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xp advisor

Channel surfing

As the digital revolution creeps slowly into our living rooms, hardware and software makers want us watching TV on our PCs. Will there finally be something worth switching on for?



In a couple of years existing analogue broadcasts will cease and we'll be forced to make the move to digital television. If you've already switched on to digital services you'll know what a patchy, hit-and-miss affair reception it can sometimes be. There's not that much to watch yet, either. More often than not the first five buttons on the remote are the only ones that get pressed.

But lack of content isn't going to stop the inevitable shift from analogue to digital channel surfing. Not surprisingly, PC manufacturers and software makers have been quick off the mark to exploit this emerging market. TV cards have been available for computers for years, spurring much debate among owners about the necessity for a TV licence. (Yes, you *do* need one if you're wondering.)

With the digital shift in mind, those choosing a new computer system might be tempted by the hassle-free approach of buying one specifically designed for home entertainment. Running Windows Media Centre Edition for its operating system and with a remote to control its built-in television, hi-fi and picture-viewing facilities, the entertainment PC puts a multimedia hub in the home – a central point from which all audio-visual manoeuvrings can be driven.

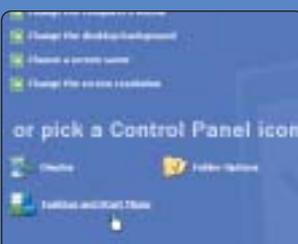
As well as giving you the ability to record content, move it around and control it from different points in your house, a Media Centre system is a fully featured PC with a specifications list that wouldn't look out of place in our Power PCs chart on page 200.

We look forward to the day when all home computers are this well-endowed. In the meantime, if you want a Media Centre system without the attendant price tag, over the next few pages we show you how to ready your PC for the job. ■

Favourite feature

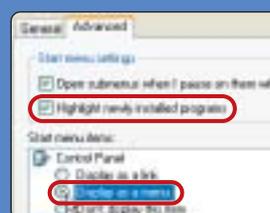
Access Control Panel items from the Start menu

With XP, Microsoft cut out the Settings menu and shortened the path to the Control Panel by one step. But you can make access to regularly used Control Panel items quicker still.



1 Click Start, Control Panel, Appearance and Themes. Select the Taskbar and Start Menu option

2 Select the Start Menu tab, click on Start Menu and then choose Customize



3 Under the Advanced tab, under 'Start menu settings' and 'Start menu items', check the two boxes highlighted above



4 In the Start menu items list, under Control Panel, select Display as a menu. Click ok. Now click Start, Control Panel again and you'll have a whole new submenu