











# Top 10 Budget PCs

			Budget PCs	Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor		
				Processor speed	Hard disk capacity	Chipset	Dot pitch		
						USB ports	Maximum resolution@75Hz		
PC ADVISOR BEST BUY	1	 <b>Mesh Matrix 3000+ MX TFT</b> 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com Last month 1	• £1,175 inc VAT • 3-year onsite warranty • First review Nov 03	AMD Athlon 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Asus A7N8X nForce2 6	17in flat-panel Sharp LL T17A4B 0.264mm 1,280x1,024		
				WorldBench 4		133			
	PC ADVISOR RECOMMENDED	2	 <b>Multivision Ionix 98 AIW</b> 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk Last month 2	• £1,175 inc VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Nov 03	AMD Athlon XP 3200+ 2.2GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 180GB	MSI K7N2 nForce2 4	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	
					WorldBench 4		134		
PC ADVISOR RECOMMENDED		3	 <b>NetHighStreet Net PA 999</b> 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com Last month 3	• £1,175 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 1-year labour-only warranty • First review Nov 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 160GB	MSI K7N2 nForce2 4	19in Samsung SyncMaster 957MB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	
					WorldBench 4		132		
	PC ADVISOR RECOMMENDED	4	 <b>Evesham Axis 3000+</b> 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com Last month 4	• £1,295 inc VAT • 2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty • First review Nov 03	AMD Athlon 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	MSI K7N2 nForce2 4	19in ViewSonic GF90FB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	
					WorldBench 4		130		
		5	 <b>Systemax Inspire 3152</b> 0870 729 7364 www.systemaxpc.co.uk Last month 5	• £1,410 inc VAT • 2-year onsite warranty • First review Aug 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	1GB DDR RAM 160GB	MSI K7N2 nForce2 5	19in CXTX EX950F 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	
					WorldBench 4		130		
		6	 <b>Carrera Octan 3200PA</b> 0871 222 3456 www.carrerassc.co.uk Last month 6	• £1,410 inc VAT • 3-year onsite, 2-year labour-only warranty • First review Nov 03	AMD Athlon XP 3200+ 2.2GHz Barton core	1GB DDR RAM 80GB	Asus A7N8X nForce2 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	
					WorldBench 4		134		
		7	 <b>MicroLand Tech AD 099.1</b> 0870 443 0399 www.microland.co.uk Last month 7	• £1,235 inc VAT • 3-year return-to-base, 3-year labour-only warranty • First review Nov 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 120GB	Gigabyte GA-7VT600 Via KT600 8	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	
					WorldBench 4		130		
		8	 <b>CCL Computers X-Pro EA91</b> 01274 471 276 www.cclcomputers.co.uk Last month 8	• £1,295 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 2-year labour-only warranty • First review Nov 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	1GB DDR RAM 120GB	Epox 8RDA3+ nForce2 4	19in Iiyama Vision Master Pro 455 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	
					WorldBench 4		131		
		9	 <b>Shepley XP3000 R98</b> 0870 758 6445 www.shepleydirect.co.uk Last month 9	• £1,410 inc VAT • 1-year return-to-base, 2-year labour-only warranty • First review Nov 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 160GB	Epox 8RDA3+ nForce2 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	
					WorldBench 4		132		
		10	 <b>Multivision Ionix 56 ND</b> 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk Last month 10	• £1,175 inc VAT • 3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty • First review Aug 03	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 180GB	MSI K792 nForce2 6	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	
					WorldBench 4		128		



The stylish Mesh Matrix 3000+ MX TFT remains our number one system. And with its secure casing it also offers peace of mind

## Buying advice

### Budget PCs

Buying a PC when you're on a budget can be tough. The trick is to figure out precisely what you want to use the system for. This way, you know in which areas you need to spend money and in which you can compromise.

For example, if you're an avid gamer you'll need a good graphics card and monitor. Alternatively, if you're into digital video editing then you'll want the biggest hard drive you can afford.

AMD Athlon processors dominate the entire chart at the moment and eight entries feature the same chip, the 2.17GHz 3000+ with the Barton core. If you prefer to take the Intel-branded route then look for a Pentium 4 that runs at speeds of at least 2.4GHz. Bear in mind, too, that when AMD or Intel bring out a new chip the price of older models tends to come down, so keep an eye on the runners-up rather than the high-flyers.

The standard memory allotment in the Budget chart is now 512MB of DDR RAM, which should be enough to serve the needs of most PC users.

Graphics card maker	Sound card	DVD drive speed	Operating system, software and extras	Comments
Graphics chip	Speakers	CD-RW drive speed		
Graphics card memory	Subwoofer			
ATI	onboard	8x/2.4x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/+R/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2003	The Mesh is a fine-looking, fast and well-specified PC. Its components are pretty average but the memory is the newer and faster DDR400 standard helping the Mesh achieve such a high WorldBench 4 score. It comes bundled with Microsoft Works Suite 2003, and is covered by a three-year onsite warranty.
Radeon 9800	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	32x/24x/10x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
128MB	yes			
ATI	Creative Audigy2	12x/4x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/+R/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002	The Ionix 98 AIW achieved the highest WorldBench 4 score in the chart this month proving that it can handle just about anything you throw at it. The graphics card performs beautifully for gamers and the built-in TV tuner allows you to record programmes to your hard drive and even pause live broadcasts.
Radeon 9800 SE All-in-Wonder	5 x Creative Inspire P580	40x/16x/10x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
128MB	yes			
ATI	Creative Audigy2	12x/4x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/+R/+RW)	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice, PC-cillin 2002	The second Recommended award goes to the Net PA 999 which is a fully-featured and well-priced system. The processor and RAM are average specs but NetHighStreet has gone for that little bit extra in terms of storage with a 160GB hard drive, and the Net's graphics card provides excellent visuals.
Radeon 9800 Pro	5 x Creative Inspire 5300	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
128MB	yes			
ATI	Creative Audigy2	12x/4x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/+R/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE	Despite its odd design, the Evesham is a brilliant performer. Its graphics card won't let gamers down and it also has a 125-channel TV tuner that records broadcasts to your hard drive. And with the bundled Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE video-editing package, there's a plethora of multimedia options available to you.
Radeon 9800 SE All-in-Wonder	7 x Creative Inspire 7700	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
128MB	yes			
nVidia	Creative Audigy2	8x/2.4x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/+R/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Power Director 2.1, TV card, six-in-one card reader	The Inspire's outstanding feature is without a doubt its graphics card – unlike all other entries, Systemax has opted for the nVidia solution. The sound card and speaker setup is also one of the best available, and there's generous storage space on the hard drive. All this is covered by a two-year warranty.
GeForce FX 5900 Ultra	7 x Videologic ZXR 750	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
256MB	yes			
ATI	Terratek Aureon 7.1	12x/4x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/+R/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Tomb Raider	One of only two systems using the ultra-fast AMD Athlon XP 3200+ processor, the Octan was certainly speedy. The hard drive is a disappointing 80GB but in terms of audio, a Terratek 7.1 sound card and Videologic ZXR 750 speaker system create brilliant surround sound. The graphics setup is equally impressive.
Radeon 9800 Pro	7 x Videologic ZXR 750	40x/16x/10x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
128MB	yes			
Sapphire	Creative Audigy2	16x (DVD-ROM)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, six-in-one card reader	Gamers will be very impressed with the Tech AD. There's the fantastic monitor and the graphics card is one of the best around. Surround sound is superb and another bonus is the bundled Tomb Raider game. Unfortunately there's no DVD writer and the warranty doesn't include onsite cover, despite lasting for six years.
Radeon 9800 Pro	7 x Creative Inspire 7700	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
128MB	yes			
ATI	Creative Audigy2	12x/4x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/+R/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Panda AntiVirus Titanium	The X-Pro has a massive 1GB of fast DDR RAM which is useful to those users who keep several applications running at once. Digital camera users will really appreciate the six-in-one card reader and CCL has also bundled Panda AntiVirus Titanium so you can ensure your PC is protected and virus free.
Radeon 9600 Pro	7 x Videologic ZXR-750	52x/52x/32x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
128MB	yes			
ATI	Hercules Digifire 7.1	12x/4x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/+R/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Pinnacle Studio 7.0 SE	Although it only managed ninth place, the XP3000 R98 isn't a bad PC by any means – it just doesn't quite have everything that the competition offers. It's a little bulky but in its favour, the Shepley's graphics setup will impress gamers thanks to its Radeon 9800 Pro card and Diamond Pro 930SB monitor.
Radeon 9800 Pro	7 x Videologic ZXR-750	52x/52x/24x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
128MB	yes			
ATI	onboard	12x/4x/2x (DVD-ROM/+R/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002	If you're interested in video editing then you'll find the massive 180GB hard drive a bonus, while the all-format DVD writer will ensure that you never run out of storage space for your videos and files. Graphics are where the Ionix falls short. The graphics card is fine for most but won't be suitable for serious gamers.
Radeon 9600 Pro	7 x Videologic ZXR-750	40x/16x/10x (CD-ROM/R/RW)		
128MB	yes			

Shop around and you can even get 1GB for your money. Aim for DDR333 (PC2700) or DDR400 (PC3200) RAM as this will give the best performance.

While 100GB of storage should prove ample for the majority of PC users, most Budget systems will come with a hard drive of at least 120GB. Though you may never come close to filling it all, it is still desirable to have as much storage space as possible.

In terms of CD-RW drives, don't go for anything with less than 40/16/10-speed (read/write/rewrite) facilities. When looking at screens, you should be able to get a decent 19in monitor for your money. Only

be satisfied with a 17in model if it has very good specifications.

Either way, check that the screen can achieve an optimal resolution of 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 displays will push up the price of the Budget system but these screens might still be worth looking at if desk space is at a premium.

In terms of dedicated graphics memory, look for a minimum of 128MB. Top-of-the range cards include nVidia's GeForce FX 5900 Ultra and ATI's Radeon 9800 Pro.

However, if you don't need astoundingly fast frame rates all the time then the GeForce FX 5600 and ATI Radeon 9600 Pro are still very capable graphics cards.

Finally, when it comes to audio Creative's Audigy2 sound card is the best option although the trusty SoundBlaster Live 5.1 is still a dependable choice. Avoid onboard audio if at all possible as its performance is never as impressive as that of a dedicated card.

If creating good-quality surround sound is important to you then look for a speaker system with five satellites and a subwoofer.