

## TOP 10 BUDGET PCs

		Budget PCs		Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor
		Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch
						Maximum resolution@75Hz	
1	 <b>Multivision Vision Pro Ti</b> 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 1	• £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour warranty • First review Mar 03	AMD Athlon XP 2700+ 2.17GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Leadtek Winfast 2	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 <b>127</b>
2	 <b>Evesham Axis 2400+MK</b> 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 2	• £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 4	17in flat-panel LG L1710B 0.264mm 1,280x1,024	WorldBench 4 <b>126</b>
3	 <b>CCL Home X-Force 812</b> 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk LAST MONTH 3	• £999 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 03	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Epox 6	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 452 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 <b>122</b>
4	 <b>Evesham Axis 2600+</b> 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 4	• £999 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 02	AMD Athlon XP 2600+ 2.13GHz	256MB DDR RAM 100GB	MSI MS-6712 6	19in LG Flatron F900P 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 <b>122</b>
5	 <b>Shepley GA400 XP24</b> 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk LAST MONTH 5	• £899 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 03	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Gigabyte GA 7VA 6	19in AOC 9Klr+ 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 <b>119</b>
6	 <b>Mesh Matrix XP 2400+ Ti Pro</b> 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 6	• £999 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 02	AMD Athlon XP 2400+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Asus A7V-8X 4	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 920 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 <b>128</b>
7	 <b>Ideal Aptus G30</b> 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk LAST MONTH 7	• £999 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 03	Intel Pentium 4 2.6GHz	256MB DDR RAM 80GB	Gigabyte G8PE667 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 <b>121</b>
8	 <b>Multivision Vision KT 4 9700</b> 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 8	• £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour warranty • First review Dec 02	AMD Athlon XP 2200+ 1.8GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI MS-6590 KT4 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Plus 93SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 <b>117</b>
9	 <b>Time Mercury 2800+ PQ</b> 01282 777 555 www.time.computers.com LAST MONTH 9	• £1,199 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Mar 03	AMD Athlon XP 2800+ 2.25GHz	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI MS-6590 KT4 4	19in LG Flatron 915FT Plus 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 <b>127</b>
10	 <b>NEC Powermate i-Select XL53</b> 0870 010 6322 www.nec-online.co.uk LAST MONTH 10	• £1,200 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Mar 03	Intel Pentium 4 3.06GHz	512MB DDR RAM 80GB	Intel 6	19in NEC FE991SB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	WorldBench 4 <b>116</b>

## 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 which areas you need to spend money on 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 2400+ processor dominates the Budget chart at the moment, but the 2600+, 2700+ and 2800+ chips are

beginning to crop up in one or two systems. 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 a new chip out 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 (double data rate) 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

faster and therefore better performance than PC2100 (DDR266) RAM.

Most Budget systems will come with a 120GB hard drive, but 80GB of storage should prove ample for most 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.

	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
	nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4800 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Powered by one of the latest AMD processors, the Multivision boasts a speedy WorldBench 4 score of 127. Its GeForce4 card supports the 8x AGP standard, which leads to smoother and more realistic graphics. The Pro Ti's Iiyama display, which features a four-port USB hub and built-in speakers, makes the most of the visuals.
	ATI ATI Radeon 9500 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE	Close to snatching the coveted Best Buy, the Axis falls one point behind Multivision's WorldBench 4 score. The Athlon XP 2400+ may be an older chip but it's still very capable, while the 80GB hard drive offers ample storage. If you're after a flat-panel then look no further – the good-looking LG L1710B is an excellent addition.
	Gainward nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	12x/4x/2x (DVD-RW) 32x/16x/12x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002	Good performance and a decent set of specifications helps the CCL Home stand out from other contenders, but its real boon is the CD-RW/DVD-RW combo drive. The Iiyama monitor may not be the latest model but it produces a high-quality image. For £999 this third-placed system represents very good value for money.
	nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 7.0	The Axis' Athlon chip pushes the Evesham to a WorldBench 4 score of 122, but with an extra 256MB of RAM this could have been a lot higher. Its monitor provides a top-notch image while adding four extra USB ports. However, if you're a serious gamer or use graphics-intensive apps you'll want a more capable graphics card.
	ATI ATI Radeon 9000 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002	Housing 512MB of DDR RAM and a 120GB hard drive, the Shepley provides enough room for storage. The Radeon 9000 graphics card may not be the best on the market but it's a capable model. However, a basic AOC monitor and only one year's onsite warranty cover lets the GA400 down.
	MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	With the highest WorldBench 4 score in the chart, the Mesh Matrix is a speedy system. With its 2GHz Athlon 2600+ and a 120GB hard drive, it certainly doesn't lack in terms of quality components. Unfortunately, though, the Mitsubishi Diamond Pro monitor doesn't feature any USB ports or built-in speakers.
	Sapphire ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/48x/16x	Windows XP Home, Sun Open Office	The Aptus' 80GB hard disk is small compared to the drives in other PCs here and the 256MB of DDR RAM is underspecified. The monitor is good quality even if it lacks features and the Sapphire Radeon 9700 Atlantis Pro makes the most of the display. Although not outstanding, the Ideal is a respectable system.
	ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 40x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	A basic model with few additional features, but the 9700 still has plenty to offer. There's the generous 120GB IBM hard drive and ATI Radeon 9700 graphics card – currently one of the best on the market. The standalone sound card is another bonus which also provides a FireWire port and the warranty is a good deal.
	Sapphire ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 40x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Sun Star Office	With the most powerful Athlon chip available, it's not surprising that the Time scored 127 in our WorldBench 4 tests. However, it fails to offer value for money. Gamers will enjoy the Mercury's impressive visuals and bundled gamepad, although the onboard audio chip can't compare to the quality of a standalone sound card.
	ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	onboard 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home	The only Budget PC powered by a 3.06GHz P4 chip, the NEC scored a surprisingly low WorldBench 4 score of 116. While it features a space-saving tower, the monitor is a 19in CRT monster which seems to defeat the point. If NEC had opted for a flat-panel then the i-Select would be perfect if you're short on desk space.

Either way, check that it 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 still might be worth looking at if desk space is at a premium.

A 64MB graphics card will probably suffice in a Budget system but you can find the new 128MB cards being offered in this price range. The top-of-the-range cards at the moment are nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4600 and ATI's Radeon 9700

Pro. However, if you don't necessarily need to have astoundingly fast frame rates all the time the GeForce4 Ti 4200 and ATI Radeon 9000 Pro are still very capable graphics cards.

Finally, when it comes to your sound system, Creative's Audigy card is the best option, although the trusty SoundBlaster Live 5.1 is still a dependable choice. Avoid onboard sound if at all possible, as its performance is never as impressive as a dedicated sound card. Speaker systems should have five satellites and a subwoofer if you want to create good-quality surround audio.

↓ With a powerful Athlon processor and a GeForce4 graphics card that supports the 8x AGP standard, the Multivision Vision Pro Ti is a worthy Best Buy

