



Reader's choice: Power PCs

If money was no object, what PC would you buy? One reader was so spoilt for choice that he couldn't make up his mind and asked Spencer Dalziel to help him out

If you're lucky enough to have the budget to buy an all-singing, all-dancing PC then you're in for a treat. But the very fact that the latest cutting-edge specifications are yours for the taking may make that purchasing decision all the more daunting. With extra cash to spend, you're open to a bewildering array of PC possibilities and even the tech savvy will um and ah over which system to buy.

For this month's Reader's choice we were contacted by a businessman with £1,500 to spend on a Power PC for home and work use.

Anthony Lilleyman lives in Putney with his fiancée Charlotte and does contract-based project management for a range of clients. Anthony's work entails a sound understanding of business software applications and he's well versed in the ways of IT hardware so he needs a PC that can cope with everything he throws at it.

"I require a range of applications. When you're working client-side they're always operating in different software environments and, as a contract-based employee, the onus is on me to turn up with the right kit," he says.

Anthony's Dell Inspiron notebook ports files between the office and home, but his old desktop is past its sell-by date. "I take work off my notebook to archive on my PC, but my old Packard Bell can't keep up. I need to load a lot of applications like Oracle, Lotus Notes and Microsoft Office and I want a dual-boot system so I can separate work- and home-related stuff – effectively I need two PCs in one."

As if this weren't enough Anthony is an avid games player so sound and graphics are important – can we find a PC to fulfil Anthony's high-end needs? The systems we assessed were Evesham's Axis 2700+, Multivision's Vision Ionix Wonder and Mesh's Matrix XP 2700+ NDX.

What did Anthony want?

- Power PC for home and work
- Good sound and graphics
- Backup/archiving capabilities
- Best monitor possible
- Decent gaming system
- To spend up to £1,500

First impressions

Each PC we chose has been assessed for our Power PC chart this month (see page 228) and all systems pack enough performance to keep up with Anthony's requirements. However, as far as first impressions go, they couldn't be more different. Evesham went for the traditional beige finish whereas the Mesh and Multivision both touted brand new cases.

Initially Anthony couldn't make his mind up about the all-black Vision Ionix Wonder and its peripherals. The front of the PC's case has a vertical blue light running down the middle, *Knight Rider*-style. "It makes a nice change from the traditional office beige but it looks a bit 80s," he said.

To be fair he did like the flip-down front that exposed the Audigy 2 breakout box, but Anthony's not a PC musician so he won't use all the ports. But the digital in/out is great for hooking up his Mini Disc player.

He wasn't too keen on Mesh's two-tone grey-and-black system and thought the

Pros and cons: the contenders measure up

Evesham Axis 2700+

- **Pros:** performance, traditional finish
- **Cons:** warranty, monitor
- **Evesham:** 0870 160 9500
- **www.evesham.com**
- **£1,249 ex VAT**



Mesh Matrix XP 2700+ NDX

- **Pros:** design, DVD-RW drive
- **Cons:** performance, expensive
- **Mesh:** 020 820 84702
- **www.meshcomputers.com**
- **£1,299 ex VAT**



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Multivision Vision Ionix Wonder

- **Pros:** warranty, cheapest
- **Cons:** internal cabling, styling
- **Multivision:** 0870 066 0882
- **www.multivision.co.uk**
- **£1,200 ex VAT**



Evesham to be the most sensible option. After we showed him the internal layout on each system, he changed his mind again though. "The Evesham's insides look a bit empty compared to the mess inside the Multivision. But the Mesh's cabling appears high quality because it's so neatly laid out. Nice attention to detail."

Anthony isn't really into digital imaging so, whichever PC he chooses, most of the USB 2.0 and FireWire ports on these PCs will be going spare, but he did admit it's good to have these options should he or his fiancée take up digital photography.

All the systems come with Audigy 2 sound cards and 6.1 channel speakers from Creative, which particularly impressed Anthony: "This will be the first time I've had a proper entertainment PC at home so I'm looking forward to playing DVDs and having a home cinema setup."

The sound cards deliver better than CD quality audio and the speakers pump out great surround sound, but with each PC sporting the same features it's making Anthony's decision quite difficult.

What the experts say

Each of the PCs boasts a 120GB hard drive so Anthony would have no problem archiving his clients' material, and all three run Windows XP Home on AMD's high-performance 2700+ processor.

Again, ATI's flagship 128MB Radeon 9700 Pro handles graphics for each PC, so eating through video-intensive applications will be no trouble at all whatever system Anthony chooses. The Ionix Wonder and the Matrix are bundled with the hugely impressive 19in Mitsubishi

Diamond Pro 930SB monitor – slightly superior to the Diamond Plus 93SB accompanying the Axis. We think this will be an important factor for Anthony who wants the best for his money.

There's 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM in both Evesham's Axis 2700+ and Multivision's Vision Ionix Wonder, helping the systems achieve WorldBench 4 scores of 131 and 129 respectively. While the Mesh's 130 proves it's capable of speedy performance, Anthony noticed it has twice the amount of RAM. "I think I'd rather get one of the other systems with 512MB of DDR RAM and buy another 512MB memory myself."

The Mesh was falling out of favour with Anthony until he noticed it has one addition the other PCs can't match: an all-format Sony DVD writer. The Evesham and Multivision systems do have DVD writers but they only support two of the four burning formats that are currently vying to become market leaders.

Being able to archive to 4.7GB DVD discs is a fantastic boon and the multiformat drive ensures the technology won't become obsolete.

The reader's choice

Though Multivision's Vision Ionix Wonder and Evesham's Axis 2700+ took first and second places in our Power PCs chart on page 228, it was Mesh's Matrix XP 2700+ NDX that most suited Anthony's needs.

Not even the impressive performance of the Axis or the incredible six-year warranty of the Ionix Wonder could change his mind. "Multivision's warranty is great insurance but it's really more than I need. Mesh's three-year onsite cover is about right because I'll probably want another PC after three years.

"I know I'm paying more for this system but it's got everything I want, it looks good and the DVD-RW drive is a great bonus. I'll just have to buy some more memory to get the performance up to scratch." ■

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