

Flat-panel technology has been getting better and cheaper over the last few years, and PC buyers have responded eagerly. Spencer Dalziel helps one *PC Advisor* reader upgrade from his clunky CRT to a slim, sharp TFT display



Reader's choice: flat-panel displays

A few years ago the price of LCD (liquid crystal display) flat-panels put them beyond the means of most consumers, who had to settle for bulky CRT (cathode ray tube) screens instead. Today prices have dropped considerably, while the quality space-saving displays offer has increased dramatically. Given these developments it's no wonder some pundits suggest the CRT is heading for obsolescence.

These predictions should always be taken with a pinch of salt, but there's no doubt that more people are looking for a decent flat-panel to replace their bulky CRT monitor. We invited one such *PC Advisor* reader to our offices after he asked us to help him choose a new LCD screen.

Stuart Fenton works in accountancy and is a credit controller for a firm in London. He lives in Woking with his wife Gill and their two children, William and Chelsea. Stuart has always had a PC at home because he often takes work home with him, but now wants to save some space by swapping his monitor for a flat-panel.

What did Stuart want?

- Flat-panel display for around £600
- Large screen size
- A space-saving model to replace his CRT (cathode ray tube) monitor
- Familiar brand
- Good DVD playback
- Sharp text

"I don't really know what I can get for my money, but I do know I've had enough of my old, bulky 19in monitor because it takes up too much space", he explains. "Ideally I still want a large screen because when I'm not working I like to watch DVDs with my family [on the PC]".

Stuart has a budget of around £600, so we chose four flat-panels we thought

it's the second most expensive model we looked at, but it does have an attractive silver finish. However, Stuart wasn't sure about the built-in speakers: "I want to minimise desktop clutter, but I don't want tinny sound reproduction. My PC is in the lounge and the whole family uses it – when we watch a DVD I want good sound quality."

The first thing Stuart noticed from our selection was "the absolute lack of any 19in flat-panels", but we pointed out that most 19in displays were beyond his £600 budget

would suit his requirements. We ran a series of tests in our Test Centre with a program called Display Mate, allowing us to assess quality of each display. The models we looked at were NEC's 1700V, LG's Flatron 782LE, CTX's PV 700 and Microtek's C783.

First impressions

The first thing Stuart noticed from our selection was "the absolute lack of any 19in flat-panels", but we pointed out that most 19in displays were beyond his £600 budget. A 17in flat-panel also offers roughly the same size image as 19in CRT, due to the fact that the edges of the tube aren't visible on a CRT resulting in an actual viewing area of 17.5in. A flat-panel, on the other hand, utilises the full area.

Stuart's attention was drawn by the Microtek C783's stylish design. At £536

Next up was the CTX and Stuart loved the fact that the screen can swivel from landscape to portrait mode: "I'm surprised you can't do that with the others. Flipping the screen would be handy for some of the work I do." We thought Stuart would appreciate the LG Flatron 782LE because it's one of the best-specified models and boasts good value for money. It has the widest viewing angle so it's possible for everyone in a family of four to get a good view of the screen. It also has a USB hub with two ports and this pleased Stuart: "I've got a USB mouse and printer so the extra ports are convenient."

Lastly we looked at the 1700V, NEC's flagship 17in flat-panel and, at £549, the most expensive display we chose. Stuart was expecting some extras that would catch his eye: "It looks well built, but there's nothing that makes it stand out."

Pros and cons: the contenders measure up

<p>CTX PV 700 Pros: value for money, great image quality, swivel screen Cons: no DVI, relatively low specifications CTX: 01923 810 800 Website: www.ctxeurope.com Price: £395 ex VAT</p>	<p>LG Flatron 782LE Pros: value for money, good features and specifications Cons: image quality not up to scratch LG: 0870 607 5544 Website: www.lge.co.uk Price: £502 ex VAT</p>	<p>Microtek C783 Pros: great styling, good specification Cons: Expensive, unimpressive image quality Microtek: 01327 844 880 Website: www.microtek.com Price: £536 ex VAT</p>	<p>NEC 1700V Pros: brilliant quality, sharp text, great colour reproduction Cons: no DVI, expensive NEC: 0845 121 9200 Website: www.nec.co.uk Price: £549 ex VAT</p>
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What the experts say

The Microtek C783 is good looking with an impressive specification list, but when you're paying this much money a DVI (digital visual interface) connection should be included. The digital-to-digital connection eliminates the unnecessary conversion to analogue and produces a better picture. What's more, when we watched some DVDs on the C783 we were disappointed with the results.

On paper the 1700V from NEC wasn't dissimilar to the C783, but in practice it was leagues ahead. Colour reproduction was dazzlingly accurate and text was pin-sharp. Again, though, we were surprised to see it lacked a DVI option, and there were also no extras.

When it comes to value for money nothing can touch the CTX, but it is lacking in features. However, when we put it through out tests we were amazed with the results. Text is crisp even at the higher resolutions and DVD playback produced results that were nearly as good as the NEC's.

→ Spencer demonstrates the different connections that a flat-panel display has – either DVI or D-sub

↘ A large viewing angle was important to Stuart as him and his family regularly watch DVDs around the PC

The LG Flatron 782LE has the best specifications list, is good value for money and, if Stuart hadn't seen its poor colours and pixellated image, we think this is the one he'd go for: "The picture looks a bit broken up on the screen and it's blurry."

The reader's choice

Stuart decided not to take our advice and went for the top-priced NEC 1700V. "I know the CTX offers better value for money, but I haven't really heard of the company. All the warranties are exactly the same, so I might as well go with a company name I know". He added, "I've got a bit of money to spend at the moment and you did point out the better viewing angle – now the wife and kids won't have to cram themselves round the screen if we're watching films." ■



How to contact us

If you are thinking of buying some new hardware and would like our help, email details of your requirements and budget to us at reviews@idg.com or write to Spencer Dalziel at PC Advisor, Fifth Floor, 85 Tottenham Court Road, London W1T 4TQ.