maker is just such a program, and one that adds multimedia capabilities.

The most significant of these is probably its ability to produce pictorial descendant or ancestor trees. You do, of course, need to have scanned in the pictures first, the program recognising a variety of graphics formats including .BMP, .GIF and .JPG, as well as Kodak Photo CD.

You can hold as many pictures as you like in the program's 'Scrapbooks', of which there is one for every individual and one for every marriage. Scrapbooks can also hold audio and video clips, and can be 'played' as on-screen slide shows.

As well as the basic edition, there are two others with extra data on American genealogical records, but, of course, at higher prices. Meanwhile, the supplier S&N is offering *What PC?* readers the basic disk edition at £44.50 (and can sell you a scanner too).

Now one of the major genealogy programs available, the versatile Family Tree Maker is equally suited to beginner or expert.

- £49.88 (incl VAT)
- S&N Genealogy Supplies: 01252 378054

Family Tree Maker v3.01

Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall	★ ★ ★ ★ ★

