

If I had £100, I'd buy...

To celebrate our 100th issue, we decided to give some of PC Advisor's valued team and contributors a (virtual) £100 to splash on the gadget of their choice. So to find out just what's on our wish lists, read on



Liz Miller, sub editor

Yamada DVD-5520

Multiregion DVD player

www.amazon.co.uk

£39.99 inc VAT

Do I want to switch from VHS to a DVD player? If you'd asked me a while ago I probably would have shrugged and mumbled a disinterested 'No', naturally assuming this new and improved piece of technology would cost me a small fortune. After all, I'm not a technically minded girl and, quite frankly, since my video works just fine I can think of better things to spend my hard-earned cash on.

But thinking about it realistically, does my video really behave faultlessly? Actually, no. I get tired of crunching videotapes, dips in sound and fuzzy lines across my TV screen. I can even recall occasions when I've had to physically rip the tape out of the machine after the rewind function packed up. My video recorder has clearly had its day.

It's time to embrace new technology and spend my £100 on a DVD player. My stash of videotapes will become null and void, but hey, they took up too much space anyway. And to my surprise, I found I could buy a DVD player from online retailer Amazon for just £39.99.

The multiregion Yamada DVD-5520 is great. It can play DVD movies bought here or in the US as it handles both formats. It can also play my MP3 music files or let me view my digital photos on the TV. And even looks good. What a result.

Ursula Seymour, managing editor for news & reviews

ChardAirbag

Laptop holdall

Techair: 01672 519 933

www.techair.co.uk

£59.99 inc VAT



I've just shelled out well over £100 for a shiny new laptop, but lugging it around in a plastic bag does nothing for either my street cred (such as it is) or my arm muscles. So what I would really like is a proper laptop bag that's easy to carry and will keep my precious portable safe... oh, and looks really cool too.

It might not sound like a particularly tall order, but have you seen the state of most laptop bags? Nasty faux-leather affairs more suited to a travelling salesman than a girl about town.

Fortunately, despite the fashion bypass that seems to have affected most of the industry, there is a bag I have my eye on - the ChardAirbag by UK company Techair. This messenger-style holdall has air pockets to keep the computer safe and two removable compartments to fill with girly stuff - or to take out if my shoulders start to feel the strain. Another bonus is its M-Port (otherwise known as a hole) that I can poke my headphones through, which makes listening to my iPod easy too.



Will Head, reviews editor

Motorola C350

Mobile phone

Virgin Mobile: 0845 6000 600

www.virginmobile.co.uk

£89.99 inc VAT

Mobile phones don't make such great presents. You end up either stumping up for someone else's phone calls for a year or lumbering them with a £15-plus monthly contract for 12 months. Neither

option is a great way to keep your friends.

That is, unless you choose a Virgin Mobile. You pay the cost of the handset up front and your friends only have to pay for any calls they make. No monthly payments, and no contracts to sour that beautiful relationship.

My £100 would be well spent on a friend who's always late and who has so far resisted entering the world of mobile communications.

Anyone who's anyone nowadays needs a colour screen and polyphonic ringtones are a must for annoying people on the train. More importantly, the phone has to be small and easy to use - I'm running enough informal technical support lines as it is. It also has to be cheap (sorry, offer good value for money) ideally without looking like it is...

Step up the Motorola C350 - small, silver, a snip at £89.99 and looking like it should cost at least double that. My mate will be suitably impressed and I can assure him he was more than worth the cash.

I reckon that's £100 well spent. None of the hassles you get with a contract, a happy and content friend and no more excuses for not telling me he'll be late. Job done.



Simon Easterman, staff writer

Creative TravelSound

Portable speakers

http://uk.europe.creative.com

£49.98 inc VAT

I love my music but I hate headphones. I've tried them all but in the end it's the same - those big pairs of bins make my ears burn like braziers and the tiny ones that 'fit' in my lugholes make them feel like they're being syringed. No matter which of my fave-rave fab-gear tunes are spinning in my CD player, sooner or later the mild to severe irritant of my earpieces will force me to turn it off.

But still, it seems wrong to be on the road for any length of time without some kind of sonic entertainment. Downtime in a hotel room, on a veranda or by the pool always requires a soundtrack to really top it off. And unless I'm travelling by car, there's no way I'm lugging a massive beatbox around.

So it was a bit of an epiphany when I stumbled on Creative's TravelSound. These compact but effective speakers bang out sounds of acceptable quality and volume but don't take up an entire suitcase. They run on four AAA batteries or an AC adapter and their digital amplifiers ensure decent battery life.

They don't provide ground-shaking bass, but with a range of 150Hz to 20kHz the sound is full enough and the 75dB offers plenty of power. What's more, I found I can plug the speakers into my laptop and give an extra spread to the surround sound when watching DVDs. Entertainment in a pocket-sized pouch - I love 'em.



There's plenty of good technology available for under £100 but my pick of the bunch is this versatile little webcam. For a mere £39.99, Creative's NX Pro lets me create dynamic multimedia content. I particularly like this model because it offers high-quality digital video and stills as well as audio.

The great thing about a webcam is that it offers an easy way to stay in touch with your loved ones abroad, so I can chat to friends and relatives in far-off lands. It also saves a fortune in phone bills by doubling up as an internet phone device, although to get the most from this webcam my broadband connection is invaluable.

My wife is expecting a baby, so perhaps the main reason I'm keen to get my hands on the NX Pro is that it also happens to be one of the best baby monitors money can buy. I can attach the webcam to my PC in the nursery and access the video and audio stream from my notebook in the living room downstairs via a home LAN.

Spencer Dalziel, senior staff writer

Creative NX Pro

Webcam

<http://uk.europe.creative.com>

£39.99 inc VAT

Ben Camm-Jones, staff writer

Logitech Xbox Cordless Controller

Games console control

Logitech: 020 7309 0127

www.logitech.com

£49.99 inc VAT

I'm getting sick of having to untangle a mess of wires every time I use my Xbox. There's the power cable, the AV cable, the wires connecting the controllers to the console, not to mention the power cable for the TV. They are constantly snagging on something or getting ravelled around the chair leg. I need a solution - fast.

If I had £100 I'd buy myself the Logitech Xbox Cordless Controller. Not only will it put an end to the jumble of wiring and let me move around freely, but it's easier to use than the standard Xbox controllers as it's not so chunky. The expansion slots are on the receiver rather than the gamepad, so you don't need Geoff Capes-sized hands to use it.

The button layout is slightly different from the conventional Xbox controller. The seldom-used white and black buttons have been moved. But as they are now within easier reach of your right thumb, the layout change should help rather than hinder you.





**Mike Hirschhorn,
freelancer**

La Cie Universal
Media Drive
Flash memory card reader
La Cie: 020 7872 8000
www.lacie.com/uk
£22 inc VAT

As a self-confessed geek, my office is full of gadgets that use a range of flash memory cards, from my Sony Clie and its Memory Sticks to the Canon digital camera which uses its CompactFlash and the JVC camcorder with its SD cards. So I thought my £100 would be best spent on a reader that could handle all these cards.

There are plenty of readers on the market but my first love is for the Mac so I wanted something that would look good hooked up to my sleek aluminium PowerBook. Enter La Cie's Universal Media Drive. Not only does it have slots for all the different cards I use, but its tiny brushed metal case would grace any desktop. And I would be left with £78 in change. What a bargain.

The La Cie reader is small enough not to take up too much space when I need to carry it around with me but the metal case makes it feel more robust than some of its plastic rivals. Now all I have to do is invest in a new Mac so I can get the most from the fast USB 2.0 connection. But I think that might blow the £100 budget.

**Faith Wardle,
subs manager**

Sony MDR-V700 DJ
Stereo headphones
Sony: 08705 111 999
www.sony.co.uk
approx £100 inc VAT



I've been after a decent pair of headphones for many years. Work colleagues kindly lend me various decaying cast-offs, but none of the proffered devices ever has a long enough lead to reach to the back of my PC without

me having to crouch under my desk and type on the keyboard while sitting on the floor.

Sound quality has also tended to be poor and most of the hand-me-downs can't cope with the musical ranges of opera, of which I am a fan. Either it's so quiet I can barely hear it or it's so loud that everyone else can hear it.

I was looking for well designed, comfortable, lightweight headphones, with exceptionally clear sound and a very long lead that doesn't wrap itself around my entire

Becci Leach, production editor

Creative 128MB Muvo
Digital audio player
<http://uk.europe.creative.com>
£99.99

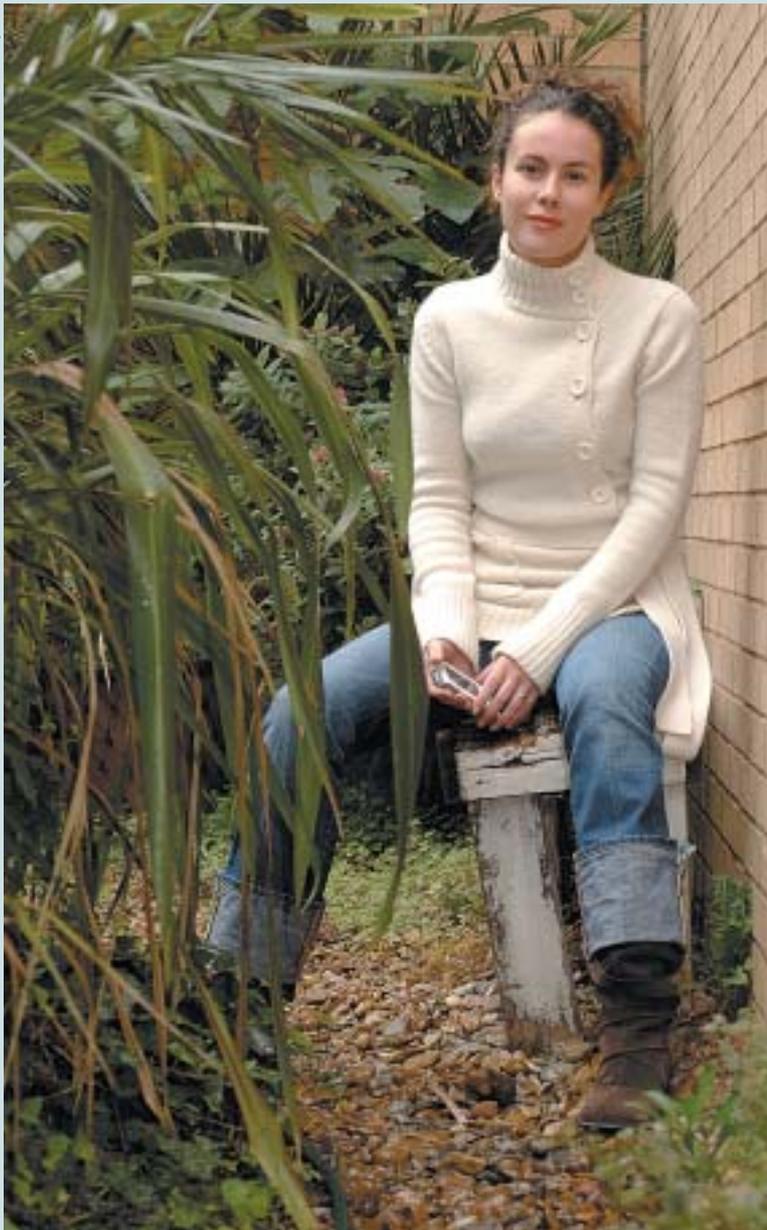
I've got £100 to spend on a gadget that'll change my life? No contest. It has to be a portable MP3 player. Having been a massive fan of iTunes for the past year or so, I've built up a fairly hefty collection of tracks on my trusty Mac's hard drive.

But now I want to listen to them on the go. The reason? I'm off for some culture, sunbathing and exquisite food in Northern Sicily and, like most girls, I have the overpacking gene. I've already had to add to my already-bulging suitcase six packs of batteries, an out-of-date, so-large-it's-obscene CD player and a choice selection of discs. If I had the Creative Muvo I would no longer have to worry about going over the baggage limit.

I may be PCA's production editor but I'm certainly no technogeek. Thank god, then, that the Muvo's incredibly easy to use. I had this dinky device up and running in less than five minutes. You simply pull the player apart, plug it into your PC or Mac's USB port, drop on your required tracks and you're ready to go.

Okay, with space for just a couple of hours' music, the 128MB device isn't that capacious. But it's small, light, comes in under the magic £100 price tag and even doubles up as a portable hard drive. Now if I could just get the editor to up the allowance to £300, I'd trade this in for an Apple iPod like a shot...





Wendy Brewer, reporter
Palm Zire
Personal digital assistant
PalmOne: 0118 974 2700
www.palmone.com/uk
£80.01 inc VAT

PDA's could be classed as today's answer to the 1980s Filofax - the must-have accessory to organise your contacts. Having relied on shabby paper diaries for years, I thought my £100 would be best spent on one of the new breed of affordable PDA's to bring me into the digital age.

As all I plan to use my PDA for is jotting down the odd reminder or creating a to-do list, the Palm Zire is perfect. It supports the Graffiti handwriting application and, even better, it falls well within the £100 price range.

As a journalist I live by deadlines and appointments, so being able to set reminder alarms on the Zire is a blessing. Also, the limitations posed by the size of a paper diary mean you often end up writing abbreviated messages in postage stamp-sized boxes, which make no sense six months down the line. With a digital calendar you have the freedom to annotate dates as much as you want and you can easily scroll through months or even years ahead.

workstation or cut off my blood supply. Although I've never spun a tune in my life, the Sony MDR-V700 DJ headphones are the answer to my prayers. They are lightweight, well padded, a cool, sleek mix of silver and black, and have a very long coiled lead that sits neatly by the side of my PC.

Best of all, the sound quality is exceptional, allowing the volume control to be maintained at one acceptable level throughout any track.

Emma Northam, deputy editor

Windows XP Home Edition

Operating system

www.amazon.co.uk

£84.49 inc VAT

My Olympus digicam threw a fit the other day when I tried to hook it up, via its USB cable, to my Windows 98 laptop. Actually, it was the operating system that went all toys-out-of-cot on me, not my precious camera. Things just don't seem to want to play with Windows 98 anymore.

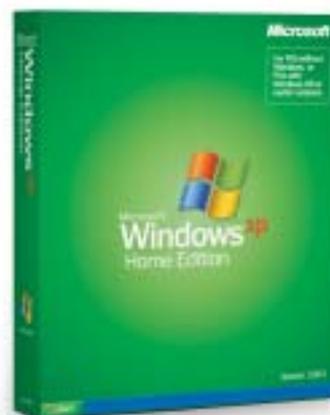
My Microtek scanner's not much happier with its working environment and that's about three years old. Why the sudden aversion? Has it heard about XP? Do scanners have ears?

The time has come for Windows XP to make an appearance on my laptop. Its green hills, fluffy clouds and promises of seamless compatibility have seduced me.

I'm still dual-booting between 98 and XP on my work PC but the former gets less and less of a look-in these days. When I do start it up, Active Desktop is there waiting, like the Tasmanian Devil, to spin a trail of disaster across the passionflower snapped by my Olympus.

Maybe it's my fault. I didn't defrag as often as I should have done and I'm sure I never ran Disk Cleanup. So okay, you win, camera. And I hope you're pleased with yourself, scanner.

But what's this - £84.49? Is that all it costs to rid me of this troublesome operating system? And I've still got change. Now what other shiny new, XP-compatible things can I buy for £15.51?





Aileen O'Donnell, art director
Microsoft Wireless Optical Mouse Ice White Special Edition
www.amazon.co.uk
£34.99 inc VAT

As an ardent Mac user, I'd learned to live without fancy two-buttoned mice. Having been born with another hand to alt-control, one button sufficed. But with a hypothetical £100 to spend I thought I'd try out the Microsoft Wireless Optical Mouse. It's not bad looking. Not as nice as my Mac one but it does have more bells and whistles. And the kind designers at Microsoft have obviously done their best to copy Apple's styling with this Ice White Special Edition.

And no wires either. Now that'll never work, I thought to myself. How wrong I was. It worked first time and within seconds I was hooked.

The mouse seemed too lightweight when I first pulled it out of its packaging, but as soon as the batteries were in I realised it was sturdy, nimble and responsive. Spot-on, in fact - no juddering and no cursor appearing miraculously at the other side of the screen.

The scrolling button is the business - brilliant for looking down endless folders of the magazine's artwork. I can now view long web pages with ease and the righthand button can also be set as a zoom button which, in QuarkXPress, is a necessity.

To be honest, the lack of wires doesn't really matter to me. I didn't find my arm extended to the end of the desk. In fact, I didn't even stray off my mousemat. But one important 'feature' that's missing is that, unlike my old Mac optical mouse, the IntelliMouse doesn't make a silhouette of a rabbit when pointed at a blank sheet of paper. Add that and for me there'll be no going back.

Rosemary Haworth, features editor

HP Deskjet 3650
Colour inkjet printer
HP: 0870 547 4747
www.hp.co.uk
£59, plus £14.99 and £8.99 for print media (all inc VAT)

I seem to have gone through an inordinate number of camera films this year but have hedged my bets and taken plenty of digital snaps too. With the whole lot now on my PC, I need to spend a few autumnal evenings identifying the best ones.

Once I've cherry-picked the most flattering portraits I'll want some copies to send to family and friends. But it's far too tedious to send them off to the photo lab and

not everyone has a PC on which to view the photos.

So I'd spend my £100 on a decent photo printer. HP's DeskJet 3650 caught my eye - it costs an entirely reasonable £59 and HP claims it can print as many as 12 colour pages per minute. I'll be after photo-realistic prints, so speed isn't as much of an issue as the detail, colour balance and paper quality.

The top colour resolution is 4,800x4,800dpi as long as I use decent inkjet paper and HP's 240g Premium Plus Photo should do the job. I'll also need some 7x5in photo paper for the pictures I want to reproduce as 'real' photos. Fortunately, even with the paper, I'm still within budget.



Phil Watson, freelancer

Backup Buddy
USB pen drive
BackupBuddy: 0114 267 2084
www.backupbuddy.co.uk
£99.99 inc VAT

Rather like Johnny Mnemonic, I am in the habit of carrying some solid state memory around with me. Unlike Johnny M, there's no USB plug in my ear.

But you can get USB storage that fits in your pocket, and I've been thinking about getting a BackupBuddy for a while. There's no need to lug information home in my bulky laptop when a matchbox-sized bit of memory will suffice.

My backup requirements are pretty simple - some documents and a few PowerPoint presentations - but would 128MB of memory be enough? The BackupBuddy could be a handy



addition to my growing collection of gadgets, particularly as I don't have to worry about sync software - I can just shove it in and stuff it full of data.

And that's pretty much what happened. There's no manual required with this thing. The packaging tells you to jam in the BackupBuddy and away you go. I was convinced that with the preposterous amount of data I have on my laptop, it didn't stand a chance. But 20 minutes later it was done. I notice Buddy claims 128MB of storage on the packaging, but with compression you can cram 500MB into this titchy little device. Impressive.

Andrew Charlesworth, editor

Broadband internet connection

NTL: 01256 752 000

www.ntl.com

£17.99 per month

Some of my colleagues' living rooms look like technology museums. But anyone who has ever visited my home will tell you I don't accumulate stuff. I'll test all manner of devices for *PC Advisor*, but for a gadget to be given house room it really has to prove its worth in my life.

There is one technology that I know would make an enormous difference - broadband internet access at home. I want to work efficiently from home, not have to keep dialling up for my email. I want the web to be my first choice when it comes to looking up information for everyday things, just like it is in the office. Damn it, I want this technology in my life.

That I don't have broadband at home already is a quirk of telecoms history. I live in a corner of southeast London where BT updated the local exchange for ADSL nearly two years ago. But I'm an NTL customer and in my specific postcode, through a series of tortuous takeovers, NTL inherited a half-baked cable network.

NTL kept telling me that broadband would be available in three months. So while the telco dug itself out from under its mountain of debt, I put off the expense of changing to BT. I'm a patient man. I can wait three months.

Three years later, just as I decide to bite the BT bullet, a leaflet drops through my door from NTL. Broadband is now available in my area in three flavours - 150Kbps, 600Kbps and 1Mbps, starting at £17.99 a month, including free installation and modem.

So my £100 will buy me four months of 600Kbps broadband. At last.



Richard Clooke, CD editor

Olympus Discovery Kit

Digital camera and binoculars

Olympus: 0800 072 0070

www.olympus.co.uk

Price £99.99 inc VAT

Possessing a pair of eyelashes Carole Smillie would be proud of isn't something I would readily admit to. You may be wondering why I would make such a personal revelation in the pages of this fine magazine. Well, it's all to do with how I'd spend my £100 if the editor were to shell it out in practice rather than in principle.

You see, I'm after a pair of binoculars. But what do long eyelashes have to do with this? Admittedly, if you don't share my predicament you may not realise how irritating it can be when you're using binoculars (or a telescope) to find what looks like a spider racing towards your eye socket.

Having a passing interest in wildlife and stargazing, coupled with an obsession with watching various sporting events, I've long hankered after a decent pair of 'bins' to assist me in these leisure pursuits without interference from creepy-crawlies, real or otherwise.

To this end, I chose the Olympus Discovery Kit as my fantasy buy because it includes a pair of DPC I binoculars and the added bonus of a Superzoom 80G film camera.

To test whether these binoculars are worth the cash I took them to the Wetland Centre in London. Result? A clear view of 18 herons, three moorhen chicks and far too many geese and ducks to mention here.

