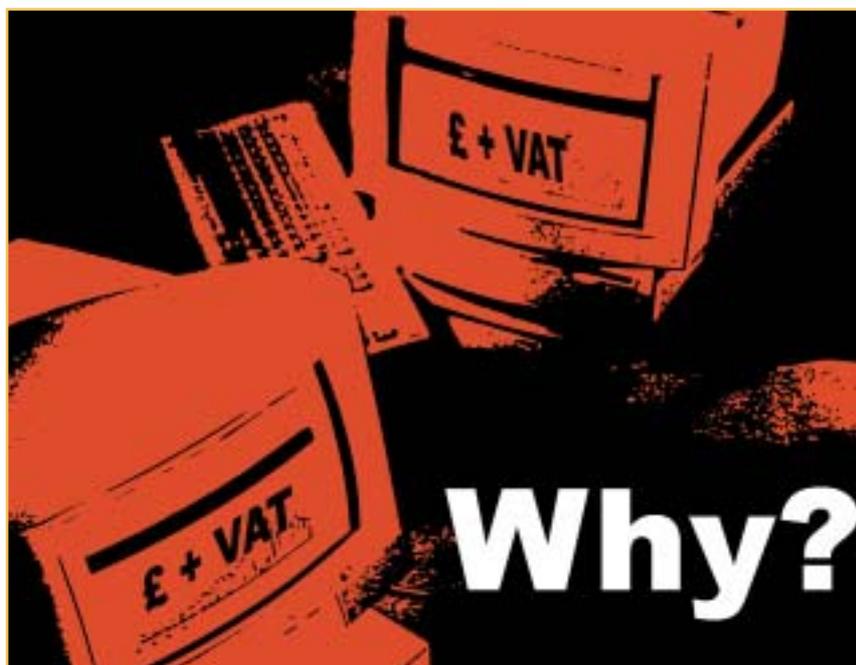


readers' writes

Our star letter writer voices his sheer disappointment with IT education in schools today while your interesting faulty-pixel stories are still flooding in. And we explain to yet another exasperated reader the reasons why we quote our reviewed product's prices without VAT



☰ Coping with copying

In your *Top 50 Helpline queries* feature (June 03 edition), I was surprised to read your advice telling readers that they can copy their entire system to a new hard drive using Windows Explorer's drag-and-drop option. It is well known that this does not usually work because some files may be in use by Windows.

Instead, it's necessary to use Norton Ghost, PowerQuest Drive Image or another drive copying utility to achieve this task, so that each sector is copied. Windows will then work properly from the new drive, provided the jumpers have been reset to make it the primary master and the partition with Windows has been made active using Fdisk.

Brian Duffy, via email

Julian Moss replies: you're right in that you can't move or overwrite files that are in use by Windows. However, the process we described was copying files, which you are able to do by simply dragging and dropping a copy of explorer.exe from C:\Windows to another folder.

Some backup programs do have problems copying files that are open for writing due to bad programming that causes them to open the files in a mode that requires exclusive access.

Using Explorer, I can actually make a backup of next month's Helpline column while it is open in Word. Ironically, this makes Explorer a better backup tool than some dedicated programs.

☰ Peace of mind

Entering the debate on extended warranties, I decided to upgrade the standard one-year onsite warranty on my nine-month-old NEC desktop to an additional three years of onsite cover. This comes with next-day service and runs out in May 06

The cost? Approximately £100 for parts, labour, monitor cover and no hassle, unlike those almost useless collect-and-return warranties. So I now have peace of mind and firmly believe that extended warranties are perfectly okay if you shop around before buying a PC.

Dave Colville, Southsea

Wendy Brewer replies: we agree. There are some really good deals out there, if you're prepared to do your homework. The problem is that for most people extended warranties are an afterthought, something we buy only after being persuaded by the ever-so-helpful salesmen.

The Competition Commission's debate into extended warranties – due to come to a close at the end of September – will hopefully offer some reassurance to buyers, providing the long-term peace of mind they're after. But in the meantime buyers should remember that most electrical goods are covered under the manufacturer's guarantee for the first year, giving you plenty of time to look for a warranty that suits your needs.

☰ The price isn't right

Why, in the 21st century, do you (together with other publishers) continue to show the price of the item ex VAT on all products you review? Is it some unwritten law that us non-corporate users have to sit and work out the suggested retail price for ourselves? Your advertisers (in most instances) have got the message and show both prices, so why can't you? Let the business users work it out instead of us home users for a change.

Martin White, via email

Simon Easterman replies: yes, you're right, no one likes having to calculate the VAT before being able to make a proper evaluation of a product, but our hands are tied by competition legislation.

Manufacturers aren't allowed to set retail prices, so they can only supply us with the ex VAT price they ask of retailers. Because it's the retailer that sets the amount paid by the customer, there's a deal of variation between outlets.

Manufacturers can advertise inc VAT prices, but only when they are selling the goods themselves without a further retail channel. If you like, when they've got their retailer hat on.

Helpful contacts

I enjoyed the news story about Computer Aid in the August 03 issue of *PC Advisor* (page 19). But where is the address or phone number of Computer Aid and similar organisations?

Mike, via email

Simon Easterman replies: thanks for pointing out this important omission. The address for Computer Aid is www.computer-aid.org. However, we would point out that the organisation doesn't really deal with household PCs and will only collect from larger organisations.

Surge of interest

Lightning strikes in the strangest places. A good friend of mine rang me yesterday to say that his house had been struck by lightning during a thunderstorm. His television, video recorder and burglar alarm had all been damaged and were left unusable. Upon trying his PC he then found his internet connection was no longer working and asked me to take a look. His PC was saved by a mains surge protector but, alas, not so with his telephone line – the result was a fried chip on board his internal modem.

The moral of the story? If you're going to fit a relatively inexpensive mains surge protector, fit one that also provides protection to your modem.

Brian Adamson, via email

Spots of bother

Like Ian Henderson (Readers' writes, July 03 issue) I also had a defective pixel experience. A couple of month's ago I purchased a system from Dell – it had everything I wanted including a flat-panel monitor which I had set my heart on.

However, as soon as I switched it on I noticed a blue pixel about halfway up the screen. I was totally dismayed as I didn't know anything about faulty pixels.

After numerous calls to Dell, I was also fed the 'up to four defective pixels is deemed acceptable' story. Dell refused to replace the monitor, but did eventually take the system back for a full refund.

I was totally put off LCD screens until I read your article about faulty pixels and took your advice by purchasing a CTX s530 flat-panel to use with my existing computer for the time being.

Star letter

I've just finished my GCSE in ICT (Information Communication Technology). Over the two-year course I was taught the most boring and outdated things imaginable. I was drilled on dated facts about dot-matrix printers when I'd have much rather learnt the workings of an inkjet or laser printer. Fair enough, history is worth knowing but how is the knowledge of a dot-matrix printer going to help me in the real world?

In addition I was taught about the kind of massive floppies they had 10 years ago – the ones that were used with BBC and the original Apple computers. Ever heard of DVDs? To complicate matters further, there's the issue of terminology. You're not allowed to use the word 'monitor' in the exam, instead you have to use the correct term 'VDU'.

My point is, why do we students have to learn this useless information when we'd much rather be taught about Bluetooth, wireless networking and optical storage. Perhaps the ICT teachers just need to read a couple of issues of *PC Advisor* magazine to see what's changed since their last teacher training course.
Nickil Patel, Crawley

Andrew Charlesworth replies: I expect it's difficult for whoever sets the GCSE syllabus to keep up with the speed at which the computer industry churns out new products. There's certainly no shortage of product info available in print and on the web, so maybe it would be better if pupils were taught about the effects of IT on society, a subject on which there seems to be very little informed debate in the UK.

*At least if you read *PC Advisor* alongside your GCSE course you get the best of both worlds – past and present.*

Write to us

If you want to air your views, please write to *PC Advisor*, FREEPOST 20 LON87018, London W1E 4AN, or email us at pcadvisor_letters@idg.com or fax us on 020 7580 1935. Please mark emails 'Readers' writes' in the subject heading.

Our star letter writer wins MyBackupBuddy, a pocket-size USB backup device with automatic compression and up to 500MB capacity. For more information, go to www.backupbuddy.co.uk.



I think the CTX monitor is brilliant. It's perfect and has completely restored my faith in flat-panel displays. Thanks for your advice – now I just need a new base unit!

Peter Beecham, via email

Further blots on the landscape

I read Ian Henderson's letter in the July 03 issue about a flat-panel display he bought from LG that had defective pixels. As it happens, I used to work for Philips and if one of their TV tubes had defective pixels outside the centre of the screen we would try to repair it before it was sent to a set maker.

Otherwise it would be sold as a 'B' screen and sent on to be used in a video

game in an arcade or public house. If, however, the defect was in the middle of the screen, it would be rejected and scrapped altogether.

In my opinion no monitor defects should be allowed. I suspect that LG didn't know that there was a defect when it released Ian Henderson's display or surely it would not have passed its quality control.

LG and Philips are now in partnership producing TV tubes, though I don't know if this is also the case with computer displays. Ian could try to contact LG direct and ask about its staff about quality control specifications on missing or damaged pixels.

Ian Cousin, via email