news

THE MONTH IN FOCUS

BREAKING NEWS

As we went to press, doctors declared that if you let your kids loose on vibrating games console controllers they could get 'white finger', which backs up what we all think – they should get out more. On the flip side, *PC Advisor* is the only mag to be carrying a review of Microsoft's Xbox games console. You can read about it first on page 59.

OTHER NEWS

18   Kodak cries off

Although it's a limited victory as it never went to court, Kodak has finally given in over its too-cheap digital camera offer.

18   Tiny leaves ripples

One of the largest PC firms just went to the wall and Time's picked up the pieces. Finding a silver lining here is going to be tough.

19   Staying smart

Children need more protection on the internet, but they also need space to explore the web.

20   Keeping secrets

UK firms that don't follow the Data Protection Act 1998 will this year find themselves in hot, expensive water.

22   Balancing act

Patricia Hewitt, top dog at the DTI, has announced a scheme to get more women into science – not before time.

Kodak caves over camera cock-up

Camera maker forced to come up with the goods to avoid legal exposure

Online retailers will be going through their auto-response emails to customer orders with a legal toothcomb, following Kodak's decision to head off the threat of expensive legal action and supply up to 2,500 digital cameras worth £329 a piece for just £100 each.

Kodak's capitulation at the very end of January came as pressure mounted from *PC Advisor* readers who had taken Kodak up on its new year 'Special Deal', in which the company mistakenly offered its DX3700 camera for £229 less than its intended price.

"Kodak initially thought they could tough it out," said a spokesman for the Consumers Association. "But they've come under an awful lot of fire. In the future companies will be very careful before they start arm-twisting their customers. It would have been better if they had acted sooner."

This represents a u-turn for the camera manufacturer. Kodak had initially fobbed off claims of contractual obligation to supply, despite sending emails to customers which everyone bar Kodak thought confirmed the order.

With the first case against Kodak due to come before the county courts, the company preferred to take a hit of possibly more than £600,000 rather than endure a hauling over some legal hot coals.

Kodak's confirmatory message had crucially stated that the email should be kept as a receipt of the purchase. Under the civil law once a retailer has agreed to a customer's offer then a contract between the two has been made.

Consumer rights advocates hailed the company's climb-down as an important one, although industry watchers were disappointed that the dispute never reached the precedent-setting status afforded by a court decision.

To find out how *PC Advisor* readers turned the screws on Kodak, visit our Registered User's Area at www.pcadvisor. co.uk/registered. Turn to *ConsumerWatch* on page 34 for the full story.

Fast finds firms negligent

Almost two thirds of UK businesses are still not complying with software regulations, according to the latest research by Fast (Federation Against Software Theft). "These figures make alarming reading," said Richard Willmott, head of Fast. "Put simply, non-compliance is a criminal offence," he warned.

Although Fast recognises that a lot of small companies are not fully aware of their legal obligations with regards to software, many firms are guilty of simply ignoring them.

"We cannot believe the amount of companies we contacted that have just not taken this issue seriously," added Willmott. But if companies are intent on ignoring their duty then they face criminal charges.

"We issue full guidelines with all software about registration, copying software and what responsibilities companies have for software. But there is only so much we can do," said a Microsoft spokesman. "If they decide not to follow it they will face prosecution."

The number of companies still operating outside the law, despite its extensive campaign to raise awareness, has astounded Fast. "No matter the size of your organisation, if you are a company director then the onus is on you to develop and sustain a legal software environment," said Willmott. "Company directors are criminally liable." For more information on your legal obligations visit www.fast.org.uk.

> "Put simply, non-compliance is a criminal offence. Company directors are criminally liable"
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> **Richard Willmott, Federation Against Software Theft**

Tiny succumbs to the brand of Time

Time is to take over Tiny's brand name and retail stores.

The deal will surely worry staff at Scotland's Fullarton Computer Industries, which made Tiny's PCs, as Time is set to move production to its own plant in Burnley.

Time assured customers it will honour all Tiny's warranties under existing terms and conditions. It must also be the case that Time should take over other Tiny commitments, such as its work with the KidSmart project (see *Safe surfing is child's play,* right).

But some might see the takeover as bad news for customers. Time came bottom in last year's *Which?* report on PC brands, scoring worst in all three tables from ease of setup to reliability. Tiny, on the other hand, fared much better in all categories.

"The report was unfair and didn't take into account that many of our customers are first-time buyers and therefore experience more difficulties than business customers," countered Time. Time also did poorly in *PC Advisor's* own Service & Reliability report, published in the November 01 issue.

There is no specific figure on how many job losses are expected at this stage, but Time has said job cuts will be necessary across all areas. Whether Fullarton, which also makes IBM's PCs, will shed workers is unknown, but the signs aren't good.

Safe surfing is child's play

Children's internet charity Childnet, the Home Office and PC firm Time are backing a scheme called KidSmart, which is aimed at making eight- to 11-year-olds aware of the dangers of unsupervised internet use.

The KidSmart campaign was launched at the Bett education and technology show held in Olympia, London in January. As part of the scheme, Bett will visit primary schools and parents' evenings across the country. To accompany the school tour, there's also a dedicated website at www.kidsmart.org.uk with resources and information for teachers, parents and children.

The scheme has the support of Beverley Hughes, chair of the government's taskforce on child protection on the internet, which was formed in March 2001. "Parents, teachers and children themselves all have a role to play in surfing safely," said Hughes, "and the KidSmart programme will help protect younger users as they explore this fascinating new world."

Childnet spokesman Vaughn Armstrong said KidSmart is not intended to scare parents and teachers or deter children from using the internet, but to encourage safe use of its resources. However, the five KidSmart rules (right) all deal with the dangers of internet usage and not the benefits. Also, paranoia about the use of the internet by paedophiles is a regular feature in the tabloid press.

KidSmart complements the Home Office's 'Wise up to the net' campaign, which is currently running radio ads highlighting the dangers posed by paedophiles masquerading as children online.

KidSmart rules

1. Keep it a secret **Always keep your name, address, mobile phone number and password private – it's like giving out the key to your home.**

2. Don't trust anyone **Meeting someone you have become friends with in cyberspace can be dangerous. Only do so with your parent's or carer's permission and when they can be present.**

3. Don't accept unknown files **Accepting emails or opening files from people you don't know or trust can get you into trouble – they may contain viruses or nasty messages.**

4. Don't be too trustworthy **Remember someone online may be lying and not be who they say they are. Stick to the public areas in chatrooms and, if you start to feel uncomfortable, simply get out of there.**

5. Communicate **Tell your parents or carer if someone or something makes you feel uncomfortable or worried.**

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Stars in their eyes

PC Advisor Network

Crack down on firms who put privacy in peril

Computer law specialists reckon the government will soon start enforcing the various laws relating to computer use.

Top of the cops' to-do list is ensuring adherence to the Data Protection Act 1998 – specifically the way it affects databases that contain personal information in the form of companies' customer lists.

"Now the Data Protection Act has had time to settle in, the authorities will be looking much more closely at compliance," said Mark Crichard, a partner of IT law consultants Andersen Legal.

Crichard believes the Information Commission, previously the Data Protection Registrar's Office, which is responsible for upholding the act, will target specific business sectors, such as financial services.

As evidence of compliance with the act the Commission will be looking to ensure companies have set up their databases such that accidental breaches of privacy, caused by lax security or sloppy practice, don't occur, said Crichard.

Small businesses will be especially vulnerable. They will have to consider the legal aspects of their customer databases as much as the financial and technical.

• Has your PC been sold to someone else without being wiped? Have you bought a PC with someone else's details on? Let us know by emailing pcadvisor_consumerwatch@idg.com

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Come in Office 2000, your time is up

Systems administrators trying to purchase old versions of Office and Office 2000 Developer edition now have little choice but to buy Office XP, even if their networks run Office 2000. This has been causing disruption to businesses as IT managers test Office XP's compatibility with Office 2000. "When you have 2,000-plus PCs and hundreds of applications to worry about, [upgrading] is not a trivial exercise," said a senior IT director.

Though IT professionals claim Microsoft has not given businesses enough time to adjust to the changeover, a spokeswoman for Microsoft said: "Office XP has been out for a long time now. Once a new version is released, that becomes the version we sell."

Microsoft's recent software licence change for businesses, License 6.0, has been criticised for fast-tracking customers into upgrading. Microsoft states that upgrading with License 6.0 is around £75 cheaper than a standard purchase. But a recent survey by analyst firm IDC showed that most customers were either still evaluating License 6.0 or were not interested.

Nation has no clue about viruses

Computer users in the UK can't tell the difference between a computer crash and a virus attack, according to a survey by antivirus firm McAfee. Nearly half of us believe viruses are responsible for program and system crashes and even faulty web connections.

The study showed that 45 percent of those polled were likely to blame a program crash on a virus rather than the operating system. Nearly as many believe that the so-called 'blue screen of death' is also indicative of a virus infection.

Once people think they have a virus, many react 'wholly inappropriately' by McAfee's standards – a quarter simply panic and 12 percent warn their friends by email.

The survey also reveals that two thirds of users fail to understand the threat of a virus, with one third exaggerating the risk and the other third underestimating it.

FLASHBACK

This time last year…

The UK's first national law enforcement organisation dedicated to fighting IT-related crime was launched in April 01. The NHTCU (National Hi-Tech Crime Unit) comprises 80 law enforcement specialists drawn from other law enforcement agencies across the country, such as Customs & Excise and the National Criminal Intelligence Service. The primary task of the NHTCU is to detect and investigate crime committed through the use of IT, while assessing the extent of internet and computer-related crime. But many privacy and civil liberty campaigners expressed concern at the fact that criminal activity on the internet was being used as an excuse to control the medium and hamper individual privacy.
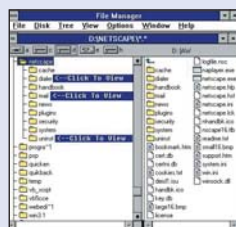
Five years ago…

April wouldn't be April without a good Fool's Day joke, and in 1997 those pranksters at Toshiba managed to stitch up the staff at normally sensible computing magazine PCW. Toshiba announced the launch of the Tecra F00-LDU, a notebook allegedly specially designed for lefthanders. A quick glance at the name surely should have given the game away, but no. Convinced by Toshiba's claims that a reversed keypad boosted productivity for lefthanded people by 20 percent, the magazine ran an article on the fallacious product. Several people telephoned the company to order the item and were disappointed to find out they'd been duped.

10 years ago…

Microsoft released Windows 3.1. It was not without controversy – Apple contended that certain functions of its Macintosh Finder had been copied in Windows 3.1 and started legal proceedings against Microsoft. The case was finally thrown out in 1993. One million copies of Windows 3.1 were sold in the two months after its launch. Three years later, Windows 95 sold as many copies in just four days.

Web voting coming soon – or is it?

PC Advisor Poll

Would you vote electronically?

Yes, as long as I don't need to leave the couch — 17.4%

No, some hacker is bound to throw the results — 24.5%

Yes, it's the only way of combatting electoral apathy — 51.6%

No, I've got a thing about polling booths — 6.6%

Britain will become the first country to adopt internet voting for general elections, or so Robin Cook, leader of the Commons, would have it. In an interview with The Guardian, Cook branded the current system, which has seen little change since its introduction in 1872, as "antique and ludicrous", saying an online system could be in place by the next election.

But, this is highly unlikely. Before an effective system can be enforced, the government will have to decide how the system would work, whether voters are really ready and willing to vote online and, more importantly, how it intends to pay for it.

In a recent PC Advisor online poll just over half of respondents said they would vote online and think online voting should be introduced. But almost a quarter still harboured security fears.

While Cook did not outline how such a system would be financed, the Home Office claims the system will work out cheaper in the long term, reducing the manpower requirements, for example, in counting and processing votes.

Although it is clear something needs to be done after the worst election turnout (59 percent) in history last year, changing a system we have relied on for decades will not be as easy as Cook hopes.

"There is no way an e-voting system could be in place before the next general elections," said a spokeswoman at the Electoral Commission. "It's just not possible."

The Electoral Reform Society is undertaking research to gain public opinion and feedback, the results of which should have been covered by PCAdvisor.co.uk by the time you read this.

OUR LIVES IN NUMBERS: PC sales down in Europe

A decline of more than five percent in PC shipments in Emea (Europe, the Middle East and Africa) in the last part of last year isn't great news. However, it's better than the nigh-on seven percent fall that happened worldwide. Compaq lost its global number one slot, but retained dominance of Emea in the fourth quarter of 2001.

Source: International Data Corporation

- Compaq 14.3%
- Dell 9.6%
- HP 8.5%
- Fujitsu Siemens 8.4%
- IBM 5.9%
- Others 53.3%

Hewitt announces science prize for women

We could see more women working in the sciences after DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) minister Patricia Hewitt announced a set of awards in January to raise the profile of women in the sector.

As part of the ongoing Wise (Women In Science and Engineering) campaign, Hewitt put forward government proposals to help mothers with science and engineering degrees return to work.

"It is vital that we increase the number of women employed across sciences, both for women's professional fulfilment and for the benefits they bring to scientific research and the UK economy," said Hewitt.
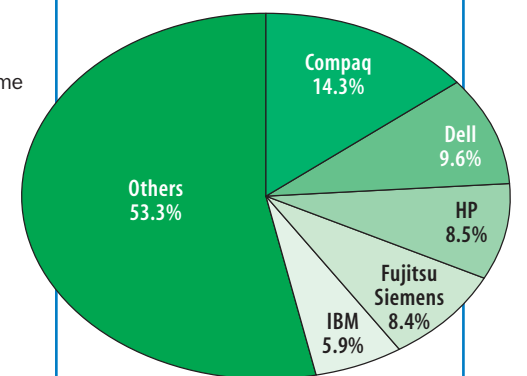
One of the proposals is the Franklin Medal, named after Rosalind Franklin who contributed to the discovery of the double helix in DNA. The annual competition will be run by The Royal Society, the UK's national academy of science, to honour women researchers who have made a contribution to scientific innovation. A £30,000 prize will accompany the award.

A separate proposal will see the government contributing £35,000 per year, for three years, to the scheme. But a single science fellowship, according to the Daphne Jackson trust which promotes women in science, costs £33,000. With roughly 10 fellowships awarded each year through private sponsors, government funding is going to represent a mere drop in the ocean.

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Texting SOS
Emergency services and Oftel say you should never rely on a text message in an emergency. In February 2001 Rebecca Fyfe was rescued from a sinking boat in Indonesia after she sent an SMS to her boyfriend in England. But this isn't normal, say emergency services. "This was a one-off… we wouldn't recommend [texting] to contact emergency services," said Bill Smith, Coastguard senior operations manager.

Linux police
A UK police advisory body, the Pito (Police Information Technology Organisation), has launched a three-month study to consider the possibility of using the Linux open source operating system on all the police force's desktops. "There is no commitment towards Linux just yet, but we liked it enough to look into the possibility of using it," said Pito's spokesperson, Isabell Davies.

Megahertz war
AMD has started shipping a 1.3GHz version of its budget Duron processor and has bumped the speed of its Mobile Duron to 1.2GHz. AMD started labelling chips with model numbers instead of clock speeds last October. The company says its chips can handle more work in a given clock cycle than those of archrival Intel, making megahertz inaccurate as a measure of comparison.

Robot guide
Japan's National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation, which opened last year in Tokyo, has a new employee – a humanoid robot. Developed by Honda, Asimo was offered for hire a year ago. The museum, which exhibits scientific advances in technologies, is the first to accept. The museum plans to conduct research on whether humans working alongside Asimo will accept the robot as their colleague.