

welcome

Currently home entertainment is split between separate machines, from the TV and VCR to the PC and DVD player. But as the pace of technology changes, vendors are now promising to channel these streams through just one device



The PC will disintegrate consumer electronics into a myriad of competing factions – just like it has done in the business world – not integrate it

These days, there's a wealth of technology on offer for home entertainment. We have TVs to receive broadcast video and VCRs to record or play movies. Alternatively, we can view the latest blockbusters via a DVD player. We can also play DVDs on a PC and, if we've got the technical competence, get broadcast TV.

Web access via a television set is made possible with a set-top box. We play interactive games on a console that connects to the TV as well as on a PC. Oh, and some consoles can access the internet too.

Then there's music: the hi-fi plays audio CDs, but the DVD player, PC and even the games console can read most of the discs too. We can download MP3s and listen to them via the PC, but getting them to play over the stereo requires a higher degree of technical knowledge.

Messy isn't it?

Technology vendors aim to take all this confusion and channel the streams of entertainment. Using an intelligent hub and a wireless home network, an appropriate device will be chosen depending on what media we are consuming and where – for example, music on the stereo, internet on a PC.

There are many contenders for the role of the hub, but they boil down to two camps: the PC- and TV-centrics. Which route a consumer chooses is dictated by whether usage is dominated by mass-market broadcast entertainment (TV-centric) or telework (PC-centric), what equipment is installed in the home and how technically confident the user is.

But the arrival of the PC as an integrator of consumer electronics means anarchy: goodbye cosy single-vendor solutions and hello to a fashion-driven refresh cycle the rag trade would kill for.

In short, the PC will disintegrate consumer electronics into a myriad of competing factions – just like it has done in the business world – not integrate it. But it's the future. We can shun it and let the world pass us by or embrace it.

At *PC Advisor* we've been watching this trend grow. And as the pace of change increases we'll help you distinguish the hype from the reality, making sure you don't fall into the gap between the elegance of digital home theory and the misery of digital home practice. ■

Andrew Charlesworth

reader information

Competition rules of entry

The following rules and conditions apply to all competitions and giveaway offers in the magazine. The judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.

There is no cash alternative to the prize or prizes offered.

Employees of IDG Communications, the company or companies donating prizes and their relatives are not eligible for entry. Winners' details will be printed at the bottom of this panel in the next available issue of the magazine. Neither *PC Advisor* nor IDG Communications can be held responsible in the unlikely event that a company is not able to fulfill its obligation and provide a prize, for whatever reason. Competitions open to UK residents only.

Liability

While every conceivable effort is taken to ensure that all details printed in the magazine are correct at the time of going to press, the publishers cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information contained in the editorial, nor for the consequences of any actions taken as a result of this information. The views of contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the publisher.

Cover disc

The publisher shall have no liability without limitation for any losses or damage arising from using software on cover discs, including any loss of profit, damage to equipment or data, interruption of business, or any other damage, direct or accidental. It is recommended that you make a full backup of all the programs and data on your hard disk before installing any new software. Telephone numbers or website addresses given for cover disc software registration may only be valid for a limited period. If you experience problems with the cover disc call our helpline on 0870 739 7630.

Product reviews

Products submitted for reviews in *PC Advisor* are accepted on the basis that the same product will be available to the consumer. This ensures we give our readers the most accurate analysis of commercially available products. If, after reading a review in *PC Advisor*, you contact the manufacturer or vendor and find the specific model is not being offered, please let us know at reviews@idg.com. Prices quoted throughout the magazine exclude VAT except where otherwise stated.

Technical helpline

We cannot answer technical queries over the phone, except via our Expert Advice Hotline (see page 135). Calls are charged at £1.50 per minute, up to a maximum of six minutes. *PC Advisor* offers a full money-back guarantee.

If you are dissatisfied with the service, please contact us on 020 7291 5970.

Consumer hotline

Whether it's consumer-related or a general enquiry, our experts can help with all your legal problems. The *PC Advisor* Consumer Hotline costs £1.50 per minute. Call 0906 906 0276, 8am to 10pm, seven days a week. English law applies to all advice given.