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Say, folks, have I got a deal for you! You can have a kind of a computer thing without a hard disk or monitor that connects to the World-Wide Web. You can watch the Web on your TV. And all for only about \$500. Or maybe £500. We're not quite sure yet.

Such is the great promise of Network Computers (NCs). Now, I'm the first person to argue in favour of specialised devices. I don't want to watch TV in a corner of my PC's screen, I don't want my answering machine to accept faxes and double as a printer, and I don't want my heating system to get uppity and start gibbering at me about closing windows for security reasons.

But a device you could carry around with you that could look stuff up on the Web and send and receive e-mail on the run would be useful. And when you consider that the Web and on-line interaction tend to pull people away from television, it makes sense to think in terms of a set-top box that can manage TV channels, Web interaction, and a host of other information services all in one via the oh-so-familiar TV set.

On the other hand...there's a kind of presumption associated with the NC that the mass market is too stupid or too non-technical (and in some techie circles those terms seem to be interchangeable) to want to use an actual computer. This is despite the fact that in many families the driving reason to get a PC is not on-line entertainment and not the Web, but children's homework and the desire to play games that won't run on anything less than a Pentium. I know such a family, who have terrifyingly ferocious demarcation disputes over whose homework is more important than balancing the family chequebook or playing Quake.

So NCs must be for companies, who don't have these problems. Just one question: if your business depended on your access to information, wouldn't you feel nervous in a situation where the information was stored on someone else's server, an Internet away? I would. I'd want to keep a copy locally, just in case the server was busy, or the service provider was down. But that's OK, you could always put a disk drive into the NC and hook on a spare monitor...sounds a bit like a PC?

Wendy Grossman

Wendy Grossman is a freelance journalist and a regular contributor to *What PC?*

The Net-Head Handbook

Nick Rosen. 144 pages. £9.99. Hodder & Stoughton. ISBN: 0-340-67207-2



This 'guide to computer chic' takes a light-hearted look at the Internet and its 40 million users. Written for the novice, it is claimed to provide everything that you need to explore Cyberspace with style and to speak geek.

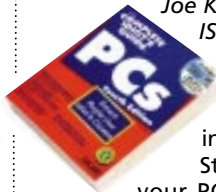
Sadly, one glance at this 'essential toolkit for the 90s' is likely to put any new users straight off the idea of getting on line. While there is some useful information inside, the *Handbook* is really nothing more than a collection of computer jokes, stories, and extracts from the Web.

It does come with free Internet software and 10 hours' on-line time, but if you're really looking for advice there are far more practical titles on the market.

Great for a Christmas stocking filler, but little else.

The Complete Idiot's Guide To PCs - Fourth Edition

Joe Kraynak. 385 pages. Que. £23.49. ISBN: 0-7897-0787-X



This newest book in the long-running *Idiot's Guide* series promises 'down-to-earth advice' on buying and using a PC for the first time.

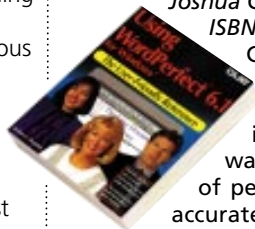
Starting with the basics of setting up your PC, author Joe Kraynak goes on to cover subjects as diverse as surfing the Internet and adding a second hard disk, and all with more than a little humour. Surprisingly, and admirably, Kraynak has not concentrated his efforts on PCs running Windows 95 alone; both Windows 3.1 and DOS have chapters dedicated to their particular foibles.

In common with most of the *Idiot's Guides* there's an accompanying CD-ROM, and in this instance it includes numerous sample versions of Microsoft software.

This is a topnotch guide that contains all the information that a beginner needs and a lot more besides.

Using WordPerfect 6.1 for Windows

Joshua C Nossiter. 406 pages. QUE. £18.49. ISBN: 0-7897-0293-2



Corel has now taken control of WordPerfect and, with the release of WordPerfect 7, has begun fighting back against the MS Word tidal wave. However, there's a vast number of people still using – or perhaps more accurately, struggling with – WordPerfect 6.1. Que's *Using WordPerfect 6.1 for Windows* is designed as a simple reference guide for these users.

The book is split into seven main parts, each covering a broadly related collection of WordPerfect 6.1 features; there's also an eighth 'part', but this is really no more than an index. The parts have been structured such that you can – depending on your experience level – read them in any order, although beginners will probably want to take the traditional sequential method. Also, particularly useful for beginners is a tear-out key guide that Que has included at the front of the book.

At times the various parts do seem a little disjointed but, overall, *Using WordPerfect 6.1 for Windows* is an excellent guide.

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If you want the best in PCs, software and peripherals, look no further than the *What PC?* annual best sellers issue. We provide reviews of all the top-selling products across more than 25 categories, plus our alternative best buys.



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Lifestyle software

Everything from cooking and wine guides through to gardening and DIY applications are covered in our special lifestyle software group test.

Upgrading: part 2

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WhatCD? 5

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On sale 10th October

(contents subject to change)