

welcome

Currently home entertainment is split between separate machines, from the TV and VCR to the PC and DVD player. But as the pace of technology changes, vendors are now promising to channel these streams through just one device



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These days, there's a wealth of technology on offer for home entertainment. We have TVs to receive broadcast video and VCRs to record or play movies. Alternatively, we can view the latest blockbusters via a DVD player. We can also play DVDs on a PC and, if we've got the technical competence, get broadcast TV.

Web access via a television set is made possible with a set-top box. We play interactive games on a console that connects to the TV as well as on a PC. Oh, and some consoles can access the internet too.

Then there's music: the hi-fi plays audio CDs, but the DVD player, PC and even the games console can read most of the discs too. We can download MP3s and listen to them via the PC, but getting them to play over the stereo requires a higher degree of technical knowledge.

Messy isn't it?

Technology vendors aim to take all this confusion and channel the streams of entertainment. Using an intelligent hub and a wireless home network, an appropriate device will be chosen depending on what media we are consuming and where – for example, music on the stereo, internet on a PC.

There are many contenders for the role of the hub, but they boil down to two camps: the PC- and TV-centrics. Which route a consumer chooses is dictated by whether usage is dominated by mass-market broadcast entertainment (TV-centric) or telework (PC-centric), what equipment is installed in the home and how technically confident the user is.

But the arrival of the PC as an integrator of consumer electronics means anarchy: goodbye cosy single-vendor solutions and hello to a fashion-driven refresh cycle the rag trade would kill for.

In short, the PC will disintegrate consumer electronics into a myriad of competing factions – just like it has done in the business world – not integrate it. But it's the future. We can shun it and let the world pass us by or embrace it.

At *PC Advisor* we've been watching this trend grow. And as the pace of change increases we'll help you distinguish the hype from the reality, making sure you don't fall into the gap between the elegance of digital home theory and the misery of digital home practice. ■

Andrew Charlesworth

reader information

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