

Top 10 Budget PCs

PC Advisor	Rank	PC Model	Price	Warranty	Budget PCs				WorldBench 4	Graphics card maker	Sound card	DVD drive speed	Operating system, software and extras	Comments
					Processor type	RAM	Motherboard	Monitor						
BEST BUY	1	Mesh Matrix 3000+ MX TFT 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com Last month 1	£1,244 inc VAT	3-year onsite warranty	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Ultra ATA	Asus A7N8X Deluxe	17in Sharp LL-T17A4 flat-panel 0.264mm 1,280x1,024	133	ATI ATI Radeon 9800	onboard nForce2 5 x Creative Inspire 5300	8x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004	The Mesh's components aren't groundbreaking but this PC still offers plenty of bite, scoring 133 in our WorldBench 4 performance tests. Throw in the extensive warranty and Microsoft Works Suite, and you have a very modestly-priced system that gives the other PCs a run for their money.
	2	Carrera Octan Ultimate 3200pa 0871 222 3456 www.carrerassc.co.uk Last month 2	£1,410 inc VAT	3-year onsite, 2-year return-to-base warranty	AMD Athlon XP 3200+ 2.2GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 160GB Serial ATA	Asus A7N8X Deluxe	19in AG Neovo F419 flat-panel 0.294mm 1,280x1,024	136	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder)	Creative Audigy2 ZS Platinum Pro 7 x Creative Inspire 7700	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004	If you don't mind its high price, the Carrera is an all-round winner. The audio is driven by Creative's Audigy2 ZS Platinum Pro sound card and heart-stopping Inspire 7700 speaker system, boasting the best sound in the chart. The monitor is also outstanding – the only 19in flat-panel in this month's line-up.
RECOMMENDED	3	Mesh Matrix 64 3200 BPC 0870 046 4747 www.meshcomputers.com Last month 3	£1,399 inc VAT	2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty	AMD Athlon 64 3200+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 2 x 120GB Serial ATA	Asus K8V Deluxe	17in Sharp LL-T17A4 flat-panel 0.264mm 1,280x1,024	144	Sapphire ATI Radeon 9800	onboard SoundMax 6 x Creative Inspire 6700	8x/4x/4x/4x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works 7.0, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE	This PC is all about blistering performance. A score of 144 in WorldBench 4 makes it the fastest in the chart. Its processor performs well and runs quickly with 512MB of RAM. Mesh also impresses with its 240GB of storage space. This system looks good and its sizeable warranty provides peace of mind.
	4	Microland Tech AD 102.01 0870 443 0399 www.microlandtechnology.com Last month 4	£1,399 inc VAT	2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty	AMD Athlon 64 3200+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 160GB Serial ATA	Gigabyte GA-8VT800	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	142	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	Creative Audigy2 ZS 7 x Creative Inspire 7700	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, games bundle	Microland is one of the few manufacturers to offer a decent sound card and – to complement the dual-format DVD writer – a separate CD-RW drive for speedier burning. It's also primed for performance and the score of 142 in WorldBench 4 proves that this is a fast PC. Its design, however, lacks the wow factor.
RECOMMENDED	5	Evesham Axis 64 3200+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com Last month 5	£1,399 inc VAT	2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty	AMD Athlon 64 3200+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 160GB Serial ATA	MSI K8T Neo	17in ViewSonic VP171s flat-panel 0.28mm 1,280x1,024	143	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder)	onboard Realtek 5 x Creative Inspire P580	8x/4x/4x/2x/4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE	The Evesham is the second fastest machine in the chart but, with integrated audio and only 5.1 channel speakers, the sound solution isn't up to scratch and its graphics card returned surprisingly slow results in our Quake III tests. With such a high price tag, we felt Evesham could have done slightly better.
	6	Multivision Ionix 98 AIW 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk Last month 6	£1,175 inc VAT	3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty	AMD Athlon XP 3200+ 2.2GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 180GB Ultra ATA	MSI K7N2	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	134	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder)	Creative Audigy2 ZS 5 x Creative Inspire P580	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002	The Ionix's processor is the very capable 2.2GHz Athlon XP 3200+. Combined with 512MB of fast DDR RAM this system should be able to handle just about anything. The speaker setup is disappointing though – five satellites and a subwoofer don't use the Audigy2 sound card to its full potential.
RECOMMENDED	7	Multivision Ionix WS 57 Ultra 0870 066 0882 www.multivision.co.uk Last month 7	£1,211 inc VAT	3-year onsite, 3-year return-to-base warranty	AMD Athlon 64 3200+ 2GHz	512MB DDR RAM 160GB Ultra ATA	MSI K8T Neo	19in Mitsubishi Diamond Pro 930SB 0.24mm 1,600x1,200	135	nVidia nVidia GeForce FX 5700 Ultra	onboard Realtek 6 x Creative Inspire 6700	12x/4x/4x/2x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Microsoft Works Suite 2004, games bundle	This Multivision doesn't offer outstanding features, but it is a well-insured model that's good value for money. It comes with a decent software and games bundle and its monitor offers the best display quality in the chart. It's just a shame the sound and graphics cards don't match those of the competition.
	8	Best Price Poweroid 2100 020 8904 3347 www.bestpricecomputers.co.uk Last month 8	£1,410 inc VAT	2-year return-to-base, 3-year labour-only warranty	Intel Pentium 4 3.2GHz	1GB DDR RAM 160GB Serial ATA	Asus P4C800 Deluxe	17in Iiyama ProLite E430S flat-panel 0.264mm 1,280x1,024	127	nVidia nVidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra	onboard SoundMax 5 x Videologic ZXR-550	8x/4x/4x/2x/4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Intervideo WinDVD Suite	The Poweroid has great graphics, an aluminium keyboard and a snazzily designed tough case. Sadly, its performance didn't quite match its looks. The WorldBench 4 score of 127 was the lowest in the chart and we were disappointed with the sound system. The graphics card, however, really stepped up in our tests.
RECOMMENDED	9	NetHighStreet Net PA 999 0870 777 5252 www.nethighstreet.com Last month 9	£1,175 inc VAT	1-year return-to-base, 1-year labour-only warranty	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 160GB Ultra ATA	MSI K7N2	19in Samsung SyncMaster 957MB 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	132	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 Pro	Creative Audigy2 ZS 5 x Creative Inspire 5300	12x/4x/4x/2x/2x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, OpenOffice, PC-cillin 2002	A good machine, but this former Recommended PC no longer has the pace to keep up with the competition. The graphics card provides excellent visuals that are ably displayed by the Samsung monitor. The warranty, though, is disappointing because it only lasts for two years without any onsite cover.
	10	Evesham Axis 3000+ 0870 160 9500 www.evesham.com Last month 10	£1,295 inc VAT	2-year onsite, 1-year return-to-base warranty	AMD Athlon XP 3000+ 2.17GHz Barton core	512MB DDR RAM 120GB Ultra ATA	MSI K7N2	19in ViewSonic G90f+ 0.25mm 1,600x1,200	130	ATI ATI Radeon 9800 SE (All-in-Wonder)	Creative Audigy2 ZS 7 x Creative Inspire 7700	12x/4x/4x/2.4x/2.4x (DVD-ROM/-R/+R/-RW/+RW)	Windows XP Home, Ability Office 2002, Pinnacle Studio 8.0 SE	The styling of the Evesham is definitely different, but it won't be to everyone's taste. The ViewSonic GF90f+ is also unusual and looks like a TV. The graphics card is a great addition – it provides good frame rates for gamers and has a 125-channel TV tuner. The software bundle provides plenty of multimedia options.



The Mesh is a fine-looking, fast and well-priced PC and comes bundled with great software

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.

- **Processor** AMD Athlon processors dominate the entire chart at the moment and the 64bit 3200+ looks a popular choice. If you prefer to take the Intel-branded route then look for a Pentium 4 that runs at speeds of at least 3GHz. 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.
- **Memory** 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. Shop around and you

- can even get 1GB. Aim for DDR333 (PC2700) or DDR400 (PC3200) RAM as this gives the best performance.
- **Storage** While 100GB of storage should be ample for most PC users, Budget systems tend to come with a hard drive of at least 120GB. Though you may never fill it, go for 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.
- **Monitor** 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.
- **Graphics card** In terms of dedicated graphics memory, look for a minimum of 128MB. Top-of-the-range cards include nVidia's GeForce FX 5950 Ultra and ATI's Radeon 9800 XT and Pro. However,

- if you don't need astoundingly fast frame rates all the time then the GeForce FX 5700 and ATI Radeon 9600 XT are still very capable graphics cards.
- **Sound card** 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.