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A couple of years ago, someone at the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) told me that the computer industry was its biggest single source of complaints. Unfortunately, the ASA's Web site (www.asa.org.uk) doesn't offer such statistics, but it still makes interesting reading. By September, the ASA had ruled on 41 computer industry complaints this year, most of which were upheld.

Reading these rulings, you know that behind the unemotional language and polite explanation is, somewhere, an enraged and frustrated consumer.

It's hard not to feel for the user, for example, who complained unsuccessfully that the advertising video for Apple's Performa made it sound easier and less time-consuming to set up than it was when he actually did so. Apple submitted magazine reviews, a *Which?* report, an instruction leaflet, statistics, and a list of the tutorials and other documentation intended to make the machine easy to use. What does it say about computers that the machine that's easiest to use still attracts complaints?

Well-known companies with rulings against their ads this year include Hewlett-Packard, Amstrad, Computers By Post, Tiny, Time, Ecom, and Thorn UK for Radio Rentals. Several complaints focused on matters such as whether prices included VAT, or objections about language (16 people complained when Planet Internet used the word 'crap' in a leaflet). A few exceptionally knowledgeable complaints came from the industry: anti-virus specialist McAfee didn't like ads that characterised Norton Anti-Virus as the most effective anti-virus software (this was upheld). The most entertaining was Wave Rider Internet's complaint against Utopia! Internet, which the ASA upheld. Utopia! had billed itself as the 'UK's fastest-growing Internet Access Provider', backing this claim with figures showing a growth rate of 1,700 per cent in two months. Yep, that's right: from one customer to 17.

Reading these adjudications is a good way to educate yourself about the pitfalls of reading computer ads. And, with any luck, putting this information on the Web will make it more accessible and give the ASA a wider reach at lower cost than it's had until now: exactly the kind of thing we all hoped the Web would do.

Wendy Grossman

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The Big Basics Book Of The Internet

J Kaynak, J Fulton, S Kinkoph, A Weiss. 525 pages. Que. £18.49. ISBN: 0-7897-0753-5



The Internet is a huge mishmash of useful and not-so-useful information, so it was inevitable that somebody would publish a book in the same mould. *The Big Basics...* sets out to be all things to all people; from the basics of connecting to the Net to writing HTML (hypertext markup language), it's all here. Unfortunately, the diversity of coverage means each section is small and often it seems you've read about as many topics as you've turned pages.

Like many books that cover the Internet, *Big Basics...* has a heavy American bias. While this might be fine for a first-time user in the States, UK users will find that whole chunks of the book are useless.

The Big Basics... is not a bad publication – in fact, it's an excellent reference guide – but what is the point of reading a book that promises to get you connected to the Internet, when even the ISP (Internet Service Provider) phone numbers do not relate to this country?

The Internet Telephone Toolkit

Jeff Pulver. 201 pages. £19.99. Demo CD.

John Wiley & Sons. ISBN: 0-471-16352

www.wiley.com/compbooks/



The Internet Telephone Toolkit is designed to help readers capitalise on a little-known aspect of the Net – its potential as a cheap phone system.

Internet telephony requires certain hardware and software and after describing how the whole system started in the first place, the book devotes a chapter to what you'll need and who to get it from. Several pages cover potential problems and a shortlist of FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) cover many common dilemmas.

The rest of the book is dedicated to Internet telephony software and several products are covered in some detail.

If you're a total novice racked by indecision and want in on the mushrooming Internet telephony market, this book will provide some useful insights. It doesn't, however, contain much in the way of essential reading and since much of the software is available from the Net anyway, you could learn almost as much by downloading it and looking through the 'readme' files.

Multimedia Sound and Music Studio

Jeff Essex. 405 pages. Random House. Apple NewMedia Library, Random House. £41.99.

www.randomhouse.com. Includes CD-ROM. ISBN 0-679-76191-8



Designed for professionals and hobbyists alike, *Multimedia Sound and Music Studio* is a guide to developing audio for use in desktop presentations. Although it's published by Apple NewMedia Library, it's claimed to include everything you need to know for working with both Macs and Windows PCs.

The book is split into four main parts: Tools and Technology, Techniques, Product Reviews and Looking Ahead. Each section is extremely detailed and includes both technical illustrations and software screenshots.

Not surprisingly, the book has a strong Mac bias but on the whole *Multimedia Sound and Music Studio* is a handy reference for multimedia developers.

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PDAs

Destined to replace the Filofax, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) are improving in leaps and bounds. We test the latest hand-held computers and the software that makes them tick.

Super-fast Pentiums

It's now possible to get a super-fast 200MHz Pentium PC with full multimedia for under £2,000, including VAT. *What PC?* and the VNU Labs put the latest top-of-the-range models head to head.

DTP software

High-quality desktop publishing (DTP) is no longer limited to the professionals. We reveal all about DTP and compare the latest budget and high-end packages for Windows.

Keyboards, mice and trackballs

Whether your mouse is on the blink or you're just looking for a more comfortable keyboard, our roundup of the latest input devices is for you.

Christmas goodies

January's issue comes out well in time to order those last-minute Christmas stocking fillers. We present a selection of computer gadgets and goodies selected by the *What PC?* team.

Computer Class: Making music part 2

In part 2 of his guide to music on the PC, Steve Helstrip takes you through Steinberg's sequencing software step by step.

On sale 12th December

(contents subject to change)