Warranty wait

The Department of Trade and Industry has granted an extension to the Competition Commission's debate into the value of extended warranties. The Commission was due to reach a decision by 1 July 03, but this deadline has now been put back to 30 September.

"It is important that we tailor our recommendations to the complexities of this market and that we get it right. We have received many representations and are now holding hearings with some of the other parties. I believe it will help all parties if we give ourselves a bit more time," said trade and industry secretary Patricia Hewitt.

Our advice? If you're looking to buy an extended warranty make sure you shop around and, if you can, wait until September.
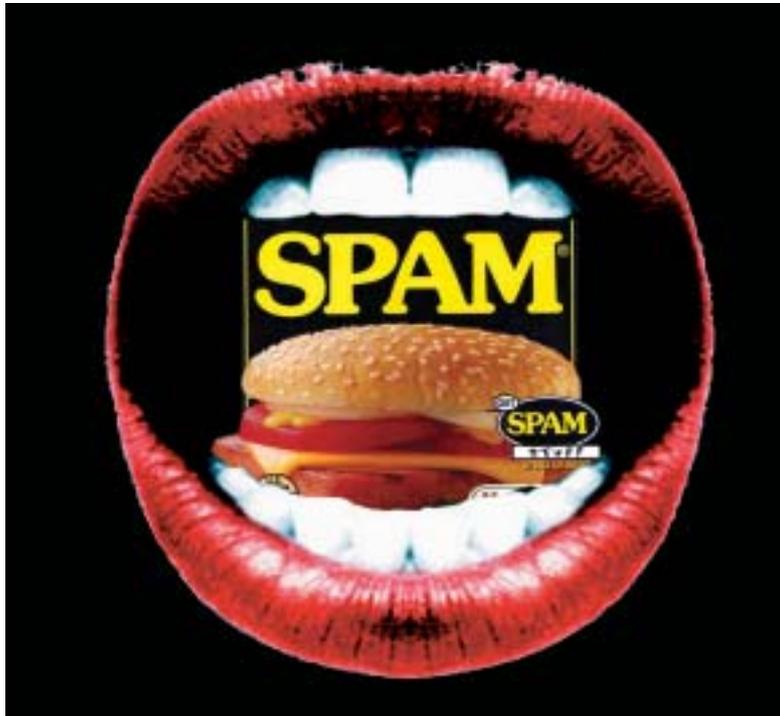
Spam slammed

Spam mail is undoubtedly a growing problem. A recent survey of *PC Advisor* readers revealed that nearly a third of all mail they receive is junk, while anti-spam software maker Brightmail estimated the figure to be even higher at 50 percent.

Government officials, EU representatives, lawyers and industry insiders met at the House of Commons in July to discuss the spam crisis. This is in anticipation of anti-spam legislation coming into effect in various countries over the next year or so.

"What we don't want is for spam to limit internet usage by shaking people's confidence in emails and the web," said e-minister Stephen Timms at the meeting.

The European anti-spam directive is set to become law in the UK before the end of the year, providing consumers with 'opt-in' protection.

What this means is that marketers can only send emails to those respondents who have expressly agreed to receive them. The one exception to this rule is where recipients are already in an existing relationship with a marketer, in which case an opt-out approach will apply.

But the problem lies in enforcement. The EU has provided no rules on how, or even if, countries should check whether respondents have directly consented, which means marketers could simply continue buying lists of addresses from third parties who have gained consent.

The EU is not the only territory to be looking at how to legislate against junk email. The US and Australia are also both introducing new laws to regulate the sending of spam. But the problem is that even with all these countries working against it, many spammers will be unaffected as mail is sent from South East Asia and South America where rules are less stringent or, in some cases, non-existent.

In order to combat this Timms told delegates that more than just legislation is required. He believes that global governments, companies and industry bodies need to come together to name, shame and then block spammers. Countries from around the world are set to meet for an international summit in Geneva in December, where spam will be top of the agenda.

"We will never get rid of spam, but within the next two to three years it will become manageable," concluded Brightmail's Enrique Salem.

Daily news at www.pcadvisor.co.uk/news

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Labels to sue fileswappers

The Recording Industry Association of America will soon begin gathering evidence for use in what could amount to thousands of lawsuits against individual music fileswappers.

In its defence the Riaa cited its efforts to educate the public that fileswapping is illegal and pointed out the number of legal download services available. It now says that those who persist in offending are engaging in piracy. "We cannot stand by while piracy takes a devastating toll on artists, musicians, songwriters, retailers and everyone in the music industry," the Riaa said in its statement.

Software will scan peer-to-peer networks for copyrighted material and download the suspect files, capturing the date and time of the download as evidence. Additional data obtained from the PC will lead the Riaa to the fileswapper's ISP. The service provider will then be served with a subpoena under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, requiring them to divulge the name and address of the individual hosting the files.

But this move could backfire on the big record labels who make up the Riaa's membership. According to a report in *The LA Times,* suing fileswappers could cost record labels: "The real people sued this autumn by the Riaa may have sympathetic stories to tell," warns the paper. It argues this could divert US legislators' attention away from the plight of the big record companies.

Record labels could also end up suing the wrong people. The Riaa can identify which PCs are sharing songs but not who is using them, so they can only go after those who pay for the web connection – often innocent parents and employers.

📄 Life in numbers: women on the web

Neilsen/Netratings' study has found that women won't catch up with men in terms of web use before 2010. Its figures show that currently only 42 percent of European surfers (35 million people) are female. UK women aren't doing too badly, though, as we only fall behind the US and Sweden.

US	
Sweden	
UK	
Netherlands	
France	
Switzerland	
Spain	
Germany	
Italy	

% of all users 30   35   40   45   50   55

MY TECHNOLOGY
gareth jones
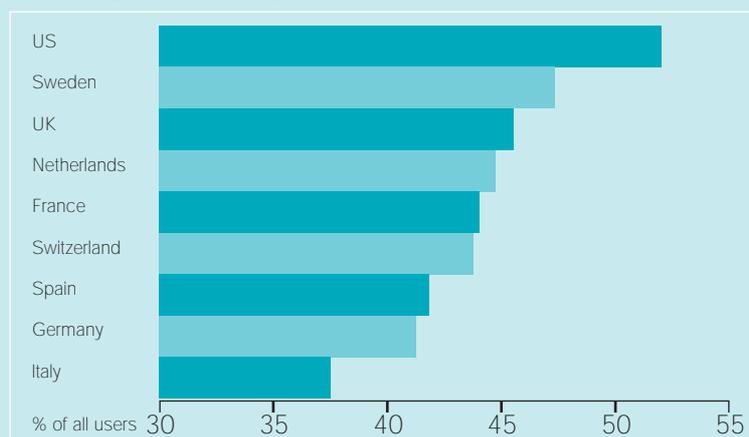
Q. Mac or PC? Which do you use and why?
A. Both. I use a PC for most things – gameplay, word processing, web design and communicating with my PDA and phone. I use a Mac for video editing.

Q. When did you last get angry with a piece of technology and why?
A. I am sorely frustrated at my PC's inability to run an infrared communication adapter.

Q. If you could invent a technology device for the future, what would it be?
A. My Psion 5MX needs repairing – if only I could open the communications link dialogue so I can get an up-to-date backup and synchronise with Outlook beforehand. I still haven't found the ideal replacement for my Psion now that they are out of production. I need a nice PDA that is light, stylish with a built-in keyboard.

Q. What's your home page or favourite website and why?
A. Sniffpetrol.com. This top car comedy website seems to be able to make the kind of jokes about the motor industry that you will never see in car magazines.

Gareth Jones has hosted network TV shows in the UK continuously since 1985. He was one of the initial MTV Europe VJs. He presented Saturday morning *Zoo TV, Get Fresh* and many other hit shows since then. On radio, he has hosted two years of *The Big Byte* and also his own Saturday morning pop show, *Weekenders.* He has presented 13 series of ITV's flagship factual show *How2* and in the summer will be hosting a major science series on network TV.

ISP feels the VAT

ISP Freeserve, which has been campaigning for the new VAT rules (see *Taxing issues*, right) to be adopted since last year, took the opportunity to poke fun at US-based rival AOL. The loophole has seen AOL escape tax payments on its European profits of around £150m, so Freeserve decided to look at just what AOL could have bought with its savings.

- 20 percent of the Millennium Dome
- 17,000 AOL Connie TV ads
- 375 Paul Gascoignes
- 3.5 Zinedine Zidanes
- 3 Michael Schumachers
- The entire Manchester United football club
- Half of Her Majesty The Queen

Taxing issues

Under new European legislation, non-EU suppliers of digital services will now suffer the same tax penalties as suppliers within member states. Under the new rules companies selling downloadable items, such as computer software and music, as well as subscription-based or on-demand broadcasting, will have to pay VAT in accordance with the country where the customer is located.

This is likely to mean higher prices for consumers living in Europe. In Denmark, for example, which has one of the highest VAT rates in Europe, prices for products and services delivered electronically from non-EU countries could increase by as much as 25 percent.

The ruling also means that firms based outside the EU may have to restructure the way they conduct their billing and sales tracking in the region. The law applies only to business-to-consumer sales, not business-to-business transactions. A memo released by the European Commission maintained the tax scheme will "eliminate a long-standing competitive distortion by ensuring that both non-EU and EU suppliers are subject to the same rules."

Comet focuses on computer safety

In a bid to protect children from the seedy side of the internet, high street retailer Comet will begin preinstalling PC safety programs on all its own-brand PCs from September. The software, available free of charge for one year, will provide internet and email security tools by default.

"By preinstalling software we are hoping that parents who would otherwise not think about this type of security device will see the benefits and make a decision to source their own software package and install it – something which isn't happening at the moment," says Bill Moir, manager at Comet.

The move has been supported by several children's charities including NCH which hopes the idea will encourage other vendors to follow suit.

Comet is in talks with other manufacturers to encourage them to install the software on their machines. "Our aim is to get all manufacturers and resellers to install safety software," says John Carr, spokesman at NCH. "It is essential these facilities are set by default so that parents don't have to go hunting for software," adds Carr.

Non-Comet customers can download the fully customisable software from www.cyberpatrol.com for £27 a year.

Spying on staff is a criminal matter

Employers should tread carefully to ensure they remain within the law when monitoring staff emails and web use, according to advice published by the Information Commissioner. The Employment Practices Data Protection Code declares that those employers who fail to stay within the law on this matter will be subject to criminal proceedings.

The Code, which sets out guidelines to help employers guarantee that their monitoring practices do not breach the Data Protection Act, can be found at www.dataprotection.gov.uk.

AOL's next step

Hot on the heels of release number 8.0, AOL is already touting its new broadband-service, Optimised 9.0, in the US. It promises enhanced mail and security features, a web accelerator and 3D animated buddy icons among other bells and whistles geared at personalisation and entertainment.

It is due for launch in the US later this year and it usually takes AOL quite a while to shift its software across the Atlantic.

The focus of AOL 9.0 Optimised is its new IM (instant messaging) capabilities such as the 3D animated friend icons, dubbed SuperBuddy icons. AOL will offer 50 original icons at launch, some of which animate common chat phrases by turning them into characters.

The new IM capabilities will allow users to conduct real-time voice conversations as well as share digital photos and webcam clips. The company is also offering IM Bots that serve up stock quotes, news, movie times and other information. For a sneak peek of the service go to www.aolepk.com.
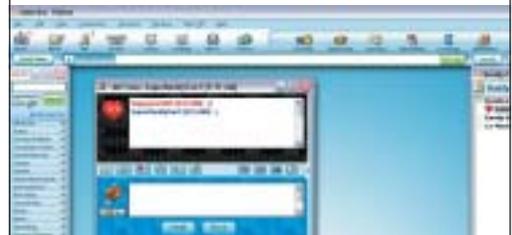
PC World tells price porkies

Eagle-eyed *PC Advisor* readers forced PC World to eat humble pie after the retail giant claimed it was the first vendor to bring out a Centrino-based notebook for under £1,000.

"Once again we are leading the market, this time with a Centrino laptop for under £1,000 in the new Advent range," gushed PC World marketing manager Jonathan Hirst in a press release sent to *PC Advisor* Towers.

Well, Jonathan, your Advent range isn't the "first sub-£1,000 Centrino laptop", as claimed in your press release.

A *PC Advisor* website regular, who goes by the nickname of TechMad, was quick to point out that Novatech is selling a similar spec Centrino-based notebook at a cheaper price. Its 1.3GHz Solo Centrino device costs £997.58 inc VAT and comes preloaded with Windows XP Home.

Meanwhile James, a friendly Dell salesman, offered a Centrino-based notebook for just £880 to a *PCA* journalist posing as a member of the public, although this didn't include a warranty.

After presenting the evidence to the accused, a spokesman for the Dixons-owned chain said: "Hands up on this one. We retract the statement."

Microsoft buys up bug buster

Microsoft has scooped up the intellectual property and technology assets of Romanian antivirus specialist, GeCad software. The company makes RAV Antivirus, a family of security products that includes antivirus, anti-spam and content-filtering technology for service providers, enterprises and home users.

As part of the deal, GeCad will retain its name and the rights to the RAV Antivirus product name. The firm will continue operating a consulting business and provide its customers with RAV Antivirus signature updates which is in keeping with its contractual obligations, according to Microsoft. GeCad will cease development of the RAV product once the acquisition is complete.

This is a harsh blow for the Linux antivirus market, where RAV Antivirus was the leading product. But as Microsoft has publicly spoken about the need to fight back against its open-source rival, closing down one of its key antivirus tools is another salvo in its battle against Linux. Microsoft plans to use GeCad technology to provide antivirus "solutions" for its own products and services.

📄 News in brief

Evesham theft gang guilty
PC maker Evesham was relieved to hear that a gang accused of stealing £171,000 worth of its PCs has been found guilty in Worcestershire County Court. The theft, which took place late last year, involved the hijacking of a lorry carrying 175 new systems. Following the guilty verdicts the defendants were handed down sentences by Judge Michael Mott, totalling over 99 years between all nine gang members.

British Library goes digital
The British Library has unveiled its upgraded electronic delivery service which will allow it to send digital copies of almost all the items in its collection direct to a PC within two hours. Thanks to new scanning hardware it can now send out both printed and microform documents digitally, giving researchers access to over one billion items via their desktop. The service launches this autumn.

End of road for car callers
Driving while using a mobile will soon become an offence. As of 1 December 03, drivers found flouting the law will be liable for a £30 fine which can be increased to a maximum of £1,000 if the case goes to court. The government is also planning to make it an endorsable offence, which would mean that drivers found guilty would get three points on their licence.

Apple gets geed up

Apple is boasting that its brand new Power Mac G5 is 'the world's fastest personal computer'. It features a new 64bit processor running at speeds of up to 2GHz, so we're sure both Intel and AMD would question who has the speediest chip.

But Apple claims that in Spec CPU 2000 benchtests, the new machine easily beat the fastest Pentium 4 and dual Xeon-based systems available. It shied away from pitting itself against *PC Advisor's* chart-topping processor, the AMD Athlon.

The Power Mac G5 incorporates 400MHz DDR SDRAM, one 133MHz and two 100MHz 64bit PCI-X expansion slots. The heart of the new Power Mac range is the PowerPC G5 processor, which features full support for 32bit applications and sports a parallel architecture that can handle 215 simultaneous in-flight instructions. It also features two double-precision floating point units and an optimised velocity engine.

The CPU is designed for full support of SMP (symmetric multiprocessing) – a key point in Apple's claim of 'fastest personal computer'. Combined with its 1GHz frontside bus, the G5 can can handle 16GBps (gigabytes per second) of bandwidth, according to Apple.

The Power Mac G5 range is equipped with ethernet, FireWire 800, two FireWire 400 ports, Bluetooth and, for the first time, three USB 2.0 ports.

The range will begin shipping in August and will come bundled with Mac OS X 10.2. You can pre-order from www.apple.com/ukstore. Prices start from £1,549 ex VAT.
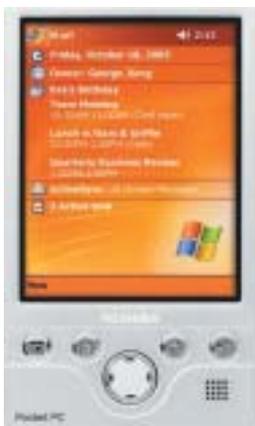
Windows goes mobile

Microsoft has announced a new version of its PDA software, which is poised to make Pocket PCs more attractive to users. Called Windows Mobile 2003 Software for Pocket PCs, it offers enhanced support for digital media and messaging as well as wireless connectivity using Bluetooth and Wi-Fi technology. The update will mostly benefit enterprise PDA users, not consumers, says Gartner analyst Todd Kort.

A new Connection Manager lets devices with 802.11b WLAN hardware detect networks that use the standard and makes connecting simple. The same goes for linking to Bluetooth-enabled devices. In addition, connections to mobile phone data networks are kept alive if the device is set to standby, allowing users to continue to receive email and instant messages.

Improved entertainment features are provided in Windows Media 9.0, which is now part of the OS. Using the Sync & Go feature in the Plus Digital Media Edition, it's possible to create photo albums on the desktop for viewing on the PDA.