Next month

TECHNOLOGY KNOW-HOW FOR 2004

Whether you're in the car, on the move or at home, we investigate which products and technologies are really worth having and which are more hype than helpful.

Digital versus SLR photography

Plus! *PC Advisor* compares, like-for-like, film-based cameras and digital equivalents for value, ease of use, features and image quality.

Web wisdom

This feature is packed with our website recommendations, whether you want to improve your mind, keep an eye on your health, track down holiday bargains so you can enjoy some winter sun or simply get some help using your PC.

Here's how Stress-free surfing

Keep your kids – and your precious information – safe from prying eyes. This workshop also shows you how to minimise or disable pop-ups and other annoyances as well as how to avoid those dangerous viruses.

Here's how Switching hard drives

How to go about choosing and adding a second hard disk to your PC or swapping your existing drive for a faster, more capacious one.

Technofile

Get the lowdown on the least understood PC component, the motherboard.
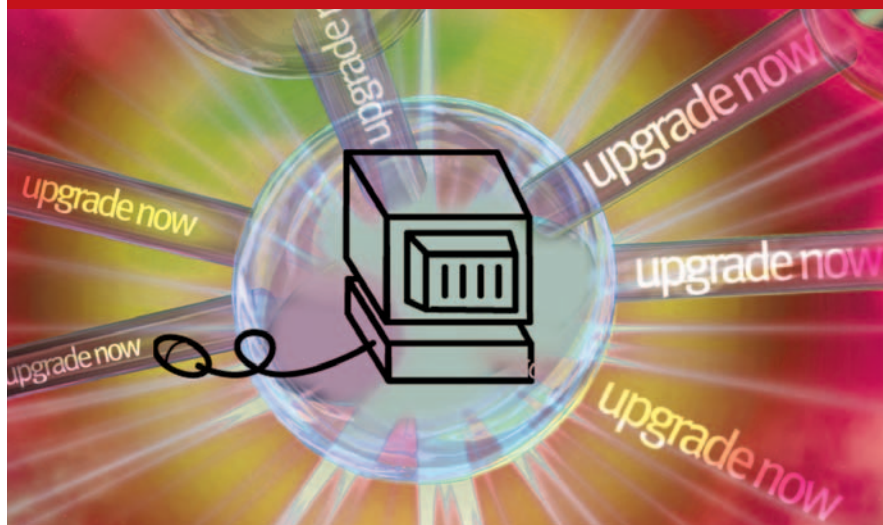
Top 10 charts

Budget PCs We take a fresh look at those PCs designed to perform to the max while not costing you the earth. The latest offerings go head-to-head in our chart battle for the top spot.

Power and Budget notebooks We've just slashed the starting price for our notebooks chart to £701, so which are the best Budget and high-spec machines this month?

Spring 04 issue on sale 5 February

Byteback

Andrew Charlesworth

Upgrade in haste, repent at leisure

Upgrading makes your life easier, your workflow faster and your computer operate better. Well, that's what the manufacturers say. Andrew Charlesworth begs to differ

Why does the computer industry expect me to upgrade my entire system every 18 months? Because the latest software and faster hardware will make me more productive, say the manufacturers. Rubbish, say I.

I'm shown demonstrations of software with it's new user interface, features and menus where operations that used to take six clicks now take one. But after all this time I've got used to working in a particular way with my old software. Upgrading means I have to learn how to use all these new features from scratch so my productivity goes down, not up.

And the more fundamental the software, the worse the problem is so a new operating system really louses up my life. Thank you Microsoft.

Computers have the potential to automate lots of mundane tasks and make us more productive workers, but not when they change so quickly. The rate of change needs to slow down to match the pace of the human brain.

Why does Microsoft upgrade the operating system so often? Because its shareholders are addicted to Microsoft's shares growing at a double-digit rate. To expand that fast you have to turn over products at a phenomenal degree.

Consequently, the computer business has a built-in obsolescence the rag trade would die for. And the productivity of computer users remains flat as we struggle to keep up.