

welcome



The Digital Home Working Group sees 17 industry giants coming together with the aim of creating interoperability standards for digital content among audio, video, mobile and PC products. But just how successful will the outcome be?

Until recently, PC and consumer electronics manufacturers have had little in common. With a few notable exceptions – namely Sony and Toshiba – the makers of hi-fis and televisions steer well clear of the PC world. And for good reasons: the PC is unstable; TVs and hi-fis are very stable.

Now 17 manufacturers including Fujitsu, Gateway, HP, Samsung, NEC, Philips and IBM have joined forces under the auspices of the DHWG (Digital Home Working Group), with the dubious mission of ‘establishing a platform of interoperability based on open industry standards’.

After all, it makes logical sense: music is rapidly becoming digital in the form of MP3s and digital radio; broadband means plenty of digital input by way of movies and other internet content; broadcast TV is going digital; and DVD players show digital movies. So it makes sense to hang all these media players off your PC and use the computer to control the acquisition and distribution of content.

But while hi-fis and TVs are guaranteed to remain stable for five years, the PC changes every six months. For example, look at the way the computer connects to other devices. Television standardised on Scart in the mid 1990s and since then the PC has been through serial, parallel, AppleTalk, SCSI, PS/2, USB 1.0 and is now still schizo about USB 2.0 and FireWire.

I really hope something useful comes from the DHWG but I've seen too many of these consortia in my last two decades as a technology journalist and experience tells me it won't. What consumers want is a single standard that enables one digital device to talk to any other. But this is real life. What the DHWG will produce is a list of ‘standards’ longer than a wet Sunday afternoon because none of the 17 companies will want their technological investment left out.

The result? Chaos – just like we've got now. Does this mean the digital revolution won't happen in our homes? Far from it. It's happening now. We've got broadband internet, wireless networks, digital music, DVD movies, digital TV and digital radio.

The conclusion is don't hang around waiting for the DHWG to ‘sort things out’ because all these disparate companies have in common is a desire to increase their sales. Go out and buy the stuff and make it work. It will be messy and often frustrating but you'll enjoy the end result and *PC Advisor* will be there to help. ■

Andrew Charlesworth

reader information

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