top gear

We look at the latest must-have gadgets from around the world to gauge what could be on the shelves of electronics shops in the months to come

← SoundBlaster MP3+
Portable USB sound card

There aren't many ways to upgrade your sound card without opening your PC case and confronting the jumble of wires and fragile components inside, but the team at Creative has managed to come up with one. The company's portable SoundBlaster MP3+ plugs effortlessly into a USB port, provides 16bit 48KHz stereo sound and you can connect it to both digital and analogue devices such as a microphone and headphones. And if you want to spread the word, simply plug it into a different PC.

■ www.creative.com ■ £39.99 inc VAT

→ Reevu LX and DLX
Bicycle helmet rearview mirror system

After seven years of development, Reevu has unveiled its cycle helmet range that features a revolutionary rearview system. A combination of reflective angles 'bends' images round the cyclist's head from the top of the helmet to a mirror in its visor at the front. The mirrors are made of ABS, a strong, reflective plastic much lighter and safer than metal or glass. We're currently still subjecting the helmets to extensive trials – so far, so good. But if there are some tragic notices in next month's issue, you'll know not to try them out yourself.

■ www.reevu.com ■ £49.95 (LX), £64.95 (DLX)

← Infineon smart carpet
Intelligent textile technology

We were floored when we heard about this one. By embedding a network of microchips, sensors and LEDs in heavy-duty textiles, German firm Infineon has created intelligent carpeting. Sensors monitor temperature, pressure and vibrations, allowing the carpet to detect the presence of intruders, fires or floods, while the network is sophisticated enough to monitor their location and direction of movement. The network can also be used to check a building's structural integrity – recording cracks or flaws – while the LEDs could direct visitors or flash up advertising slogans.

■ www.infineon.com ■ price: TBA

➜ Polycom VTX 1000
Wideband teleconferencing station

Anyone who has participated in a teleconference will know it's usually a session of shouting "Can you repeat that?" into the mic while your clients sound as if they are using walkie-talkies in a bathroom. Polycom's VTX 1000 changes all that. It uses wideband telephony, so audio quality is greatly improved. It works best when you have a VTX 1000 setup at both ends, but features such as a pickup radius of 20ft and automatic background noise reduction mean the Polycom will improve a conference call even when the other parties are using non-wideband phones.

■ www.polycom.com ■ £1,187 each

← Wabi bears
Remotely activated teddy bears

The makers of talking bear Teddy Ruxpin have created another hi-tech cuddly toy that your toddler will either cherish dearly or run away from screaming hysterically. The Wabi bear's 900MHz technology allows you to communicate remotely with your tots through the mouth of their furry friend (always assuming they'll go near the thing). You can send voice messages or other content including nursery rhymes, songs and educational games, all with "100 percent reliability and security". It can only be hoped that children won't be permanently scarred after hearing their parent's voices emitting from a wall-eyed synthetic ursine's erratically twitching maw.

■ www.wabi.com ■ price: TBA

➜ AverDVD EZMaker USB 2.0
Portable digital video maker

The video age is fast receding and VHS will soon be a thing of the past. But don't let the thought of losing your favourite home videos to the inexorable tide of progression horrify you – we've got the perfect solution. The plug-and-play EZMaker allows you to transfer analogue and digital video to CD, DVD or your PC hard drive, capturing images from a range of devices and offering you extensive authoring and editing facilities. If you don't want your first steps into the digital age to mean the loss of your tot's first steps at a tender age then grab this gadget.

■ www.averm.co.uk ■ £59.99 inc VAT