

readers' writes

We all want a crystal-clear screen with our PC, and a pixel glitch proves too much for one reader. Meanwhile another letter contemplates a futuristic virtual office and we pass on a friendly warning about replacing ink cartridges prematurely and being out of pocket



Seeing red (and blue)

I'm the 'proud' owner of a two-week-old LG L1710B flat-panel display that harbours two faulty pixels. After reading your article on defective pixels (December 02 issue) I contacted both Evesham, the screen's supplier and its manufacturer LG Electronics and got the same response from both parties – up to four faulty pixels is deemed perfectly okay. Imagine if a car manufacturer said that up to three wheels was an acceptable situation!

Neither Evesham nor LG would exchange the monitor as it 'met the criteria'. My point? The blue pixel is not a problem; I don't see it unless I hunt for it. However, the red pixel is towards the centre of the screen and causes major irritation against dark backgrounds.

Don't manufacturers zone screens for faulty pixels? You've advised about testing the monitor prior to purchase and I have certainly spread the word to friends, colleagues and those on your ConsumerWatch forum. But I bought my system via an Evesham outlet and it was delivered afterwards so I could not test the monitor prior to accepting it.

Will I learn to love the little blighter eventually? Not a chance, at £304 inc VAT it is no joke.

Ian Henderson, via email

Robin Morris replies: we look forward to the day when pixel perfection is a given with a new flat-panel. Unfortunately, a huge number of LCD panels already have to be scrapped due to an 'excessive' number of defective pixels, and forcing manufacturers to guarantee against all imperfections could dramatically force up prices at a time when the technology is just beginning to become affordable for the consumer.

Under the wording of the law, flat-panel manufacturers are certainly within their rights to claim that the odd faulty pixel is acceptable. However, as you rightly point out, it only takes one awkwardly placed defective pixel to mar an otherwise first-rate screen.

Testing before you buy is an extremely useful exercise, but is generally a right only available to those prepared to bear the higher costs and added inconvenience of buying and collecting from a store on the high street.

Wary customers should only consider buying from manufacturers like CTX, whose s530 and s730 flat-panels are guaranteed free of defective pixels. Perhaps if enough people lend their support to such deals, other flat-panel manufacturers will be forced to admit that their idea of what is acceptable is anything but.

The future's so bright, I gotta wear my VR shades

After reading your *What next for your PC?* article in the April 03 edition, it struck me that although computers have come a long way and are faster and more ingenious than ever, the way in which they convey information – via black writing on a white-background displayed on a CRT or flat-screen monitor – has changed little since the turn of the century.

How much easier would life be to remember points from meetings and letters if you were a part of them. Imagine arriving at work and instead of sitting in front of a monitor you simply put on a pair of virtual reality glasses that projected an imaginary office about you. Then, to retrieve files or letters, you would use a combination of voice commands to summon virtual filing cabinets, drawers and suspension files.

A set of sensor gloves (similar to those used by Tom Cruise in *Minority Report*) would allow you to pick out individual files. Replies could be typed using voice commands and could incorporate video and animation, and their recipients would be interactive passengers in the artificially intelligent world projected around them.

Neil Potter, via email

More unused Office space

Reading your review of Office 2003 (June 03 issue, page 58) it seems to me that with every new version of its software Microsoft is becoming more remote from the everyday needs of computer users.

There are now so many functions in just one part of the Office suite that no one can hope to master them before the next version is produced. And I don't even want to think about the amount of hard disk space all this unused software takes up. I'm sure in the distant past I remember software that enabled users to download the functions they needed as they went along.

Bryan Marscombe, Warrington

Long shots

I had a similar scanning dilemma to Peter Fry (Readers' writes, June 03). With a number of slides to scan, the time taken would have been prohibitive had I not bought a faster PC and a scanner with an interpolated resolution of 1,200x2,400 for slides. I got acceptable results, however, it would seem that you only get out what you put in – if the original's not pin-sharp, you can't expect the scan to be. I've been able to correct many of the original photographic faults using editing software, though – not bad considering many of the slides are over 20 years old.

To make things quicker still, I projected some of the slides then photographed them with a digital camera and transferred them to my PC in about a minute. They have now been burned to VideoCD from which they can be viewed as a slideshow.

Derek Sandford, Coventry

More ink than you think

I agree with Andrew Charlesworth's reply (star letter, May 03 issue) that printer manufacturers want to sell more of their cartridges. I have an HP PhotoSmart 1218 printer which has a toolbox that indicates the remaining ink in the cartridges.

After receiving the message that there was zero percent ink in both black and colour cartridges I thought I'd see how long I could keep printing. I started printing the user guide for Norton SystemWorks Professional 2003 and guess what – I was able to print the entire user guide (296 pages in total) utilising both black and colour inks. The moral here is don't replace ink cartridges prematurely. Keep printing until you see the evidence of low ink for yourself on the printouts. This should help keep costs within reason.

Dr Mahendra Bhatia, Leeds

Andrew Charlesworth replies: the petrol gauge on my car says it's empty when it's not too. So is there a conspiracy among printer manufacturers to rip off their customers, or is the level meter there to warn customers when they are getting close to needing a refill? Either way, the printer cartridge debate will run and run (unlike some cartridges). See our ConsumerWatch feature on page 78 for more on printer cartridges.

Star letter

I have recently applied for a broadband account and can't wait to get it up and running. Now here comes the crunch: I am frequently away from home and, although I have a laptop which is indispensable to my business, it seems that I will have to make do with my old 56K modem while away from my own home.

Isn't it a shame that I can't attach the USB broadband modem to my laptop and use it from whatever location I happen to be in while on my travels? BT's email and internet phoneboxes are somewhat limited and don't allow me to plug in my laptop which has essential stuff on it for online banking, website updates and so on. The same goes for internet cafes: my notebook holds the cookies I need for personal identification for various tasks and that makes use of a third-party computer a poor alternative.

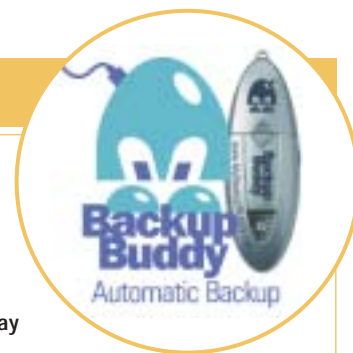
Lynn Robson, via email

Guy Dixon replies: the future of high-speed access on the move is guaranteed through the rollout of Wi-Fi hotspots. During a recent press trip to San Francisco, I felt like a fish out of water. I was practically the only person who wasn't wirelessly accessing the internet from my notebook, while simultaneously negotiating a skinny latte. On passing through San Jose airport, meanwhile, I couldn't move for Wi-Fi users. The UK and the rest of Europe will inevitably follow suit – moving beyond the current conservative pilots – with affordable hotspots becoming commonplace wherever business activity is found.

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Trial spam

I was wondering how many readers have received the latest chain email doing the rounds? These things are becoming more creative with each passing day.

The latest is claiming to come from a lawyer and asks that you pass on the mail as part of a beta trial on tracking emails being carried out by Microsoft. The idea is that the email is being traced by Mr Gates' organisation and for every one you send you will eventually receive a sum of money as thanks.

I just wonder how much of this junk is currently cluttering up the internet, along side all the spam for various porn sites and so on that end up straight in my trash file. All I can say is thank goodness for web-based email management.

David Ahearn, via email

Back to basics

All of a sudden, everyone is panicking because PC manufacturers are starting to scrap the floppy disc drive (Readers' writes and Byteback, May 03 issue). We had an ideal solution a couple of years or so ago – the LS120 superfloppy – but nobody wanted it.

I sometimes think the computer industry needs to go back to basics instead of always going for bigger, faster and better. To start with, how about a set of transfers for keyboard characters or replacement keys?

I have to replace perfectly good keyboards simply because some of the most used letters wear off and I am not a trained typist so I need to see which keys my fingers are falling on.

Marshall Morris, Rhyl ■