



**M** P3s, or rather digital music, really has come of age. What started as a cool but impractical geek's plaything has become a mainstream music format. And unlike previous formats, it has become established without music industry support, despite the big companies' best efforts to kill it.

Now obviously – standard disclaimer coming up – we don't condone piracy. Artists and records companies should earn their fare wage from the music they produce. But it's not digital music that's the problem – piracy goes way back. And just because file sharing networks make it easier to get your hands on must-have tunes, it doesn't mean that everyone's going to give up purchasing music.

True, there are still those people who will take the music and run. But equally there are folk who buy a £5 album from a car boot sale knowing full well it's not the original item.

Users flock to filesharing sites because there isn't a decent, proper place to buy music online. The demand is there but no one is satisfying it. But there's more to digital music than downloading tracks. There's using paid-for tunes in a way that suits your lifestyle.

Confession time: until recently I only had a tape player in my car, but all my music was on CD. So I used to copy my CDs to tape to listen to in the car. Although officially you were meant to buy the album in tape format, record companies accepted that this was a ludicrous idea and didn't start prosecuting car drivers.

It's no different with MP3 – you own the CD, you should be allowed to listen to it in any format you want. And with devices like Creative's Muvo NX and Zen NX (see pages 40 and 48) you're going to want as much of your music in digital format as possible. ■

*Will Head, reviews editor*



## Scoring and testing explained

**E**ach 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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We look at the latest digital cameras, explain how they work, focus on their important features and list what you should look out for in each price category.

## 197 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 on the market.



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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.