

Readers' writes

While our star letter writer is getting it in the neck from his boss for recommending one manufacturer, another PC maker is neglecting to answer the phone. We've got your views on photography, tips on using multiple monitors and a warning about Microsoft's website

✉ Pay-as-you-go broadband

In March 04's *PC Advisor* your *Quick, it's the January sales!* news story mentioned that BT had a pay-as-you-go wireless broadband. So I tried a search for 'pay-as-you-go broadband' in Google and was surprised to find that some ISPs do offer it.

This is an excellent idea. I would move to broadband on this basis, as would many of my friends. Charging for its use, however, depends on the number of megabytes downloaded rather than the time spent online.

Is possible for you to write an article which compares services and explains the charging method of these pay-as-you-go broadband ISPs? ✉ **David Davies, Somerset**

Guy Dixon, associate editor, replies: we agree that the arrival of pay-as-you-go broadband is a significant development that could push broadband into the mainstream - way beyond the UK's current 3.5 million high-speed subscribers.

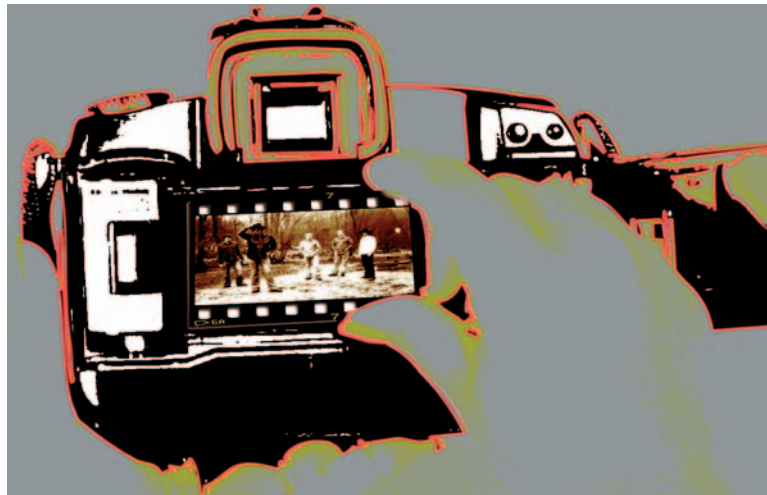
You're right, though, that complex issues surround the charging of pay-as-you-go broadband. This is because people use broadband in different ways. The ability to predict network capacity is central to the way broadband ISPs conduct business and if one customer spends all his or her online time swapping music files via peer-to-peer networks such as Kazaa, he or she is likely to cost the ISP more than someone doing research for a university thesis.

We'll be addressing this very issue in an extended news story in the May 04 edition of PC Advisor.

✉ A problem shared

I had never used the *PC Advisor* discussion forum until this week. I had a problem and posted my thread. To my surprise I received two postings within four hours.

Further postings completely solved the problem and my computer is now operating better than it has ever done. I am very grateful to the forum and to the two people who



gave their advice. You have some extremely knowledgeable readers.

✉ **John Robertson, via email**

✉ Photo finish

I enjoyed Spencer Dalziel's article about the future of photography (*Photo wars*, Spring 04) and agree with many of his opinions. However, as a long(ish) time user of both analogue and digital cameras, I think that he might have taken his discussion a little further.

For example: it is undeniable that negatives and slides have a higher effective resolution than most digital cameras can manage, but I would argue that standard commercial prints do not. Also, I find it almost impossible to maintain old negatives and slides free of dust, dirt and hairs - something that becomes obvious if they are used to generate new prints.

Finally, neither prints, negatives, nor slides are completely colour-stable, so the whole experience has a limited shelf life.

In exchange for their lower resolution, digital images offer a number of advantages. Many attempts can be made to capture the perfect hard-to-repeat image at no extra cost and poor shots can be electronically improved.

For me, raw images have become the starting point of a whole new hobby. They can be cropped,

manipulated, combined into collages, assembled into presentations and slideshows or published on CDs, DVDs and the web.

It is my experience that the resolution of modern digital cameras is adequate, even for quite demanding enlargements. As an enthusiastic amateur, I would not relish the idea of returning to a world of variable quality film processing, lost unrepeatable negatives, boxes of dusty slides of uncertain order and orientation, hot and noisy slide projectors and finger-slicing projection screens. ✉ **Dave Williams, via email**

Spencer Dalziel, senior reviews writer, replies: I know what you mean about the impermanence and instability of film media. It's physically prone to disintegration and colour instability, whereas digital gives the same quality regardless of how many times you print a shot.

It is ironic then that we still live in a world where we think of pictures in a digital format saved on a PC as something transitory.

✉ Windows warning

I want to pass on a word of warning to all *PC Advisor* readers: it would seem Microsoft is aiding and abetting the proliferation of email viruses.

I recently tried to get some assistance from the Microsoft website. I could not find what I wanted on its knowledgebase so I moved on to one of its community newsgroups and posted a query.

As a new user I innocently assumed this would be safe as it is part of the Microsoft website. But I was horrified to find that my email address was posted for all the world to see. Since then I have been inundated with messages from my ISP reporting emails with viruses attached.

Furthermore, there is no provision to remove postings from this site to stop the tide of infection. So I rang Microsoft UK for some advice on what to do next. The person I spoke to confirmed that it was not possible for users to delete or edit postings, but said they would try to get mine removed.

I was told that Microsoft does not recommend posting of personal details. If it sees fit to issue this advice why does it add this data to the postings? I did not realise by inputting my email address on the original form would result in it being published with the query. ✉ **Dave Street, via email**

Simon Easterman, staff writer, replies: there are those in the IT security business who would say that by making Windows so virus-porous, Microsoft isn't so much aiding and abetting as rolling out the red carpet for pranksters the world over. It pays to be as cagey as possible with your personal details.

✉ Double vision

I was most interested in the article, *Work faster, not harder*, in the March 04 issue, particularly the idea of hooking up two monitors to a PC.

I would like to do this, but have one or two queries. For starters, how do I tell the computer on which screen an application or file is to be opened? Would I need more than one mouse or would this be an option to decide upon each time?

Can such a system be implemented with two flat screens? Finally, can you explain what 'VGA port' and 'DVI' are? ✉ **Ewa Posner**

Star letter

I knew this would happen. I knew I should have kept my mouth shut, but there you go, I just could not keep quiet.

My boss said he needed a new PC to cope with his flight-sim games and he mentioned a couple of PCs he thought looked good.

Okay, said I, but you might want to buy from Evesham or Dell. Why?

Because they provide the best customer service according to *PC Advisor*, and that is a top-notch publication. I then cheerfully dumped your latest edition on his desk and told him of the days of Dan when all around me, including Dell customers, were tearing their hair out because of poor support and I was blissfully happy. Evesham sounded very like Dan to me.

Oh dear. I am now hiding in corners and doing everything I can to avoid him. Bits didn't work and they needed to update the Bios. Not only that, he doesn't want to take a day off for the engineer to attend so he is having the various bits sent to him for him to fix the PC. Nice support, but why release a PC with the wrong Bios? Still, I could have recommended Multivision. Gissajob! ✉ **Ian Graham, via email**

Simon Easterman, staff writer, replies: ah, the perils of giving advice on computers. Not something we'd know anything about round here...



Will Head, reviews editor, replies: connecting two monitors to your PC requires two things: a graphics card with dual outputs and an operating system that supports multiple monitors.

If you're using a recent version of Windows you should be fine as multiple monitor support has been included since Windows 98.

As for finding a card with dual outputs, there are plenty on the market. A graphics card can use one of two connectors: DSUB (sometimes referred to as VGA) is the old analogue connector but it's still common today. DVI (digital visual interface) is a new standard that can support both digital and analogue connections, though you may find some implementations that only support digital.

The reason behind the new interface is that while CRT monitors are analogue, flat-panels are digital. If you connect a flat-panel using the

DSUB connection, the signal is converted from digital to analogue by the graphics card and then back to digital by the flat-panel before being displayed. This unnecessary conversion results in image degradation and is removed by the exclusively digital connection via DVI.

Some graphics cards feature two normal DSUB connectors, while others offer one DSUB and one or two DVI connectors - it doesn't really matter. As long as you have suitable monitors to attach to the relevant connectors on your card it will work.

In terms of operation, your desktop appears as normal in Windows, just wider with the display spanning two monitors. You can choose what applications appear on which screen by moving them around with the mouse in the usual way.

You move the mouse as normal, and when you hit the left edge of one monitor it moves on to the monitor on the right.

Write to us

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Our star letter writer will win the Buffalo Wireless Starter Kit worth £99.