

TOP 10 BUDGET PCs

		Budget PCs	Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor	
			Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch	
						Maximum resolution@75Hz	
1		Multivision Ionix Ti 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 1	• £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review May 03	AMD Athlon 2800+ 2.25GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI K7N2-L 4	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		134		
2		Mesh Matrix XP 2700+ Multidrive 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 2	• £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Apr 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Asus A7N9Y 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		132		
3		Evesham Axis 2700+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 3	• £1,106 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review May 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Leadtek K7NCR18D Pro 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		132		
4		Campus Eclipse 540GTX Pro System 0870 066 0711 www.campus-systems.co.uk LAST MONTH 4	• £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review May 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Gigabyte 7VAXP 4	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 0.24mm 2,048x1,536
			WorldBench 4		125		
5		Shepley B2700+ 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk LAST MONTH 5	• £999 ex VAT • 1-year onsite parts & labour, 4-year return-to-base warranty • First review May 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	EpoX 8RDA 4	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		125		
6		Systemax Inspire 7397 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 6	• £799 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review May 03	AMD Athlon XP 2500+ 1.86GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	MSI KT4V-L 6	19in CTX EX950F 0.25mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		120		
7		Multivision Vision Pro Ti 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 7	• £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour only warranty • First review Mar 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Leadtek WinFast 6	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 0.24mm 2,048x1,536
			WorldBench 4		127		
8		Evesham Axis 2400+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 8	• £1,049 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 03	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Leadtek WinFast 6	17in flat-panel LG L1710B 0.26mm 1,280x1,024
			WorldBench 4		126		
9		Cybyte Supro Gamer 01603 455 554 www.cybyte.com LAST MONTH 9	• £1,020 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review May 03	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	EpoX 8RDA 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,920x1,200
			WorldBench 4		124		
10		NEC PowerMate i-Select XL53 0870 010 6322 www.nec-online.co.uk LAST MONTH 10	• £1,199 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review May 03	Intel Pentium 4 3.06GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Intel 4	19in NEC VR19 0.26mm 1,600x1,200
			WorldBench 4		121		



↑ The Ionix combines an excellent performance with great features, a decent spec list and impressive warranty

Buying advice: Budget PCs

Buying a PC when you're on a budget is tough. The trick is to figure out precisely what you want to use the system for. This way, you know in which areas you need to spend money and in which you can compromise. For example, if you're a gamer you'll need a good graphics card and monitor. Alternatively, if you're into digital video editing then you'll want the biggest hard drive you can afford.

The Athlon 2700+ processor dominates the top half of the Budget chart at the moment, but the 2800+ is beginning to crop up in a few

systems – the Best Buy Ionix features this speedy chip. If you wish to take the Intel-branded route and opt for a Pentium 4 then look for a processor that runs at speeds of at least 2.4GHz. Bear in mind, though, that when AMD or Intel bring out a new chip the price of older models tends to come down, so keep an eye on the runners-up rather than the high-flyers.

The standard memory allotment in the Budget chart is quickly becoming 512MB of DDR RAM, although 256MB of DDR RAM should serve the needs of most PC users. Aim to get PC2700 or DDR333 RAM as this will give a faster performance than DDR266 RAM.

	Graphics card maker Graphics chip Graphics card memory	Sound card Speakers Subwoofer	DVD drive speed CD-RW read/ write/rewrite rate	Operating system, software and extras	Comments
	ATI Radeon 9500 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	12x/4x/2x (DVD-RW) 40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite	The Ionix Ti performs on every front: it combines great features, an impressive specification list, value for money and is protected by the best warranty we've seen. While there are other chart entries that beat the Ionix Ti's graphics and sound systems, none is as well balanced as this brilliant machine.
	ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	8x/4x/2.4x (DVD-I+RW) 32x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2003, Pinnacle Home Studio 8.0 SE	The Matrix is decked out with some of the best specifications and features £999 can buy. It performed beautifully in our tests and not surprisingly landed the second best WorldBench score in the chart. Its monitor isn't as good as the 930SB model but it complements the graphics card well, producing a great display.
	ATI Radeon 9500 128MB	Creative Audigy2 6 x Creative Inspire 6700 yes	12x/4x/2x (DVD-RW) 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, Big Fix, Ability Office 2003, Pinnacle Home Studio	The Axis may not be fancy-looking but it's an excellent performer. The graphics setup isn't top notch, but the audio facilities are particularly impressive – this is the only Budget PC to offer Creative's supreme Audigy2 sound card. Evesham has included two top-notch DVD and CD-RW drives for backup.
	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Videologic ZXR 550 yes	16x 52x/52x/24x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite Millennium	The Campus has great styling, decent specs and an impressive warranty. Its graphics subsystem is the best money can buy. There's no DVD writer and access to the internals is awkward for upgraders but the software bundle and fastest CD-RW drive on the market ensure this is a great Budget PC.
	ATI Radeon 9500 Pro 128MB	Creative Audigy 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 40x/24x/10x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office	While the Shepley is powerful enough for everyday applications, we've seen this exact spec achieve a higher score. However the monitor is excellent and the B2700+ beats most PCs for audio clarity. It's a shame that the bundled CD-RW drive is a slow model and the five-year warranty only includes one-year onsite cover.
	ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard Realtek Avance 4 x Creative Inspire 4400 yes	16x 52x/52x/16x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	The Systemax might lack the power of the competition but for £799 it has some great features – most notably AMD's new Barton core AMD Athlon XP 2500+. While the specs aren't top notch you do get a fast CD-RW drive, Lotus SmartSuite software, a fair warranty and, ultimately, value for money.
	nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4800 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Despite being four months old, this ex-Best Buy is still a good system. Powered by an Athlon XP 2700+ chip, the Multivision landed an impressive score of 127. The monitor gives a brilliant image and also has a four-port USB hub and built-in speakers. The Pro Ti card is showing its age, but the PC remains a good buy.
	ATI Radeon 9500 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE, Ability Office	The Axis 2400+ may not have one of the latest AMD chips but it's still a capable processor. The 80GB hard drive is smaller than most and the graphics card can't match the 9700, but the Evesham's LG monitor performs well and looks the part. Overall a good buy, particularly if you want a decent flat-panel display.
	ATI Radeon 9700 Pro 128MB	onboard 5.1 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Open Office, Power DVD, Easy CD Creator	Graphically the Supro can't be faulted. ATI's Radeon 9700 card and Mitsubishi's picture-perfect monitor make an excellent combination. Sound clarity is average, but you get 5.1-channel support. As one of the pricier systems in our chart, we expected more from the Supro Gamer such as onsite cover in its warranty.
	ATI Radeon 9800 128MB	Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1 5 x Creative Inspire 5300 yes	12x/4x/2x (DVD-RW) 32x/16x/8x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 6.0	The PowerMate i-Select sits in tenth place due to a below-par features list, high price and miserly one-year warranty. This is the only system, however, to include a 3.06GHz Pentium 4 processor so users get the benefit of hyperthreading technology. The NEC also delivers dedicated 5.1 channel sound.

Most Budget systems will come with a 120GB hard drive, but 80GB of storage should prove ample for the majority of PC users. It is desirable to have as much storage space as possible even though you'll probably never come close to filling it all.

In terms of CD-RW drives, don't go for anything with less than 40/16/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) facilities. When looking at screens, you should be able to get a decent 19in monitor for your money. Only be satisfied with a 17in model if it has very good specifications.

Either way, check that the screen can achieve an optimal resolution of 1,280x1,024 at 75Hz. Better still, for really sharp images look for 1,600x1,200 at 75Hz. In terms of dot pitch, 0.25mm or lower is fine. Flat-panel displays will push the price of the Budget system up but these screens might still be worth looking at if desk space is at a premium.

In terms of dedicated graphics memory, look for a minimum of 128MB. Top-of-the-range cards include nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4800 and ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro. However, if you don't need

astoundingly fast frame rates all the time then the GeForce4 Ti 4600 and ATI Radeon 9500 Pro are still very capable graphics cards.

Finally, when it comes to audio, Creative's Audigy2 sound card is the best option although the trusty SoundBlaster Live 5.1 is still a dependable choice. Avoid onboard audio if at all possible, as its performance is never as impressive as that of a dedicated card. If creating good-quality surround sound is important to you then look for a speaker system with five satellites and a subwoofer.