

readers' writes

Several of this month's letters come in the form of advice: how to deter credit card fraud, suggestions for ISPs in the broadband debate and mending an error message in Outlook Express. But our star letter highlights the problems of shopping online

Widening broadband

I recently added my vote to one of your online forum polls entitled *The most successful broadband providers will...* I noted that cheap price and reliable service were far ahead of speed and content. I'm sure we would all like fast speeds and great content too. But, like many of your readers, I know we only get what we pay for. The results so far suggest that a low price and poor service won't be acceptable, which is common sense really.

Broadband is approximately twice the cost of a dialup service at present. I suggest that ISPs offer a two-tier system for light and heavy users. A 'time-limited' broadband connection – perhaps three hours per day – and the more expensive unlimited service. I rarely go beyond two hours online each day, although I pay for unlimited access.

I wonder if a time-limited option would encourage internet service providers to provide a reliable broadband service at a low price?

Phil Lyons, via email

Guy Dixon replies: broadband providers are already offering tiered services. Tiscali, for example, recently announced an ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) broadband service for £19.99, but limiting speeds to a maximum 256Kbps (kilobits per second) downstream – half the usual maximum speed.

Further tiering isn't likely to result in time restrictions, but rather the way you use your connection when you're online. A user who downloads several gigabytes of data a day may well end up paying more than someone browsing the internet for their university thesis. No-frills BT Broadband's terms and conditions state that it doesn't expect its users to download more than 1GB per day.

Catch a thief

I've just finished *Signs of assurance* from the November 02's ConsumerWatch, and thought your readers might like to know of a personal way I've found to prevent against excessive credit card fraud.

I took out a second credit card with a different company with a limit of just £250, specifying this was never to be increased. I find this amount is adequate for monthly acquisitions of DVDs, CDs and other computer consumables.

The maximum liability would be small even if the credit card details were hacked and the theft of personal details would be brought to the attention of the retailers much quicker. It would also possibly mean that an internet trail leading back to the perpetrators could be much more successfully employed.

Lee Smith, via email

Rosemary Haworth replies: you can never be too careful with your credit card details, whether giving them over the phone, online or even when handing over your card in a high street store. Even carelessly discarded transaction slips thrown in your bin at home can be used fraudulently.

The web trading organisations we outlined last month use a variety of methods to try and provide a more secure transactional framework; having a second card with a deliberately low limit is another sensible approach.

Unfortunately, there is no single right answer that will absolutely guarantee security. Credit and debit card fraud is a risk we take by relying on electronic transactions and a side effect of the way we handle money these days.



Unlucky for some...

On 13 October I received around 25 emails from various people around the world. However, 13 of these were infected with the W32bugbear@mm worm virus. Thank goodness I have Norton AntiVirus 2002 installed on my PC and, more to the point, that I update it daily.

Rowland James, via email

Emma Northam replies: you're right – having antivirus software on your PC is no use whatsoever unless it's kept up to date and run regularly. Too many computer users ignore these golden rules at their peril. We're glad to hear you're not one of them.

Scanner beats off mould

In response to Bernard Minns' letter (*Downsize and upgrade*, December 02) about scanners with slides adapters, I recommend the HP ScanJet 5470c.

I recently copied a negative of my grandfather on which there were small spots of dried mould. Laying the adapter over it, the copy came out fine.

Maria Wilson, York

Ben Camm-Jones replies: those mould spots are the very devil – we're always having to scrape them off the ed... But seriously, thanks for the tip Maria.

Vintage charity

I'm trying to check over a number of old computers, given to a charity, for sending to schools in Eastern Europe. They include Acorn and Apple Macs. Can you tell me how I get hold of a manual 1982+ to purchase or hire?

John Sykes, via email

Nel Staveley-Dick replies: we found a couple of sites on the web that have PDF format manuals which you can download and print. At Apple's site (www.info.apple.com) type in 'manuals', then 'operating systems' and enter the precise year and model of your system. Riscos now holds all of Acorn's records. Call 02920 492 324 or try www.riscos.com.

If any other readers have old PCs they no longer need and would like to donate them to charity, try www.iforecharities.co.uk/pcs.htm for a list of places to take your old computers. Or send your old Pentium PCs to Computer Aid International for overseas learning projects.

Clipboard junkie

I have read advice in *PC Advisor's Tips & Tricks* (Issue 2, Autumn 02) which says to save to Clipboard, then paste the image into MS Paint. But I have to disagree – I find MS Paint quite a bother. It is quicker to save to Clipboard, open a Word document and Paste. The image can then be enlarged or reduced by pulling the handles, text can also be added to the page, and it can be printed out for reference. To put the Clipboard icon in the System Tray, click Start, Programs, Accessories, System Tools, Clipboard Viewer, then right-click and choose Send To, Desktop (Create a shortcut).

Glen Thomas, via email

Emma Northam replies: MS Paint can be basic and unintuitive at times but, in its

Star letter

Behind the news (page 28, October 02) states that two-thirds of shopping baskets are abandoned at e-shopping sites. Frustration and jamming on the web are just two of the issues. Many are dissuaded by the slow and complicated process as well as cost – particularly the delivery charges. While some offer free or moderate fees, others are prohibitive. Hiding them on the penultimate page simply serves to incense shoppers who want to compare total cost (price, VAT and carriage) across several sites.



To gather this information, a customer is forced to carry out the entire purchasing procedure and then abandon it at the last stage. What a waste of time and facilities. Sites with reasonable charges lose exhausted customers, while those mistakenly hiding extortion (or should that be distortion to compensate for competitive pricing?) will never be visited again.

Stan Sutherland, via email

Our star letter writer wins a Canon SmartBase MPC400, worth £249 inc VAT. This four-colour, multifunction device combines a printer, copier and scanner in one compact flatbed unit. See www.canon.co.uk/multifunction for more information.

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defence, Paint can be a quick-and-dirty solution and it has the advantage that every Windows PC has a copy. But pasting an image into Word is a great option if you don't want to alter the picture before printing. Plus you can email embedded images easily this way and be sure the recipient can view them as long as they have a word processor.

Burn out

I wish to transfer to CD my record collection which is on reel-to-reel tape. Some of these tapes were first used back in 1956 and onwards. Your article *Trouble-free computing* in the December issue said CDs that have been burned are not guaranteed for more than 10 years. If this is the case will I be wasting my time?

Malcolm Oliver, West Sussex

Jason Whittaker replies: using recordable CDs to create audio as well as data backups is a good idea, but there are a number of provisos. First, most CDs are not guaranteed (though it's unlikely that your reel-to-reel tapes will be either). Some

CD brands such as TDK do offer more expensive discs which have longer guarantees, but one solution is to make double backups and store those discs away from sunlight and humid conditions.

Media life is only one thing to consider, however: also bear in mind that you will need to burn audio-compatible CDs in order to play them in standard CD players (most CD-burning software allows you to do this), but even then some older players simply refuse to work with recordable CDs.

If you will be playing music on your PC, an alternative to CD would be to store your audio tapes as MP3 (or similar format) files on your hard drive. You could then make regular backups of your music – and probably store a lot more tracks on to each disc in the process.

This relates to a final point: I presume these audio files are commercial tracks, some of which may not be available on modern media. While creating a personal backup of music that you have already purchased is a legal grey area that could be covered by fair use, many companies take a dim view of any form of copying. ■