Readers' writes

This month you have major concerns about PC sales staff training, while another reader questions the sincerity of hardware and media manufacturers' thinking. Shopping online? It seems you can't assume what's part of the package so check exactly what's included before parting with your money

Living rooms with a view

I think you were too dismissive about the usefulness of digital photo viewers (October 03 issue, SanDisk Digital Photo Viewer review, page 54).

I have a Konica KD 300Z digital camera that has a video output but I've found that this is not at all suitable for showing a compilation of photos drawn from the PC. First, the quality of the pictures onscreen is poor and, second, it does not accept photos that have been edited on the computer.

However, the photo viewer remote is very useful whereas the alternative – standing by the TV set with the camera in hand to show the photos (and rotating them if necessary) – is not at all convenient.

The video output, meanwhile, is only useful for a quick viewing of pictures taken with the camera and certainly not as a 'slideshow' device.

My digital photo viewer is made by Lexar and I am quite pleased with it although, being an early model, it does not accept Secure Digital or Multimedia cards which newer devices can. ⊠ **Louis J Lauler**

Andrew Charlesworth replies: I don't think the digital photo viewer is a bad product, but I wouldn't run back into the house to rescue it in the event of a fire. If yours suits your lifestyle then that's a good reason to own one. Thanks for putting forward the other side of the story.

Long live the written word

I have not written to Readers' writes before but my wife has threatened me with physical violence if the vast collection of *PC Advisor* magazines that have found their way around the house are not soon disposed of at the municipal recycling site.

Strange isn't it? There's been talk of paperless offices for a number of years and we were told we'd all be reading e-books rather than paper ones very soon. But what's better than reading from a written/printed book or magazine?

The internet has taken over my reading habits and I have the *PC Advisor* archives on CD-ROM, but if the day comes when I'm sat in bed reading from a laptop or other electronic device it will be a sad one indeed. Think also of the exercise you are taking while having to turn those pages yourself! ⊠ **Chris Thornley, via email**

Simon Easterman replies: you won't be surprised to learn that we're with you all the way on this one, Chris. Books and magazines are objects of desire, small or otherwise – more so if you actually value their content. Grief from cohabitants must be borne willingly if you're to keep your sacred texts as near to you as they are dear to you, though if it actually becomes a fire hazard perhaps you should clear up just a little bit.

Conspiracy theory?

Last issue (Helpline, p138) a reader touched on the subject of cheap CD-R media being unusable with his CD-RW drive. You very sensibly replied that trying a single disc before buying in bulk would be good idea. The hardware manufacturer's firmware was agreed to be the likely culprit, though no solution was given.

I recently purchased an NEC 1300d (DVD-/+RW). It's a super bit of kit but I, too, found that it would not entertain 'budget' media and its use was limited to an official list of (surprise, surprise) high-end media.

After trawling the web I found a free, rewritten firmware download for the NEC 1300d, complete with Bios flash routine, which is more tolerant of 'low-end media'.

As a precaution I saved my old official firmware in case the machine ever needed returning for repair. The result is that I now have a machine that will not only play ball with all the high-end media as outlined by NEC, but is also far more tolerant of cheaper discs. The proof of the pudding is my spindle of 25 Bulkpaq 4x DVD-Rs, not one of which has become a beer mat. At around 65p each, that's quite something.

But I shouldn't have to have done this. To me it looks like a convenient conspiracy between hardware and media manufacturers. As a mere user I just want to be able to afford to do this stuff and, beyond possibly invalidating my warranty from NEC, I don't see that I've done anything wrong. ⊠ **Chris Green, Hounslow**

Julian Moss replies: I'm sure other NEC 1300d owners will be glad to know about this, Chris. In general, though, we'd caution readers about installing firmware from anyone but the manufacturer. If the upgrade went wrong and you couldn't restore the original, you wouldn't be entitled to any help under the warranty.

Some manufacturers (such as Samsung) provide official firmware upgrades on their websites. These might provide better media compatibility as well as improved performance so it's definitely worth checking. As for whether there is a conspiracy between hardware and media manufacturers, perhaps this is

something to write to your Euro MP about because, if it's true, it's almost certainly illegal.

⊠ Buying blind

I decided to invest in a scanner and, as always before buying hardware, I consulted *PC Advisor's* Top 10 charts. I chose the Visioneer 9020, partly because of its rating in the chart and partly because Adobe Photoshop Elements was bundled with it.

I opted for Amazon.com as the supplier as it was offering the scanner at a competitive price. I was a little worried about the lack of information on the website about the bundled software but, as Elements 2.0 has been on the market for some time, I assumed this would be what I'd get.

Wrong. Although there was no indication of the version number on the installation disc, I soon became aware that many features of Elements 2.0 were missing from the software I had been sold. I entered into an exchange of emails with Amazon.com, but the company refused to accept any responsibility for supplying the outdated software.

So buyers beware. Don't buy on the internet unless you are sure of what you're getting. Better to go to a store where at least you can interrogate a salesman! ⊠ **Kathy Mulvany, via email**

Guy Dixon replies: an email to Amazon prior to purchase would have settled the issue. If Amazon didn't mention Elements 2.0 on its website, why would you assume that the advertised scanner would automatically come supplied with the said software? This has nothing to do with high street retail versus electronic retail, it is simply a question of checking before you buy.

On the plus side, as an online customer you are very well protected. Under the EU's Distance Selling Directive you have the right to cancel your order within 14 days of placing it.

⊠ Millions of a kind

In response to *PC Advisor's* Technofile article on Smartphones (September 03 issue, p68), you are indeed correct that a mobile phone user has to compromise in some areas such as screen size or input method, but to say that "no manufacturer has

Star letter

I would like to draw your attention to an advert in the *Plymouth Evening Herald*, dated 24 September. This confirms to me something we have always suspected, but it is nice to see it in black and white.

I quote: 'The Computer World is the biggest high street computer retailing force in Europe. Combining the existing brands of Tiny and Time Computers we offer a one-stop shop for all your PC needs. To take the concept further we have vacancies in our Plymouth store.

'So, if you possess a lively outgoing personality, enjoy new challenges and interacting with the public, we want to speak to you. It is not imperative that you know about PCs, it's your hunger for sales and commitment to delivering an unrivalled customer service that will set you apart.'

How lack of knowledge and hunger for sales can be equated with unrivalled customer service is anyone's guess. I have always been convinced that this deficiency was widespread, but it is nice to have it from the horse's mouth, so to speak. At least we know now where not to go for our PC needs. ⊠ Martin Hermes, Plymouth

Andrew Charlesworth replies: lack of knowledge among sales staff is one of the chief criticisms of retail outlets in PC Advisor's Customer Satisfaction Survey (November 03 issue). All sales staff, including those recruited by The Computer World, will be given product training. The question is: how good is the training?

managed to create the perfect model yet", misses the point of them.

Unlike the PC, which has imposed a certain uniformity on our desktops (standard Qwerty keyboard, mouse and so on), there is no 'perfect' mobile phone.

In contrast to desktop PC sales, selling mobile phones relies on precisely the differentiation in screen size, form factor and input method you criticise. This was true even before the smartphone revolution began. Each manufacturer's phone comes with its own operating system and method of interacting with it through a proprietary user interface.

Mobile operating systems from Symbian and Microsoft simply add to manufacturer's choice. But this doesn't necessarily mean more pain for us customers.

It is true that user interface design is becoming increasingly complex as our ability to communicate increases with the introduction of 2.5G and 3G. However, good user interface design

and products will find a market, whatever the operating system. It's one reason why Nokia phones, with their intuitive input methods allied to great industrial design, are market leaders. ⊠ **Philip Watson, via email**

⊠ Two-year Time bomb

Re 'Destined to fail', Reader's writes, November 03 issue. Spooky or what? Just like your other reader, I have a Time computer that died a sudden death after two years (luckily I had purchased an extended warranty so was still covered).

A close friend of mine had exactly the same experience: Time PC, dead after two years on the nose. Even spookier, we both had Epson printers. Mine was a 440; my friend was a 460. Both passed on at the same time, two years after purchase.

Is this a conspiracy between Time and Epson or just a coincidence? What say other readers who have Time PC and Epson printers? ⊠ **Susan Offord, via email**