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If you believe the hype, pretty soon we're going to be living in networked homes where all our previously separate devices can chat happily among themselves, stream video, audio and data as well as access the internet and send and receive email.

Except it's missing one vital part – the network. The adventurous consumer wanting to share a printer or internet connection may have hooked a couple of computers together, but it's a network that's unlikely to reach outside the room.

The arrival of broadband provides a compelling reason to set up a home network, but it's unfortunately coincided with the arrival of wireless networking. Why go to all the hassle of installing wires when for slightly more money you can send the information through the air? Plus if you've got a notebook the network follows you pretty much wherever you go.

But wireless doesn't provide sufficient bandwidth for video. With broadband at a maximum of 1Mbps, the 11Mbps on offer from 802.11b is plenty and a wireless network can stretch to music too. But high-quality video over an 11Mbps network is out of the question.

Bundling a wireless adapter into a networkable device is also going to significantly add to the cost. You can buy wireless bridges, which allow wired devices to hook into a network, but they are usually pricier than a standard wireless adapter.

If you planned ahead, installed your Cat5 cabling and are patiently waiting to enter the brave new world then the Slimp3 (see page 46) is the device for you. If, on the other hand, the only networking you've ever done in your house is when you invited the boss over for a fondue, that digital dream could remain someway off. ■

Will Head, reviews editor

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Scoring and testing explained

Each review rates a product according to a set criterion for its type. The score is broken down at the end of the review to show how we reached our final verdict. Ratings range from 1 to 10 and fall into the following classifications:
1 to 3 – poor
4 to 6 – average
6 to 8 – good
8 to 10 – excellent

How we rate hardware
• Features **This score rates the specification of a product by current standards. For example, a 2.6GHz PC with 512MB of RAM and a 120GB hard drive would score highly.**
• Build quality **This rating denotes how well the product is made and the quality of the components.**
• Value for money **The price of a product will often be the deciding factor between**

a good review and a bad review. This is not to say that cheaper products will always win out, but the better the price/performance and features ratio the higher the score.

How we rate software
• Ease of use **Rates how easy software is to install and use.**
• Features **Indicates how much the package contains. An office suite that**

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66 Technofile

A top-notch video card is a must for gamers but, as we explain, it's the graphics chip that determines whether generated images are more pure than pixellated.

209 Top 10 charts

Located at the back of the magazine, the charts are designed so they're a cinch to navigate. The at-a-glance comments and buying advice help you make the right purchasing decision. Products we've already tested are ranked in our charts after competing against existing entrants. The result is a definitive guide to the best hardware available on the market.

only came with a spreadsheet would score poorly.
• Value for money **Lots of features, good performance and a low price tag will result in a good score.**

Prices
All prices are quoted by the manufacturer or distributor and exclude VAT. Please note that prices are only intended as a guide and you may see products on sale for less or more than our quoted price. *PC Advisor's* recommendations are for guidance only and are not a guarantee of suitability. The publisher takes no responsibility for purchasers' decisions.

PC Advisor Gold award
Outstanding hardware products receive a *PC Advisor* Gold award. This may indicate that the product will enter our charts next month but *PC Advisor* Gold also honours excellence in a product that is not covered in this month's charts.