

readers' writes

Our Reviews department get some exacting questions this month, with one reader pinning them down on the difference between megapixels and dots per inch and another with some of his own advice on how best to rate digital cameras. There's also a lot of discussion of broadband, regarding the security risks it entails and the vexing question of whether it's really worth it

Insect repellent

I've been a keen internet user for some years and have tried to keep up with security aspects of life on the web since I started. Last week I took the plunge into broadband and got the shock of my life when almost immediately I was zapped with a worm/trojan virus. My antivirus software took care of it right away, but another hit me a couple of days later, then another a couple of days after that.

The techies at my ISP told me no doubt a hacker was 'stealing' my cable bandwidth. The solution was a firewall and after installing one the system is fine. But that left me with a bunch of questions. We hear little of hackers with respect to ordinary home users and aren't firewalls things to stop your house burning down?

Terry Potter, via email

Rosemary Haworth replies: good point. It's something we've pointed out in connection to broadband access in the past, but it bears repeating. If you turn to the broadband section at the back of this magazine, we've a workshop showing you how to protect your PC with firewall software.

No kidding

In your October 02 issue news article *MSN versus AOL over internet bucks* it says that version 8.0 of MSN will "offer weekly reports on children's internet use". Recently there have been many complaints about privacy on the internet involving websites storing information about their visitors.

Surely privacy applies to children too? Although obviously well intended, who knows who could find out about what your children are interested in and even use this information to set up 'meetings'. As a 14-year-old I can see where the concern comes from, but this system could do more harm than good.

Jon Shephard, via email

Digital camera storage

For some years I have been on the verge of buying a digital camera. However, I was not prepared to pay almost the price of the camera again for storage cards to make up for their inadequate capacity for high-resolution pictures. It is downright uncommercial to pour millions of pounds into this (now not so) new technology without putting right the major and probably more easily remediable problem for potential users in the mass market.

PC Advisor could do more to help through its Top 10 charts. It seems to me that storage has not featured at all strongly in the criteria for positioning in the camera charts. I realise that the exact number depends on the shots taken and their complexity, but it does give a better idea than no comment at all on a very important item, at least to me. Please help the cause and give storage capacity a big part of your assessment. If the manufacturers read the charts as avidly as I do then there is chance of progress.

David Hunt, via email

Spencer Dalziel replies: storage is an important part of digital photography and manufacturers aren't helping the consumer experience by bundling 16MB cards on £600 cameras. That said, we can't blame most camera manufacturers for the cost of storage cards as they don't make them – apart from Sony, which ties its customers to its own Memory Stick format.

On the plus side the storage card business is very competitive at the moment. Many formats are vying for trade. Let's hope this will bring the price down and end users will see better storage capacities being bundled with their new digital cameras. We do factor in storage capacity when placing cameras in our charts.

Back for good

I have just returned to subscribing to PC Advisor after having spent 18 months trying other computer magazines only to find that it is by far the best one for my purposes. This is particularly because the way your digital cameras charts are set out is far better than other publications. However, one thing still bothers me.

What is the relationship between the resolution of a printer and a digital camera? For instance if my printer has a resolution of 1,440x720 (which equals just over a million dpi) what is the point of buying a camera with a resolution 2Mp? Can you equate pixels to dpi?

David Davies, via email

Spencer Dalziel replies: dpi (dots per inch), megapixels and resolution are often mixed and matched in the description of digital imaging processes, so it's no wonder people get confused. As a basic guide, image dpi represents the resolution (the number of dots per inch) of the image file that is captured by your digital camera. Printer dpi represents how many dots per inch the printer uses to print the image. The megapixel rating of a digital camera describes its ability to capture resolution,

Star letter

I have just finished reading Readers choice, October 02. What a right old laugh! That was me, that was. Poor old Paritos: "There's no need to spend more than £750 on a PC because I don't want the extras. As long as I can surf the internet, send emails and get the best value for money, I'll be a happy man."

I remember looking to buy my first PC nearly two years ago. All I wanted was to surf the internet and send emails, so I bought a budget PC without all the extras. Little did I realise that the future of PCs would hold more for me than surfing the web to read barebones text and sending some 'Hello Mum, I'll be round for tea' emails.

Make no mistake people, unless you really are a barebones type of person who still has a black and white telly and a Reliant Robin because 'they do the job', a bargain-basement PC will not be sufficient. Don't fool yourself! Paritos' first thing to go will be the onboard sound – a nice Audigy card should do him for a few months. Then he will soon be telling himself that a 17in monitor is obviously straining his eyes and he needs a 19in number, maybe a nice TFT job. Then there is the appeal of online gaming and that will probably need a new graphics card.

And the story goes on. Two years ago everyone I knew who had a PC told me how I would want more than a basic system. It was soon apparent how right they were and I am now waiting for the ATI 9700 Pro to arrive at Watfords and the nForce chipset motherboards to be released for me to upgrade. After all, who can live without AGP 8x, DDR 400 and a 3Dmark score of less than 10,000?

So good luck, Paritos, with keeping to a basic system. By the way, you know that a well-equipped PC makes a great video-editing machine too, then there is the ability to have PC-housed TV, high-quality digital photo-editing and printing... Be assured, the list goes on. At least you won't have a problem thinking of things you would like this Christmas. See you soon in a Quake III server.
Kenton Evans, Birchington, Kent

Andrew Charlesworth replies: we discussed with Paritos about buying a more powerful PC for future needs, but he decided that he would rather wait to upgrade to a better machine in a few years when his child is nearer school age. Paritos made up his mind that he didn't want the PC to become a hobby – just yet – and it's not our place to up-sell. But if you're prepared to spend the time to get the most from a top-notch PC, Kenton's right – go for the highest spec your budget will stretch to.

Our star letter writer wins a Daisy Technology PhotoClip 5032 worth £99 inc VAT. This smart convergence device combines a digital camera, MP3 player, AVI movie camera, voice recorder and webcam. For more details, see www.visionradionet.net.

If you want to air your views in these pages, please write to PC Advisor, FREEPOST 20 LON87018, London W1E 4AN, fax us on 020 7580 1935, or email us at pcadvisor_letters@idg.com. Please mark emails 'Readers' writes' in the subject heading.

in terms of pixels per inch, to produce the image file. If you're using a 1,200x1,200dpi inkjet printer it can't improve the basic quality of the image file – only more pixels in the original image from the digital camera can do that. So depending whether an image is shot on a 1Mp, 2Mp or 3Mp

digital camera, it will look noticeably different in quality when printed at the top dpi setting on an inkjet.

Goggle-boxed

I use the internet every day and am bombarded with offers of broadband

connections at ludicrously inflated prices. But under certain conditions it would appear better speeds are already available on my humble 56K modem. On my PC I can tune into the Beeb at any time and listen to sounds that are getting to be as good as those from my ancient tuner. And worse, I can watch live television using the free RealPlayer. Its meter chirpily tells me this is being received at between 30-40Kbps, which is up to eight times as fast as the downloads and updates I get from the web.

It also occurs to me that under the TV in the lounge there is a brand-new digibox on a copper cable which includes a modem and inputs for a PC, printer and fax. Despite this my ISP continues to ply me with offers of trailing the same sort of cable round the house to a PC, charging me £40 per month for the privilege of getting a speed increase identical to the difference between my download speed and my telemodem speed.

Is this a bad case of the emperor's new clothes, greed run out of control, or realising the average being is too thick to cotton on? If it isn't, and let's hope not, what please is going on?

Peter Harrap, via email

Guy Dixon replies: while the broadband providers, cable and ADSL alike are blitzing us with high-speed hyperbole, the ubiquity of narrowband will prevail. For applications such as email your 56K modem will continue to shine. The BBC is a world leader when it comes to streaming multimedia content via both narrowband and broadband, and its deep pockets have allowed it to make infrastructural investment that your average shareware publisher couldn't match.

However, this is not a case of emperor's new clothes. The broadband service you are being offered sounds like Telewest's Blueyonder broadband 1Mbps product – £39.99 per month – which is currently the fastest domestic broadband offering on the market. This is clearly a lot more than you are paying for your 56K connection, but as with so many things in life you get what you pay for. If you're impressed with the quality of the BBC's streamed content using your 56K modem, you'll be stunned by its multimedia content over a 1Mbps connection, especially on its broadband-specific service (www.bbc.co.uk/broadband/entertainment). ■

