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Convergence technology: when it's good it's very good but when it's bad it's awful. Don't believe us? Look no further than the sublimely inane Internet Fridge.

You can just picture the research and development meetings that took place, chaired by irritating futurologists who believe mankind will be saved by the benign implementation of nanotechnology and scientists who've spent too long working in confined laboratories next to leaky canisters of nitrogen. "Why don't we converge the seemingly incongruous worlds of web access and food cooling storage? You know, for a bit of a laugh. Dexter, go pitch this baby to marketing."

End result? Technology for technology's sake and a chimerical smorgasbord of ideas fused into one faintly ridiculous product.

But convergence technology *can* work. With PCs incorporating a TV, DVD/CD player, there's a serious chance we could be on the cusp of throwing away redundant home entertainment products. It certainly seems conceivable when you consider the technological capabilities embedded in multimedia PCs often surpass the average TV and stereo system.

First, though, multimedia machines have to get over one big hurdle. Due to its ugly beige-and-boxy looks, the PC is usually relegated to the study or bedroom. Do people want them invading the living room?

We have what might be the first true solution to this problem sitting in our Test Centre and it sure don't look like no PC. The Systemax Encore 3602 (see page 35) screams living room. Designed to look like a compact home stereo, this multimedia extravaganza does everything bar make the tea. Believe it or not, it's also a powerful PC as well. ■

Spencer Dalziel, senior staff writer

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Scoring and testing explained

Each review rates a product according to a set criterion for its type. The score is broken down at the end of the review to show how we reached our final verdict. Ratings range from 1 to 10 and fall into the following classifications:

- 1 to 3 – poor
- 4 to 6 – average
- 6 to 8 – good
- 8 to 10 – excellent

How we rate hardware

- **Features** This score rates the specification of a product by current standards. For example, a 2.6GHz PC with 512MB of RAM and a 120GB hard drive would score highly.
- **Build quality** This rating denotes how well the product is made and the quality of the components.
- **Value for money** The price of a product will often be the deciding factor between

a good review and a bad review. This is not to say that cheaper products will always win out, but the better the price/performance and features ratio the higher the score.

How we rate software

- **Ease of use** Rates how easy software is to install and use.
- **Features** Indicates how much the package contains. An office suite that

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34 Hardware reviews

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60 Software reviews

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PaperPort Pro 9.0 Office	66
WinShark crm	66

70 Technofile

Printer inks and photo papers tested

198 Top 10 charts

Located at the back of the magazine, the charts are designed so they're a cinch to navigate. The at-a-glance comments and buying advice help you make the right purchasing decision. Products we've already tested are ranked in our charts after competing against existing entrants. The result is a definitive guide to the best hardware available on the market.



only came with a spreadsheet would score poorly.

- Value for money Lots of features, good performance and a low price tag will result in a good score.

Prices

All prices are quoted by the manufacturer or distributor and exclude VAT. Please note

that prices are only intended as a guide and you may see products on sale for less or more than our quoted price. *PC Advisor's* recommendations are for guidance only and are not a guarantee of suitability. The publisher takes no responsibility for purchasers' decisions.

PC Advisor Gold award



Outstanding hardware products receive a *PC Advisor* Gold award. This may indicate that the product will enter our charts next month but *PC Advisor* Gold also honours excellence in a product that is not covered in this month's charts.