

TOP 10 BUDGET PCs

Budget PCs			Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor
			Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	USB ports	Dot pitch
						Maximum resolution@75Hz
1	 <p>Evesham Axis 2600+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2400+	256MB DDR RAM	MSI MS-6712	19in LG Flatron F900P
			2.0GHz	100GB	6	0.24mm
			WorldBench 4			122
2	 <p>Mesh Matrix XP 2400+ Ti Pro 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com LAST MONTH 2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2600+	512MB DDR RAM	Asus A7V-8X	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 920
			2.13GHz	120GB	4	0.24mm
			WorldBench 4			128
3	 <p>Multivision Vision KT 4 9700 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour warranty • First review Dec 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI MS-6590 KT4	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 935B
			1.8GHz	120GB	6	0.25mm
			WorldBench 4			117
4	 <p>NetHighStreet Net PA999 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com LAST MONTH 4</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 02 	Intel Pentium 4	512MB DDR RAM	Asus P4S8x	19in CTX EX950F
			2.56GHz	80GB	6	0.25mm
			WorldBench 4			113
5	 <p>Systemax Inspire 7317 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk LAST MONTH 5</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,199 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return to base • First review Dec 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI KT4V-L	17in flat-panel CTX PV700
			1.8GHz	120GB	6	0.26mm
			WorldBench 4			119
6	 <p>Ideal Computing Aptus M120 0870 745 5061 www.idealcomputing.co.uk LAST MONTH 6</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £899 ex VAT • 1-year onsite, 4-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	512MB DDR RAM	Gigabyte GA 7VXP	17in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 750SB
			1.8GHz	80GB	6	0.25mm
			WorldBench 4			120
7	 <p>Multivision Vision Elite 4 Ti 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk LAST MONTH 7</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £999 ex VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year labour warranty • First review Sep 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2100+	512MB DDR RAM	MSI 6380E	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454
			1.73GHz	80GB	5	0.25mm
			WorldBench 4			118
8	 <p>Evesham Axis 2200+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com LAST MONTH 8</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £949 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Sep 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	512MB DDR RAM	Asus A7V333	19in Samsung SyncMaster 957 DF
			1.8GHz	80GB	6	0.25mm
			WorldBench 4			120
9	 <p>CCL Computers Home 978X 01274 471 267 www.cclcomputers.co.uk LAST MONTH 9</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,149 ex VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Dec 02 	AMD Athlon XP 2200+	512MB DDR RAM	Asus A7V-8X	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 454
			1.8GHz	120GB	6	0.25mm
			WorldBench 4			116
10	 <p>NEC Powermate i-Select XL5 0870 010 6322 www.nec-online.co.uk LAST MONTH 10</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £1,199 ex VAT • 1-year onsite warranty • First review Dec 02 	Intel Pentium 4	512MB DDR RAM	Gigabyte	17in flat-panel NEC LT17u
			2.4GHz	40GB	5	0.26mm
			WorldBench 4			111

Buying advice: budget PCs

Buying a PC when you're on a budget can be a tough business. The real trick is to figure out precisely what you want to use the PC for and therefore in which areas you should splash out and in which you are prepared to compromise. For example, if you're a gamer you'll need a good graphics card and monitor, and if you're into digital video editing then you'll want the biggest hard drive you can afford.

In terms of processors, the Athlon 2200+ dominates this chart at the moment, but the 2400+ and 2600+ chips crop up in one or two systems.

If you want a Pentium 4, look for one that runs at at least 2.4GHz. Bear in mind, though, that when AMD or Intel bring a new processor out the price of the older chips tends to come down, so keep an eye on the runners-up rather than the real high-flyers.

The standard memory allotment in the Budget chart is quickly becoming 512MB of DDR (double data rate) RAM, although 256MB of DDR RAM should serve the needs of most PC users. Aim to get PC2700, or DDR333, RAM as this will give faster and therefore better performance than PC2100 or DDR266 RAM.

Most budget systems will come with an 80GB hard drive these days, but hard drives of 100GB and 120GB are available too. It is desirable to have as much storage space as possible even though you'll probably never even come close to filling it all. In terms of CD-RWs, don't go for anything with less than a 40-/16-/10-speed (read/write/rewrite).

When looking at screens, you should only be satisfied with a 17in monitor if it has very good specifications, but you might be able to get a decent 19in model for your money. Either way, check that it can achieve an optimal resolution of

Graphics card maker Graphics chip Graphics card memory	Sound card Speakers Subwoofer	DVD drive speed CD-RW read/ write/rewrite rate	Operating system, software and extras	Comments
nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 7.0	A fast processor and DDR400 memory push this PC to the top. The WorldBench 4 score may not be the best, but great graphics and fast video encoding help to make up for this. What really swung it for the Axis, though, was the Flatron display, a pleasingly low price and a three-year warranty.
MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Despite its slower processor the Mesh outstripped our Best Buy in the WorldBench 4 tests, proving it's a fast performer. Graphics are equally good, while a 120GB hard drive is generous. An Audigy sound card handles audio beautifully, so it's a shame the Matrix was let down by its return-to-base warranty.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 40x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Multivision's innovative system uses ATI's latest Radeon 9700 graphics card with 128MB of RAM, ensuring good graphics performance. The PC's WorldBench 4 score was respectable thanks to the 2200+ processor. A sound warranty backs this PC which missed out on a higher placing due to the tough competition.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice	NetHighStreet takes the final Recommended award. Its 2.5GHz Pentium 4 chip only managed a WorldBench 4 score of 113, which is several points behind the competition. But performance isn't everything and this PC has more to offer, including a good monitor, 128MB Radeon 9700 graphics card and Audigy sound card.
MSI nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 40x/40x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Systemax has used a PV700 flat-panel monitor, which is one of the best displays around. Fortunately, it wasn't so costly an addition that corners had to be cut to include it, so you still get good performance, smooth graphics and surround sound from this system. However, it's let down by its higher price.
Gainward nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4600 128MB	onboard 4 x Mercury Home Theatre yes	16x 48x/48x/16x	Windows XP Home, Sun Open Office	The Aptus is competitively priced and scored extremely well in our WorldBench 4 tests. However, its basic 17in monitor, onboard sound and four-point speaker system keep it mid-table. If you're looking for a pared-down performer, this is a good choice. The five-year warranty, first year onsite, is a bonus too.
nVidia nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/48x/12x	Windows XP Home, Lotus SmartSuite 9.7	Once a Best Buy, this model has been superseded by new additions to the chart that beat its specifications, though its WorldBench 4 score of 118 means it can still handle everyday tasks easily. The display is good quality, as are graphics and audio. But now you can get more for your money.
Leadtek nVidia GeForce4 Ti 4200 64MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 40x/32x/10x	Windows XP Home, Pinnacle Studio 7.0	The Axis' WorldBench 4 score of 120 is just two points shy of this month's Best Buy. The Samsung display is fairly decent, as are the graphics from the GeForce4 Ti 4200 card, although a better card might have secured the Axis a higher place. Another drawback to note is that there's no office suite.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	Creative Labs Audigy 1394 5 x Videologic ZXR 500 yes	16x 48x/48x/24x	Windows XP Home, Ability Office	One of this CCL model's distinct advantages is its excellent liyama monitor, which offers a four-port USB hub, built-in speakers and top-notch image quality to boot. However, this isn't enough to ensure it a high position, and what keeps it down at the bottom of the chart is a poor WorldBench 4 score and high price.
ATI ATI Radeon 9700 128MB	Creative SoundBlaster Live 5.1 5 x Creative Labs Inspire 5300 yes	16x 40x/16x/10x	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 2002	The NEC Powermate i-Select XL5 finds itself at number 10 due to its poor performance, miserly 40GB hard drive and meagre one-year warranty. These specs are not good enough to really cut the mustard in this chart anymore. But on the bright side it does come with a flat-panel monitor and plenty of spare USB ports.

1,280x1,024 at 75Hz. Better still, for really sharp images, look for 1,600x1,200 at 75Hz. In terms of dot pitch, 0.25mm or lower is fine. Flat-panel monitors will push the price of the system up but they still might be worth looking at if space is at a premium.

A 64MB budget graphics card will probably suffice but you can find the new 128MB cards in this price range. The top-of-the-range models at the moment are nVidia's GeForce4 Ti 4600 and ATI's Radeon 9700 Pro, but if you don't necessarily need to have astoundingly fast frame rates all the time

a GeForce4 Ti4200 or ATI Radeon 9000 Pro are very capable graphics cards.

Finally, for your sound system, Creative's Audigy card is the best option, although the trusty SoundBlaster Live 5.1 is still available. Avoid onboard sound if at all possible, as this is never as impressive as a dedicated card. Speaker systems should have five satellites and a subwoofer if you want to create good-quality surround sound.

↓ A 2.13GHz Athlon chip and fast DDR400 memory take the Evesham Axis to the top

