readers' writes

PC Advisor's editor receives a bashing by plenty of outraged readers this month for his opinions on e-voting, there's a ghost in our marketing department printer, an apparent clairvoyant lurking in our news department and, once again, online security is the subject of a letter or two

Do as you would be done by

After reading *Readers not protected (*News, May 02), which revealed the generally poor level of protection and high level of apathy when it comes to viruses, I have to wonder why more ISPs don't do as mine does and filter out viruses before they reach individual users.

I have been a dedicated Easynet user for several years now and its (fairly) recently introduced EasyFilter system is available at no extra cost. It deletes spam that is heading my way so I never even see it, and if someone sends me a virus I get a message saying who sent it. This allows me to get back to them, tell them they're infected and ask them to resend after they've deloused their PC. What I don't get is some nasty virus crawling around inside my PC.

Don't get me wrong – this isn't the complete solution (I still use antivirus software as well). However, if every ISP and node removed viruses rather than passing them on to be someone else's problem (or perhaps bounced them back to the original sender) then the biggest source of viruses would surely be a long way to being removed.

I've also heard about a program called Adobe Approval which allows a user to fill in and save changes on PDF (portable document format) files. This is just what I'm looking for, rather than shelling out for the full Adobe Acrobat program. Do you know when (or if) it will be available in the UK?
Gordon L Hewstone, via email

Emma Northam replies: many ISPs do remove suspect EXE files attached to emails passing through their servers, but that doesn't mean viruses can't slip through so, as you point out, you should still use antivirus software too. And under the newly approved Electronic Communications Data Protection Directive, ISPs will now also have to take responsibility for filtering out unwanted spam messages.

As to Adobe's Acrobat Approval, yes, it is available in the UK, priced £29. You can download it direct from Adobe's site at www.adobe.co.uk. However, note that you won't be able to fill in forms using Adobe Approval unless they were created in Acrobat.

Political opinion…

I was astonished at Andrew Charlesworth's Welcome article, *Vote with one's PC,* in the July 02 issue. I believe he has the wrong take on the problem. There are many reasons why the number of active voters appears to be declining, but ease of voting is not one of them.

On the evening of my local elections, I strolled down the road to my local church hall, casted my vote, called in for a pint and then strolled home. The whole process took around half an hour – a pleasant walk on a warm May evening. It would hardly have been more arduous had it been raining – I would simply have taken my brolly. It could not have been easier.

To my mind, there are three main reasons why people are disinclined to vote. Firstly, we have bred a nation of couch potatoes who are complacent. All the time the economy does not disturb their personal lives, they simply cannot be bothered. They have lost sight of their responsibilities to society but are always ready to claim their 'rights'.

Secondly, many people are fed up with the spin and half-truths of arrogant, self-serving politicians of all parties and believe that their vote simply makes no difference. They feel disenfranchised, so those who wish to give those politicians a bloody nose are motivated to cast a protest vote, often for the most unlikely candidates – hence what has been happening across Europe.
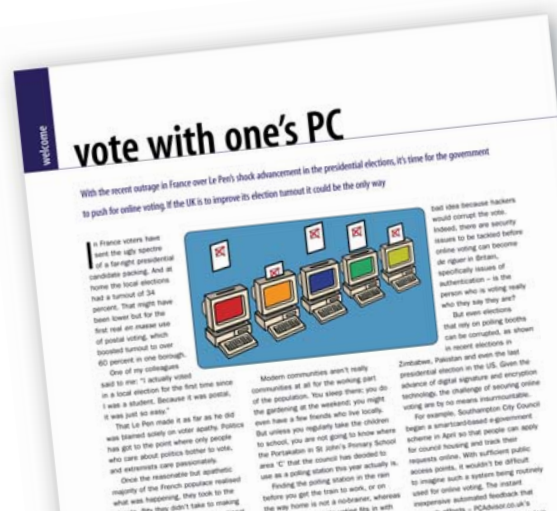
Rather than make voting even easier, the real answer is for politicians to engage frankly and honestly with the electorate and freely debate those problems which cause concern for the man in the street without letting political correctness get in the way.
Mike Ellis, via email

…political pressure…

Andrew Charlesworth should stick to telling us the pros and cons of online voting without the political lecture on why we should vote. The reason I buy *PC Advisor* is because of my interest in computers not politics. And as for the nonsense of people not knowing where the polling station is, I think people may be a little bit brighter than he thinks.
Peter Butler, via email

Star letter

The web seems to be becoming a more dangerous place to play. After conducting a quick search for MP3-related sites, I started looking at some results when all of a sudden my connection was swamped with pop-ups and sites dropping into my System Tray. Trying to close them all down was a nightmare. Closing one caused one or two others to appear until I had about a dozen open at the same time. Eventually, with some nifty mouse and keyboard work, I banished them all but discovered one of them had managed to alter my settings to make itself my default home page. At times like this I really regret not being clever enough to be able to return the compliment and remotely 'adjust' some settings at these lowlife sites. Do they really believe that by bombing a PC in this way they will encourage surfers to spend time at their sites?

Today I received an email headed 'Postmaster – undeliverable mail'. I would normally not be suspicious of this sort of contact, but I could not remember sending mail to any new contacts recently and the included attachment 'your original message' worried me. I looked at the sender's details and did not recognise the name or address. The origin was clearly foreign so I immediately deleted the entire mail. It may have been harmless but I was taking no chances. You certainly need your wits about you when you log on to the internet these days. John Revell, via email

Our star letter writer wins an IBC Pontis SP600 MP3 player worth £129 inc VAT. This ultra-portable device offers 4GB memory capacity, so you can enjoy up to 66 hours of CD-quality music. For more details, see www.ibc-ltd.co.uk or call 01344 752 700.

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.

...partly politics

I was most upset after reading *Welcome* (page 13, July 02). I thought at first it was an article on voting by PC, but it turned out to be a piece bashing the rise of the far right in France. If I wanted to read about politics I would have purchased *The Guardian.* Perhaps Andrew Charlesworth is getting in practice for his next job as a political pundit on such a paper. Computer magazines should be about computer-related subjects, so please keep to PC issues and don't go making political comments.
Ray Matthews, Leicester

Andrew Charlesworth replies: it's difficult to write about voting without mentioning politics, but boroughs that used postal voting experienced an increased turnout, so I stand by my opinion that remote voting is the way forward.

Slips and ticks

I'm beginning to wonder if *PC Advisor's* staff are able to see into the future. On page 22 of the July 02 issue you stated that Comet was a well-known part of DSG (Dixons Stores Group). That would probably come as a surprise to Kingfisher, the actual owner of Comet. However, given the frequency with which Kingfisher reorganises, you never know.

This was only the beginning, though. I got a much better laugh from the subscriptions renewal form you sent me. I'd nearly finished when I got to the normal bit about other companies sending me things. I was surprised to see it read: "Please tick here if you do not want to receive dire mail from other carefully screened companies."

Now is that a bit of frank honesty or just a typo?
Mark Weldon, via email

Rupert Collins-White replies: you're absolutely right about Comet – I got it mixed up with Currys. Isn't it amazing what endless media lunches will do to the brain?

Faith Wardle replies: strictly speaking it wasn't a typo; the missing 'c' and 't' of 'direct' were the result of a faulty printer. Oddly, these were the only two letters affected on the mailing...

Shooting from the hip

I am in the process of deciding which digital camera to purchase, and obviously take your comments into consideration. However, I can not see the point in recommending cameras with 4, 5 or 6Mp (megapixel) resolutions when they are provided with such small storage facilities. It does after all seem silly paying top price for 6Mp and then having to use a high compression codec to store the image. Why not just buy a 2Mp camera in the first place, and save a fair bit of money?

I note that you regret the FujiFilm FinePix 601 lacks a Tiff option, but I doubt a RAW 6Mp image would fit on the supplied 16MB card. I think you should take this factor into consideration more than you do. For me, the only serious contenders in the higher megapixel range have to be CompactFlash Type II compatible so that 1GB IBM Microdrives can be used. All other storage formats are useless as far as I am concerned.
Bob Newall, via email

Spencer Dalziel replies: it's certainly remiss of manufacturers not to provide adequate storage for high-resolution cameras. The largest storage card we've seen on a professional digital camera is 32MB and it's simply not good enough. There's an unwritten expectation for consumers to pay extra for the biggest storage card but, with the exception of IBM's Microdrive, the biggest card is only 256MB – still not enough.

However, if you have the money, it's sensible to buy a higher resolution digital camera as you won't be satisfied with a 2Mp model that can store more images. And remember, at least digital cameras offer the facility of deleting shots that are no good so you can fill the storage card with your best photography. ■