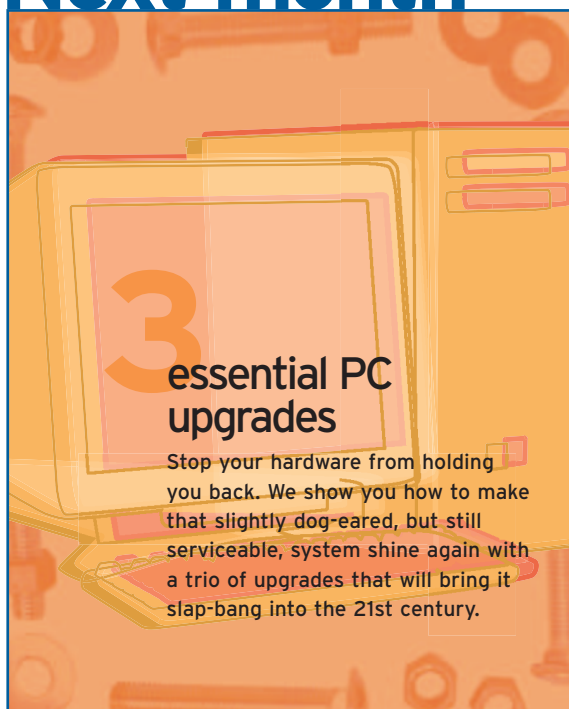


# Next month



## 3 essential PC upgrades

Stop your hardware from holding you back. We show you how to make that slightly dog-eared, but still serviceable, system shine again with a trio of upgrades that will bring it slap-bang into the 21st century.



### Paying for it

Broadband web access is now fast enough for you to enjoy live sports action and movie trailers without having to endure jerky images and irritating time lags. We take a look at the premium content that is available and reveal what it's worth shelling out extra for.

### Going it alone

Fed up of working for someone else? Be your own boss! With the aid of *PC Advisor* you'll be able to plan and cost out the technology you need to get started.

### Music to your ears

We'll show you how to tweak audio files to remove the hisses and crackles from your music collection.

### Fingers and thumbs

Keyboards and mice are your primary tools for interacting with your PC. Investing in better ones will improve your computing experience and keep physical strains at bay.

### Tried & tested

Few components in your PC are more important than the hard drive, but how do you know which one is right for you? We test the best to offer you the definitive guide.

### Top 10 charts

**Superbudget PCs** As manufacturers fight for your custom, there are bargains to be had. Our chart will help you get the maximum return on your hard-earned money.

**Inkjet and mono laser printers** Get the most out of your desktop publishing experience. We rate the best units on today's market

May 04 issue on sale 25 March

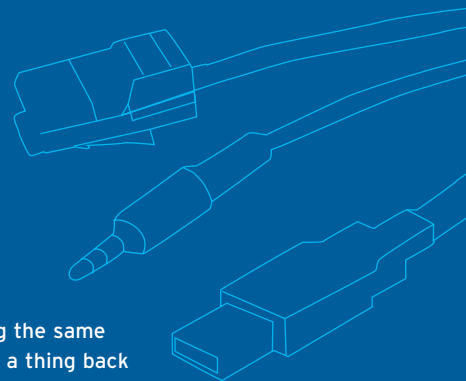
# Byteback

Rosemary Haworth



## Socket to me

Drowning under a deluge of cables, wires and plugs, it's no wonder that Rosemary Haworth dreams of a world where everything could be hooked up to the PC by one universal connection



I must be regressing. I'm experiencing the same frustration I did when I was a slip of a thing back in the mid-70s. And it's something as advanced as 21st-century PC kit that's causing me to revert to type.

Remember when you first started nursery or primary school and were given an assortment of brightly coloured plastic shapes to play with? You learned how each object's properties differed and, to demonstrate your understanding, pushed each of them in turn through the slot of the same shape.

My current dilemma isn't much different. As with those cubes and pyramids, it comes down to matching shapes to slots - only this time they are smaller and fiddlier and they all look the same.

That's right, my gripe is about the endless array of plugs and sockets on every variety of electrical device. Okay, I may have hoarded more than my fair share of gadgetry in the past couple of years, but even allowing for that this is a ridiculous situation.

Let's see, I've got a flatbed scanner with a square USB-B connector, a couple of digital cameras - both with standard USB-A connectors - plus FireWire on the better of the two models should I wish to vary the way I download still and video clips to my PC.

So far, so simple. But then I've got other gadgets with different types of connection, mini USB and mini FireWire plugs among them. I also have webcams, thumb drives, MP3 players and bargain-basement budget DV cameras, none of which have connections that match each other or anything else - though all hook up to my PC with a flat USB plug at the other end.

However carefully I try and keep the relevant cable with its product, when it comes to it, I don't just want to store them in their boxes - I'd like to be able to use them. And why should I be unable to use my little DV camera just because I can't find the proprietary cable to transfer the images off it and on to my computer (it's not swanky enough to warrant a media card). Wouldn't it be better if there was a standard connection so I wouldn't need to rely on trial and error every time I want to copy files to my PC?

Now consumer electronics and PC peripherals are trying to converge, there's a whole new area of sockets and connection types to contend with, though in this area at least the Digital Home Working Group is attempting to impose some order. And they call this plug and play!