

NTL limits broadband use

ISP NTL has shocked its customers by announcing it will limit the amount of data its broadband customers can download to 1GB per day. On its customer gripes website www.nthellworld.com, the company defines 1GB as roughly 100 large software programs, 200 music tracks, 650 short videos or 20,000 web pages.

Since the announcement NTL has received a barrage of calls from disgruntled customers venting their frustration at its decision, but it insists that only a few users will be affected. "If you occasionally exceed your data limit this will not be a problem," states the company's MD, Azid Hussain on [nthellworld](http://nthellworld.com). "Our only objective is to limit very frequent or persistent heavy users that can impact other customers."

NTL will monitor usage for a couple of months and alert those customers who exceed the limit. Only those that go over the limit three times within any consecutive 14-day period will be contacted, but the company promises they will not be disconnected. A poll on [nthellworld](http://nthellworld.com) shows that 760 users will be switching to another service provider as a result of the caps, while other dissatisfied users have set up

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www.dont-pay-ntl.co.uk to discourage people from paying the hiked prices.

NTL has now redefined the 'unlimited' tag it once attached to its broadband service. It now means 'available at any time' rather than unrestricted usage, according to NTL.

Many ISPs are making only small profits from broadband services and several leading providers in Europe are already offering 'tiered' systems, charging customers for the amount of content they use in order to make back some of the money invested in high-speed technologies.

BT Retail's no-frills broadband product, which provides a basic internet connection without extras such as email services, also has a 1GB ceiling for downloads.

Broadband is for business too

UK Online for Business, part of the DTI (Department of Trade & Industry), is launching a nationwide awareness campaign to promote the benefits of broadband internet connection to small businesses.

"The Broadband for Business campaign will be saying this is what the technology can offer your business: better efficiency, increased profit and a better relationship with your customers," states Elizabeth Grant, director of UK Online for Business.

"If this doesn't resonate, then don't buy. But if it does then come to us for impartial advice," Grant continues.

The campaign kicks off 10 March and will feature radio and print advertising as well as sponsored taxis.

"There's lots of hype and media coverage of broadband, but very little dispassionate advice about what value it brings to a business. In some cases that's very easy: just moving from variable to fixed telecoms costs can be a straightforward financial gain," says Grant.

Last month UK Online for Business launched a new section of its website to inform small businesses about data security. The information resource aimed at non-technical business managers includes explanations about viruses, hacking and data security legislation and advice on reasonable security measures.

It also provides a useful questionnaire enabling a business to quickly assess the health of its data security.

• www.ukonlineforbusiness.gov.uk/informationsecurity



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ID card debate hots up

Civil liberties group Privacy International is in the news again. This time it's slamming the government's consultation on 'entitlement cards' or ID cards, claiming it breaches the code of practice that must be followed when introducing new legislation.

Group director Simon Davies has lodged a complaint of maladministration with government minister Glenda Jackson and Prime Minister Tony Blair, insisting that the consultation has breached four areas of the code of practice. These include the requirement for even-handedness, specificity, impact assessment and declaration of the relevant companies procedure.

"The Home Office has been guilty of maladministration throughout the entire consultation process. It should accept that an extension of the consultation period is in the public's interest," says Davies.

Section two of the code of practice states: "a document should so far as possible include an assessment of the impact of the proposals on groups likely to be particularly affected... Departments should consider whether there is a particular impact by gender, age, ethnicity or disability." But, according to Davies, no such impact assessment was included in the document, nor was any reference made to the risk of social exclusion.

"Identity cards might have a particularly negative impact on the elderly, mentally ill and the homeless," states Davies. The group is asking for a six-month extension to the consultation document. The Home Office was unavailable for comment.



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Simon Davies, director, Privacy International

Dell drops floppies

Years after Apple condemned the floppy drive to computer history, PC maker Dell has followed suit. It plans to ditch the drives on its high-end consumer desktop, the Dimension 8250, later this month, making it an optional extra.

Dell also plans to offer customers the option of a thumb drive for the same price as a floppy drive. The thumb drive will plug into a standard USB port, use flash memory, offer faster transfer speeds and have greater capacity than a floppy disk. Dell hasn't set the pricing on its floppy drive option yet. But in the US it currently sells the 16MB thumb drive for \$17 (around £10) and the 64MB model for \$30 (around £18).

The decision is hardly surprising as the floppy drive has long been functionally obsolete as most of the files people share are too large to fit on its meagre 1.44MB capacity. It will be interesting to see how many manufacturers follow Dell's lead and cease to offer floppy drives as standard on new machines.



Q. Mac or PC? Which do you use and why?

A. I've got both, but have to say I prefer the Mac.

Q. When did you last get angry with a piece of technology and why?

A. When the satellite navigation system on my car broke down.

Q. If you could invent a technology device for the future, what would it be and why?

A. If I knew that I would be a multimillionaire. It would be nice to be one step ahead of Bill Gates.

Q. What technology product couldn't you live without and why?

A. My juicer. There's nothing better than freshly made fruit juice in the mornings.

Q. What's your home page and favourite website and why?

A. Football365.com. I support Arsenal and can keep up to date with the Gunners at the click of a mouse.

Ronnie O'Sullivan is one of the highest ranked snooker players in the world. He has won 25 titles including the Embassy World Championship in 2001.

MY TECHNOLOGY
ronnie o'sullivan



OFF THE CUFF ursula seymour

Portable computing boom?

As the desktop PC industry remains caught up in near terminal decline, it's no surprise that manufacturers and developers are looking for new technologies that allow them to part us and, more importantly, big businesses from our money.

If recent launches are any indication, the smart money seems to be backing portable computing. Be they notebooks, tablet PCs, portable screens, smartphones or PDAs – devices that we can pop in our pockets, or at least a briefcase, are where it's at.

We are facing a future where technology no longer resides on the desk or in the study but surrounds us in our everyday lives.

However, no matter how smart such dinky devices might look or sound, making them easy to use is the key to selling them to the mass market.

Wireless networking is a grand idea, but actually getting one up and running at home is no mean feat for the average family. Equally, using your mobile to pick up email or surf the internet is far from intuitive.

So the killer application on both the desktop and while out and about is to make technology so simple to use that it seamlessly links into our everyday lives at home and work – and actually shows us some real benefits. Until then we fear many portable devices may not fulfil their true potential.

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Court gets tough on cyber criminal

UK virus writer Simon Vallor was handed down the stiffest sentence in the history of the crime for his part in the creation and dissemination of the Gokar, Admirer and Redesi bugs. Vallor has been sent down for two years, in sharp contrast to Jan De Wit – the Dutch-born creator of the Anna Kournikova worm – who received just 150 hours of community service.

But while some might say Vallor's sentence was harsh in comparison, *PC Advisor* readers aren't so lenient. Over 50 percent of those polled on www.pcadvisor.co.uk said that Vallor should have received a tougher sentence for creating the bugs, which infected around 27,000 computers in 40 countries. A further 38 percent said they thought the sentence was fair.

Graham Cluely, senior technology consultant for antivirus firm Sophos, said: "This hard line [approach] suggests companies must be completely cheesed off with cybercriminals."



Cluely's conclusion is backed up by European Commission's plans to announce a cybersecurity agency.

The European Network and Information Security Agency will serve as an advice centre for the 15 member states on matters relating to cybersecurity, including computer viruses.

The Commission has allocated a £16m budget for the Agency over the next five years. Further details can be found in *Cybercriminal punishment* on page 87.

Nokia engages gamers

Nokia has launched a mobile game console called the N-Gage. It combines the applications of a mobile phone with wireless gaming technologies, allowing users to enjoy multiplayer and remote gaming. Console manufacturer Sega will provide titles for the unit, including one featuring Sonic the Hedgehog.

The N-Gage supports two kinds of games – smaller downloadable titles and rich media formats on 2MB, 8MB and 16MB MMCs (multimedia cards).

T-Mobile, the first operator to sign up to work with Nokia and Sega, will develop online gaming services in time for the Christmas launch. Pricing has not yet been announced but it is expected to be in the same ball park as Nintendo's GameBoy Advance, which retails for around £90.



Top five PC threats of 2002

Security software firm Symantec has compiled its list of the top five threats which faced PC users in 2002.

- 1 Email threats continued to increase in number last year, with over 323 threats discovered.
- 2 Exposed or incorrectly configured resources. Last year Symantec recorded over 50 threats that used open file shares to propagate.
- 3 P2P (peer-to-peer) and instant message-based threats.
- 4 Potential web browser-based threats. Over 67 vulnerabilities were uncovered, which could leave millions of desktops open to attack from malicious code.
- 5 Users who fail to use passwords, or choose easy-to-guess ones, leave themselves wide open to attack.

Put your old Pentium PCs to good use

Computer Aid International, otherwise known as CAI, is relaunching its campaign to encourage businesses and the public sector to donate old Pentium PCs to be sent on to the developing world.

The charity – the world's largest non-profit supplier of refurbished PCs – hopes to build on the success of an appeal it ran in June 02, which netted the organisation 5,000 unwanted PCs.

Donated PCs are refurbished and shipped out to developing countries to help decrease the technology gap between the first and third worlds.

"Donations [from the last appeal] have already made a huge difference to thousands of lives. However, there is still an enormous demand for refurbished computers

in developing countries where 99 percent of children leave school without ever touching a computer in the classroom," explains Tony Roberts, director of CAI.

The cost of new PCs is prohibitive in poorer countries so recycling old computers makes sense, particularly as the build-up of techno garbage is becoming a problem for the developed world. CAI says for the price of just one new computer it can collect, test, refurbish and ship 20 Pentium PCs.

To ensure that no sensitive data is passed on with the old PCs CAI erases all information stored on the hard drive using Sanitizer software, which has been approved by the US Department of Defence.

The donation campaign is only looking for Pentium-based systems. CAI requests business users to call a special enquiry hotline on 020 7281 0091, visit www.computer-aid.org or email info@computer-aid.org. Home users can donate PCs, but they have to be delivered to CAI's warehouses in London or Southampton. More information can be found at www.computer-aid.org.



Small is beautiful thanks to SuperCCD

Fujifilm launched two fourth-generation sensors in its SuperCCD cameras that, according to the camera manufacturer, will provide users with better picture quality and smaller form factors.

The first sensor, a 9.4mm model, has an effective resolution of 3.1Mp (megapixels) and picture output quality of 6Mp, while the second boasts a 14.9mm 6Mp sensor producing 12Mp. Both devices deliver a 50 percent higher effective pixel count than the sensors of the same size found in Fujifilm's current third-generation range.

The company doesn't use any software interpolation technology to achieve the results so digital images should have a more accurate colour palette. The more photodiodes and pixels a camera has, the higher the quality of images it produces.

Traditionally, CCDs (the devices which record the light falling on them and capture the image) have been made up of square photodiodes and pixel arrangements, whereas SuperCCDs lay them out in octagonal blocks, making better use of the space available.

This honeycomb pattern improves the signal-to-noise ratio, which leads to a fuller image with more vivid, realistic-looking colours. By using the space between the diodes a SuperCCD with a resolution of 3.1Mp would produce the same picture quality as a camera with a 6Mp resolution.

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Four Centrino models from Toshiba

Toshiba is one of the first of what we are sure will be a growing band of notebook manufacturers using Intel's new mobile processor, Centrino.

The company plans to launch an unprecedented number of new notebooks built around the Centrino chip – its Satellite Pro, Portege and Tecra range will all offer a Centrino-based model. The processor also includes built-in 802.11b wireless networking, offers improved battery life and higher performance over the Pentium 4. All of the Toshiba portables will be unveiled on 12 March.

Product manager, Ken Chan, says that the notebooks are all aimed at a corporate market as "this is where Intel is focusing [Centrino]".

Centrino sees Intel taking a leaf out of rival AMD's book, with a processor that promises more pace at a lower clock speed. Chan said that in Toshiba's tests it was getting the same performance from a Centrino chip as from a Mobile Pentium 4 with a clock speed that is 800MHz faster. But this lower speed, higher performance message could be hard to sell to consumers, who Chan says still "buy on clock speed".

So for the moment the company won't be pushing its Centrino-based range to consumers. Having invested in four new models using this processor, Toshiba undoubtedly hopes Centrino will prove a success.

But it will continue to offer Mobile Pentium 4 alongside the new processor, as some corporate customers may not want to invest in the changes required (such as wireless networking) to make the shift to a new chip. See Behind the news on page 28 for more information.



Phones get fashionable

In an attempt to revive the sluggish mobile phone handset market, Siemens is developing handsets as fashion accessories for the European market. The company has developed a collection of four "wearable" phones that it will sell through fashion retailers and department stores.

Two collections of four phones will be released each year, one for spring/summer and one for autumn/winter. The theme of the first collection will be 'space on earth'.

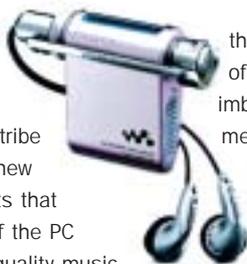
The phones, small with simple voice functionality, will be manufactured in limited quantities and will be sold from April initially in the UK, China, Hong Kong, France, Germany, Italy, Singapore and Spain. Siemens will then expand the range to further markets from September.

news in brief

Walk the Sony way

Sony's Walkman personal stereo tribe has spawned a new family of products that use the power of the PC to compile high-quality music on the move.

The funkier baby is a diminutive Network Walkman which goes by the enigmatic epithet 'NWMS70D'. Its 54g titanium body can store tracks from up to 11 audio CDs – or



the equivalent amount of data – on an imbedded 256MB flash memory and removable Memory Stick Duo, a proprietary Sony solidstate memory module.

The device comes with SonicStage software which runs on a PC and enables CD, MP3, WAV, WMA and PC data to be transferred to the device via a USB port on its base charger.



Success story

Sony announced that it has sold 50 million PlayStation2 consoles since its launch in March 00. PS2 has won popularity far faster than its predecessor, which took over a year longer to reach the same sales figure.

Surfing without the ripcord

The UK is to get 80 more wireless networking hotspots in public places across the country, according to BT, so mobile surfing without wires is fast becoming a reality. And it's set to get even faster as Stephen Timms clears the way to upgrade to 802.11a, which boosts data transfer from 11Mbps to 54Mbps by deregulating the 5GHz radio spectrum it requires.