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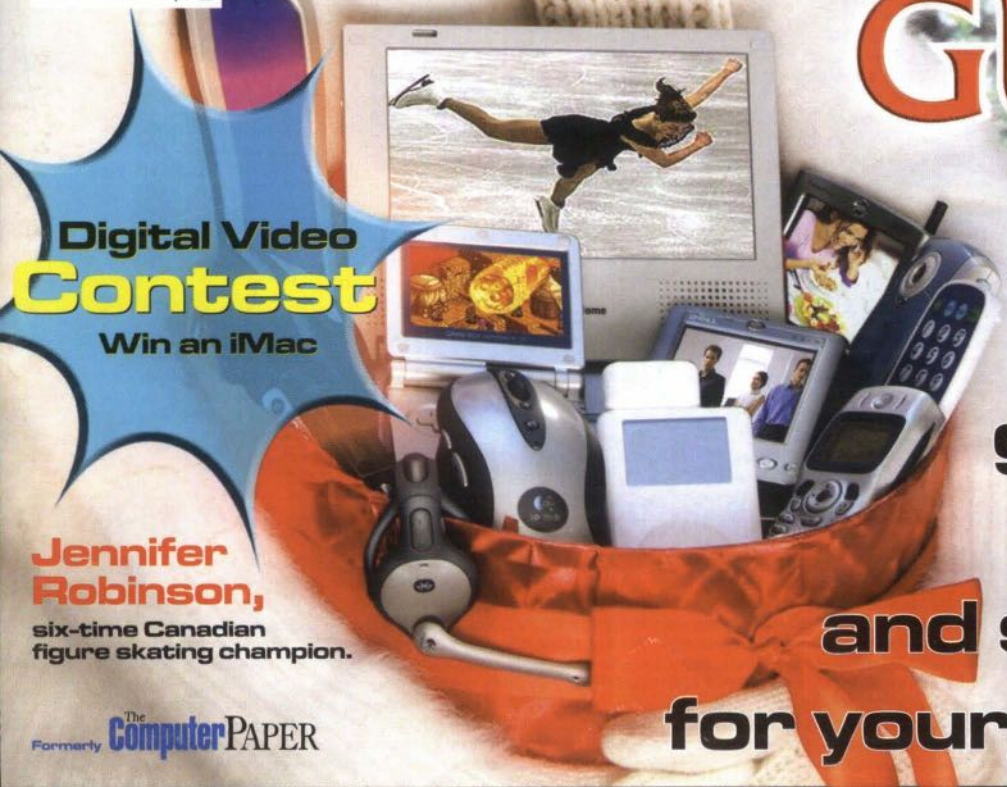
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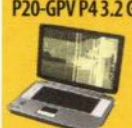
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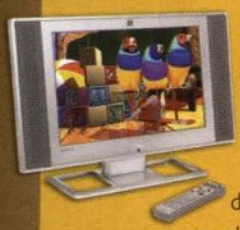
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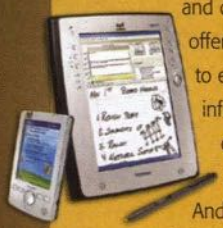
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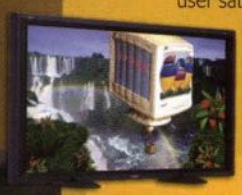
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Contents

December 2003

Letter from the Editor 10

First Glance 11

On our cover: 22
Jennifer Robinson, six-time Canadian figure-skating champion

CyberWalker: A vaccine for obsolescence 38

Gift Guide

Getting into the game 12

Bring home your own digital hub 14

The gift of WiFi 16

Home theatre for the holidays 18

Thumbs up kids picks 20

Organization (and fun) on the go 23

Tuning into holiday sounds 26

Digital gifts for the shutterbug 28

Ringing in the season 30

Dreaming of a Blue(tooth) Christmas 32

Gifts for your notebook PC 33

Digital living

How to: Plan a party with your handheld 30

The three-year itch: PC obsolescence 34

Contests

Letter of the month 10

Digital video contest 33

Photo spree 35











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Editorial



Megan Johnston

By the time this issue hits the streets, it will be a week into the biggest shopping season of the year. For some it's a reason to rejoice, for others it's a reason to recoil as they see the annual holiday advertising tsunami heading in their direction once again. To help those troubled souls — as well as for those who embrace their inner consumer — we've compiled a Gift Guide (pages 12 to 33) that goes beyond the usual "ideas" culled from press releases that are found in a lot of magazines this time of year. All of the gadgets and gear in this issue have been in the hands of HUB editors and contributors. To signify this, we are introducing the HUB Tested logo this month, which we've incorporated into the first page of the Gift Guide. The heavy lifting for this issue was done by Senior Product Review Editor, Sean Carruthers, who coordinated all of the reviews and made sure that we have something for everyone. So, happy shopping, and, more importantly, have a great holiday and best wishes for the new year from everyone at HUB: Digital Living.

—Megan Johnston, Editor

Letters: The gadgets you love

We had a lot of feedback on your favourite digital gadgets. Here are a few of our favourite letters:

When we were visiting my wife's grandmother in September, I happened to bring my MP3 player with me – it's so small that I had forgotten to take it out of my shirt pocket. Pulling it out, I remembered that I could also record with it, and so we spent the next couple hours talking with Olive, and recording her reminiscences. Not long after we returned to Winnipeg, Olive passed away, and we realized then that the audio captured by the MP3 player was the only recording of her voice ever made, one that will always be precious to the entire family. —Mark Morton, Winnipeg

My favorite digital gadget... has to be my hearing aid. Having gone with an analogue unit for the majority of my life, I decided to take the jump in my midlife and purchase a digital unit. The experience is unbelievable, I am able to hear conversation and sound much clearer and at a further distance... and feedback has be reduced.... This digital device pretty well destroyed all of my own excuses of not hearing the individuals, especially my wife. —Luciano Borrello, Vaughan, Ont.

It is a tie between by Dell Axim X5 (PDA) and my Xbox. Both are wirelessly connected to my PC. With this setup I can easily transfer files, play MP3s, play movies, access email, and the Internet (on my PDA) from my PC instantly in my home! The Xbox also acts as a secondary file server, allowing me to store files on its harddrive, which is upgraded to a 120 GB from its regular 8 GB. The next project is, of course, setting up my home theatre PCand connecting it to a HDTV projector. —Trung Ta, Toronto

Letter of the month contest

The prize this month goes to **Joe Larotta** of Calgary:

"Thanks for your article on GPS ['I know exactly where I am,' HUB November]. I bought a portable GPS last spring (the Magellan SportTrak Map) and recommend to anyone who is thinking of getting one to go ahead and do so. Especially if you are thinking of Geocaching. My family have become avid Geocachers and have found all kinds of "treasures." Though we are not big hikers, the beauty of geocaching is that there are many caches hidden throughout urban parks here in Calgary (and surely every city in Canada). As we've become more adventurous, we've visited some more remote locations, seen some fantastic sights, and have had a great deal of affordable family fun. It sure makes it worth while to wade through thorn bushes and battle mosquitoes when I hear one of my daughters excitedly scream, 'I found it!'"



Fujifilm Canada is giving away a digital camera for the best letter of the issue. The camera is its new pocket-size **Fuji FinePix A205**, a 2.0 megapixel model, with 3X zoom, and 1.5-inch colour LCD monitor for reviewing shots and navigating the commands. This month, in addition to feedback on the issue, tell us if you've made New Year's resolutions involving digital technolgoy.

Drop us a line at **letters@hubcanada.com**.

HUB

DIGITAL LIVING

Volume 16 : Number 13

EDITORIAL

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COMING UP

January 2004
Digital Video

National ad booking deadline	Mon., Dec. 29
Regional ad booking deadline	Fri., Jan. 2
Ad deadline	Mon.,Jan. 5
Distribution begins	Wed. Jan. 14

February 2004
Home Automation

National ad booking deadline	Wed., Jan. 21
Regional ad booking deadline	Thurs., Jan. 22
Ad deadline	Mon., Jan. 26
Distribution begins	Wed., Feb. 4

March 2004
Music

Ad booking deadline	Wednesday, Feb. 18
Ad deadline	Monday, Feb. 23
Distribution begins	Wednesday, Mar. 3

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On the cover this month:
Jennifer Robinson, six-time Canadian figure skating champion.
Photographer
Mir Lada, www.mirlada.com
Make-up and Hair
Jose Bass, Plutino Group

First glance

A preview of new and notable digital devices. Look for full reviews in upcoming issues of HUB: Digital Living.



PowerLite Home 10

Wide-screen wannabes whose budget can't quite stretch to plasma have an affordable alternative in Epson's (www.epson.ca) PowerLite Home 10. The $1,999 projector delivers 16:9 widescreen video for home theatres and is HDTV-ready. Users can choose between four projection modes that adjust the display to suit the viewing environment, and the projector can project an 80-inch image from as close as 1.8 m (6 ft.) or a 300-inch image from as far away as 7.5 m (24.9 ft.), according to Epson. A 1.54X optical zoom lens provides flexible positioning. The projector weighs 3.6 kg and comes with a two-year limited warranty that includes expedited telephone support and a replacement program for projectors that need to be repaired.



iMac with a 20-inch display

Banking on the idea that size matters after all, Apple (www.apple.ca) has added an iMac with a 20-inch display to its lineup, which includes 15- and 17-inch models. The widescreen display offers 1,680x1,050-pixel resolution, which is 36 per cent more viewable area than the 17-inch model, according to Apple. The new model is otherwise identical to the 17-inch version, and is priced at $2,999. The company also took the opportunity to expand its Power Mac G5 lineup, introducing a dual-processor 1.8 GHz model that starts at $3,499 to complement the single processor 1.6 GHz and dual-processor 2 GHz models already available.

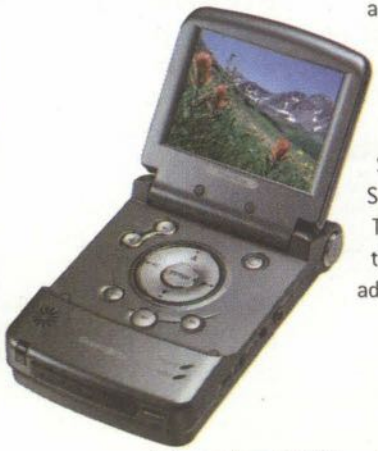


Rayovac battery system

Do you frequently find yourself (or rather, your gadgets) powerless? Rayovac (www.rayovac.com) boasts its new I-C^3 Nickel Metal Hydride (NiMH) battery system can be fully recharged in 15 minutes or less. Available in AA and AAA sizes, the batteries can be recharged up to 1,000 times and will last up to four times longer than alkaline batteries in a digital camera, according to the company. The chargers are available in two- or four-position versions, with a car cord adapter available for the four-position unit. The recharger takes other NiMH and Nickel Cadmium batteries, but the I-C^3 batteries are required to get the 15-minute charging time. A Rayovac press release lists prices starting at $13 for a pair of AAAs and $32 for the two-position charger, but a quick look at Canadian online retailers showed higher prices: $19.99 and $49.99 respectively.

40 and 80 GB FlashTrax

Even the most eager shutterbug will have room to spare on SmartDisk's (www.smartdisk.com) 40 GB and 80 GB FlashTrax drives, portable USB 2.0 multimedia players. Both models can be connected to a TV for viewing images, but also unfold to reveal a 3.5-inch LCD. Users can zoom in and out, pan, and view slide shows of JPEG and some raw image file formats, as well as play motion picture JPEG files and MP3 files. They accept CF and microdrive cards, with optional adapters available for SmartMedia, Memory Stick, SD, MMC, and xD formats. The 40 GB model is $716*, the 80 GB is $911*, and the adapter is $65*.



* Converted from US$.

Getting into the game

No gift category says holiday better than games, and in the digital world that means consoles, PCs, and handheld systems. Here we look at some recent titles and gadgets, but start with a roundup of consoles.

The consoles

Sony PlayStation 2

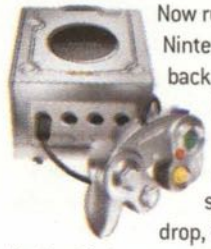
www.playstation.com Estimated price: $250



PS2 leads the pack in sales and has signed an online exclusivity deal with EA Sports, the biggest sports game development and publishing company. It also has the most available titles overall and, with this clout gets some of the juiciest exclusive software deals. That said, the PS2 is beginning to show its age where graphics are concerned and its online arrangement leaves the door open for individual games to charge an online access fee.
—Andrew Moore-Crispin

Nintendo GameCube

www.nintendo.ca Estimated price: $140



Now running neck and neck with the PS2 in sales, Nintendo is the only console not to offer DVD playback, thanks to its proprietary disc format. Nintendo's focus is on its signature gameplay flair and connectivity with the Game Boy Advance, the incredibly popular handheld game system. Also, with a recent holiday season price drop, GameCube is head and shoulders above (below?) the competition where price is concerned. GameCube's most notable downside is its somewhat smaller software library.—AMC

Microsoft Xbox

www.xbox.ca Estimated price: $250



The most powerful and largest of the bunch, Xbox has an 8 GB hard drive built in for game saves and music ripping. The console's graphics are noticeably better than those of the PS2, even to the untrained eye. Microsoft charges a yearly fee of $79.99 for its Xbox Live online service, with one-year included in the purchase cost of an Xbox Live starter kit. The original Xbox control pad was an assault to the hands but has since been replaced with the svelte and infinitely more usable Xbox Controller S. —AMC

Nintendo Game Boy Advance SP

www.nintendo.ca Estimated price: $140



Nintendo's Game Boy Advance SP all but owns the handheld games market, and with good reason. With a massive software library, compact clamshell design, relatively large LCD screen, and the ability to connect with the GameCube in many newer games, the SP is a good bet for gamers on the go.—AMC

Gadgets and gear

Nyko Air Flo EX controller (Xbox)

www.nyko.com Estimated price: $45*



The Air Flo EX features a dual-speed fan as part of an only slightly bulkier controller. Cut outs on the controller's handles direct the air and work well to cool the palms, avoiding the dreaded clammy gamer hands. Your opponents will thank you when ending the game with a relatively dry handshake.—AMC

Mad Catz RetroCON (for PS2)

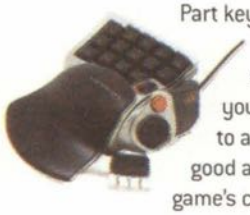
www.madcatz.com Estimated price: $35*



As the name implies, the RetroCON PS2 controller harkens back to the old rectangular control pads of the Nintendo Entertainment System and the Sega Master System. Despite low marks for ergonomics, it scores points for the cool aluminum shell and a face that lights up in Technicolor. The RetroCON is a neat peripheral but one that will tire out hands the way old control pads did in their heyday.—AMC

Belkin Nostromo SpeedPad n52 (for PC)

www.belkin.com Estimated price: $65*



Part keyboard, part control pad, and a small part mouse, the n52 adds a scroll wheel, quick shifting, and full customizability. Not exactly your standard game controller, the n52 appeals to a small portion of fanatical PC gamers but is good at what it does, namely, putting all of the game's controls at your fingertips.—AMC

Nyko iType2 PS2 controller (for PS2)

www.nyko.com Estimated price: $50*



Nyko goes a step further than its Air Flo controllers with the iType. While there are no fans, this controller incorporates a thumb-size, USB keyboard on a slightly larger PS2 controller base. Gamers who do a lot of text entry in online games will appreciate the feature.—AMC

The games

ESPN NHL Hockey

www.espnvideogames.com Estimated price: $70



The best of this year's hockey games is available on PS2 and Xbox only. Sharp graphics, numerous play modes, online gameplay, and excellent presentation make this game a good bet for hockey fans.—AMC

more @ hubcanada.com

*Converted from US$.

HUB TESTED

The Simpsons Hit and Run

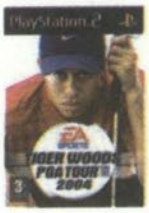
www.thesimpsons-hitandrun.com Estimated price: $70



Available on all consoles, Hit and Run is perhaps best described as a slightly scaled back PG version of Grand Theft Auto. Fans of The Simpsons will delight at the inside jokes, cars, and characters, and can rejoice that there is finally a good game based on TV's most popular cartoon family.—AMC

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004

www.easports.com Estimated price: $70



Arguably the best golf video game franchise gets even better this year, offering tournament play online for PS2 gamers, plus EA's excellent Game Face feature on all consoles, as well as the PC. Easy to pick up, but with enough depth to keep things interesting, Tiger Woods 2004 is a great game for any golf and video game fan.—AMC

Tron 2.0

www.tron20.net Estimated price: $50



When the movie Tron was released in 1982, the computer graphics were revolutionary, and it spawned a hit video game as well. Now, two decades later, Tron 2.0 takes advantage of even better graphics, right on your PC. This one features a story you can play through, or just jump straight to the lightcycles if you want to race.

—Sean Carruthers

Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg

www.sega.com/ Estimated price: $59.99



From the creator of Sonic the Hedgehog, a hero who saves the world from eternal night by rolling giant eggs around and wearing a rooster suit. If you're a console game player, though, you probably have the suspending-disbelief thing covered and will enjoy the trip through the cool 3D worlds. Fun for Everyone (with mild cartoon violence). For Nintendo GameCube only (GameBoy Advance compatible).

—Megan Johnston

Games for the grownups

Halo: Combat Evolved

www.microsoft.com/games/Halo Estimated price: $70

The title that helped launch the Xbox now comes to the PC. An alien alliance is determined to wipe out Earth's budding star empire, and you're marooned on the colony world Halo. Gameplay is fast and futuristic, and this version features new maps, weapons, and online multiplayer. Rated Mature 17+ for blood, gore and violence.—SC

Mac Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne

www.maxpayne2.com Estimated price: $70

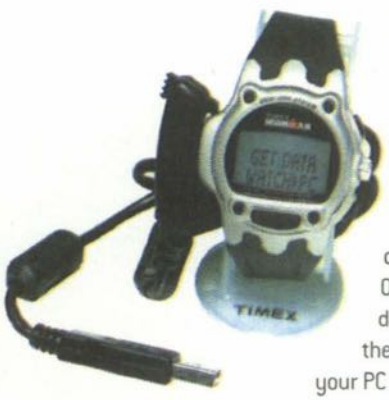
Available for PC, PS2, and Xbox, it returns to the noir, comic book feel of the first installment. You play Max Payne, an NYC cop, who's lost it all and has to fight mobsters, commandos, and even other cops. Rated Mature 17+ for blood, violence, language, and mature themes.

—SC

Stocking Stuffers

Timex Ironman Data Link USB

www.timex.com Estimated price: $150



PDAs are essential to many people who need access to their schedule and contact list on the go, but sometimes you don't want to have to carry a handheld. If you just want the basics, Timex's Ironman Data Link USB watch synchronizes with Microsoft Outlook, and can copy calendar and contact information to the watch by connecting it to your PC with a USB cable. You can't enter data into the watch, just review it, but if you want to travel light for a few hours, it's perfect. Of course, it also has standard Timex Ironman features like watch, 200-lap chronograph, countdown timers, multiple alarms, and an Indiglo night-light.

Microsoft Wireless Intellimouse Explorer

www.microsoft.com/hardware Estimated price: $80

Just when you thought they couldn't do anything new with the good ol' mouse, Microsoft has added a new twist — well, a tilt, really. This addition to the wireless line has all of the things you'd expect if you're right-handed, including an optical sensor on the bottom that allows you to use it on nearly any surface, two buttons up top, and two more within easy reach of your thumb and a scroll wheel. The "tilt" is in that scroll wheel: in addition to the usual up/down scroll, the whole wheel can be tilted to the left or the right, making it easy to scroll around large documents like spreadsheets in any direction you want. It takes two AA batteries.

—SC

See page19 for more Stocking Stuffers

Bring home your own digital hub

Despite the spread of digital technology into cameras, camcorders, and audio and multimedia players, the personal computer remains central to sharing, creating, and organizing the content. Here are a few systems we've looked at recently that are fit for a family — whatever their digital work and play needs — and some peripherals that can add a little zip to an existing system.

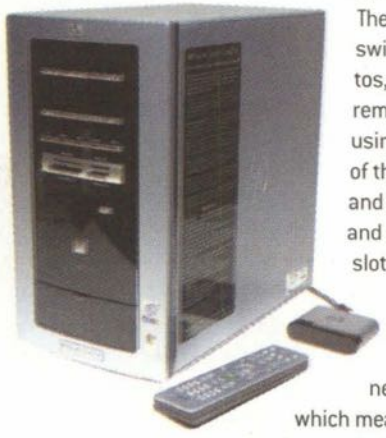
Windows XP Media Centre PCs

If you want to pick up a nice tech toy for the whole family this Christmas, but you're deadlocked between a new computer and a media centre, here's your chance to get both in one box. Microsoft's Windows XP Media Centre operating system starts with Windows XP, then adds multimedia functionality, including DVD movie playback, cable TV input, the ability to record your favourite television programs to the hard disk, digital audio playback, and special digital photography slots and software. Throw in a remote control so you can play music or DVD movies from across the room, and it adds up to a nice all-in-one package. Hewlett-Packard was the first company out of the gate with a Windows XP Media Centre, but a number of other companies are now onboard, including Dell, Seanix, and Sony.

HP Media Centre PC m270n

www.hp.ca Estimated price: $2,499

Right out of the box, you can tell that the m270n isn't your typical Windows box: its silver and black finish looks more like a home audio or video component than a PC. The system makes it easy to switch between TV, DVD, photos, and PC functions with the remote and on-screen menu or using the buttons on the front of the PC itself. It has USB 2.0 and FireWire ports on the front and rear of the machine, and slots for digital camera memory along the front. The computer has a top-notch graphics component and a speedy CPU, which means it'll handle whatever you throw at it, from DVDs to photo editing to games. It also has a 160 GB hard drive inside, which means a lot of room for your music, photos, recorded TV programs, and videos. Because it also has a DVD+RW burner, you can burn your media files to CD or DVD, too. The monitor is sold separately, but the Media Centre PC comes with its own high-quality speaker set.



—Sean Carruthers

Sony VAIO PCVRZ44G

www.sonystyle.ca Estimated price: $2,499

Previously reliant on its own proprietary media management software, Sony has also joined forces with Microsoft for the new VAIO, which makes use of the Windows XP Media Centre Edition 2004 operating system. The machine comes with a CD drive and a DVD±RW burner, plus slots on the front for Type II CompactFlash, SmartMedia, and Memory Stick Pro cards. The system features a 2.8 GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512 MB of memory, and a 160 GB hard drive. It has a total of seven USB 2.0 ports and two FireWire (called i.LINK by Sony) ports onboard. As with other Sony multimedia systems, this one comes with Giga Pocket onboard, allowing you to view TV on your PC and share it with other Giga Pocket accessories.



—SC

Sony VAIO PCV-W500GN1

www.sonystyle.ca Estimated price: $3,000

If space is at a premium, Sony's new VAIO W-series has come to the rescue. Though it's not a Windows XP Media Centre machine, this Windows XP-based system is nonetheless a pretty compelling multimedia PC, featuring a built-in cable TV antenna, DVD burner, integrated speakers, and a 17.5-inch widescreen LCD. Even better, it's integrated into one compact unit, featuring a keyboard that folds up if you're not using the machine or folds in if you're using it as a television. The machine changes modes depending on which way you flip the keyboard. The VAIO comes with Giga Pocket onboard, which manages your multimedia content, from recording TV programs to streaming data to other Giga Pocket-enabled Sony devices like the RoomLink Receiver ($350, sold separately). A remote control is included so you can put up your feet and control the machine from across the room.



—SC

PC accessories

Belkin Mini-Wireless Optical Mouse

www.belkin.com Estimated price: $75

Take a standard mouse, shave off some weight and size, eliminate the ball, and cut the cord. That pretty much describes Belkin's Mini-Wireless Optical Mouse — no ball, no cord, and about one-third the size of a standard mouse. A USB Radio Frequency module that plugs into the computer (it comes with a USB extension cable) communicates with the mouse at distances of up to a 90 cm. The mouse, while small, is quite comfortable to use and has a scroll wheel and a rubbery coating that improves grip. It's powered by two AAA batteries, and has an off-on switch on the bottom for conserving battery power.

—David Tanaka

Humanscale CPU Dolly

www.humanscale.com Estimated price: $279

One of the best solutions to desktop clutter is moving your computer under your desk (it helps muffle the fan noise, too). One way to do that is with a CPU stand — preferably on casters.



Not only do the wheels make it easier to clean under the desk, it makes it easier to access the computer's cables. Humanscale's steel CPU dolly is more expensive than most, but it's also one of the lightest, sturdiest, and best-designed out there. Its base accommodates tower-style CPUs up to 22.8 cm wide, and its adjustable handle makes it a snap to put even a 62 cm-long CPU on without fear of tipping. Best of all is the simple mechanism that uses the computer's own weight to hold it securely in place — just put it on the dolly and you're done.

—Emru Townsend

Samsung SyncMaster 191T Plus

www.samsung.ca Estimated price: $1,180

If you want a bigger monitor but don't want to use up a lot of your desktop space, check out the SyncMaster 191T Plus, which handles both analogue and digital video signals. The screen itself pivots between landscape and portrait, the whole thing swivels in place, and the screen's height can be adjusted. And of course, since it's a Samsung TFT display, the picture is fabulous.



—SC

Zboard interchangeable keyboard system

www.ideazon.com

The Zboard (think "zee" instead of "zed" and it'll all make sense) is such a simple idea it's surprising it wasn't done before: unlike a standard keyboard, the Zboard consists of a base unit and removable keyboard components that can be swapped out for other configurations. It may be as simple as a module that's relabeled to show you Photoshop or Excel commands right on the keys themselves, or as involved as reconfiguring the keyboard to include huge cursor buttons and regrouped function keys specific to some of your favourite



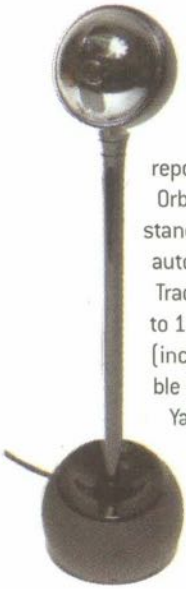
games. There are currently keyboard inserts for eight different productivity applications and seven different game titles (with more to come). Ideazon also has a generic gaming keyboard called the Zboard Crossfire, which is designed to be used with many different games. The good news is that whichever keyboard insert you choose, all you have to do is pop it into place, and the software reconfigures the keyboard layout automatically.

Zboard base: $27
Gaming keysets: $15 to $20
Application keysets: $20 to $55
Base and basic keyboard starter kit: $40

—SC

Logitech QuickCam Orbit

www.logitech.com Estimated price: $225



If you don't live close to friends or family, Web cameras are a great way to stay in touch, allowing you to see each other while chatting online. With most Webcams, though, if you lean to one side or the other, you may just lean out of the image frame. Rather than spending all your time repositioning the camera, take a look at the QuickCam Orbit. The camera module sits on top of a 22 cm stand, and you can set up the camera to pan and tilt automatically when you move using the Face-Tracking feature. The camera captures still images up to 1.3-megapixel, video at resolutions up to 640x320 (including up to 320x240 live streaming in compatible instant messaging programs like MSN and Yahoo), and audio from the built-in microphone. It connects to your computer via USB and is compatible with both Windows (Me, 2000, XP) and Mac (OS X 10.1.5+).

—SC

The gift of WiFi

Once you've tried connecting to the Internet or other networks wirelessly, going back to the world of cables can be mighty disappointing. It may be time to cut the cords, clean up the clutter, and set up a wireless network. Whether it's in your home or home office, here are some new wireless networking products we've been looking at.

Microsoft Broadband Networking series

www.microsoft.com/hardware

Microsoft joined the ranks of wireless networking hardware vendors last year with the release of its 802.11b WiFi products. Now, the company has updated the line by moving the products to the faster 54 Mbps 802.11g standard. The Broadband Networking line includes several models: a notebook adapter, a PCI adapter for your desktop machine, and a base station model that acts as an Internet sharing device. The base has four wired 10/100 networking ports and the ability to handle up to 253 wireless devices. All of these products feature both WEP and WPA security, to keep your connections safe. The products are also backwards compatible with slower 11b products. You can save a few dollars by purchasing the Wireless Notebook Kit (a base station and a notebook card) instead of buying the pieces separately. For gamers, there's also an Xbox wireless adapter that allows you to add your Xbox game console to your wireless network.



Wireless Base Station (MN-700): $150
Wireless Notebook Adapter (MN-720): $120
Wireless PCI Adapter (MN-730): $120
Xbox Wireless Adapter (MN-740): $200
Wireless Notebook Kit (MN-820): $250

Aerielink 802.11g series

www.aerielink.com

Generally, when a motherboard manufacturer branches out into a technology that's not specifically motherboard-related, you know there's a future for the technology. This is the case with Soyo and its Aerielink wireless networking division, which has introduced a few new 11g products. We looked at the PC Card and the 11g Wireless Router. While the former is pretty typical of PC Cards in this category, the router is very compact but very powerful. Despite a tiny case, it has four wired ports and can handle 253 wireless devices. The configuration Web page is well-designed and easy to configure.



Wireless Router (AWR01403): $185*
Cardbus Card (AWPC3101): $105*

US Robotics 802.11g Wireless Turbo series

www.usr.com

While other manufacturers released 802.11g products before the specifications were finalized, US Robotics held off until it was sure its products were 100 per cent compatible. Not only that, the company's 11g debut offering features 100 Mbps Turbo speed, which is nearly twice that of standard 11g products, even while maintaining backwards compatibility with standard 11g and older 11b products (including USR's 22 Mbps models). The Wireless Turbo series features the usual assortment, including a four-port broadband router, an access point, a notebook PC Card, and a PCI card for your desktop machine. All of these feature 100 Mbps speed, and both WEP and WPA for security. There's also an access point with extended functionality, including bridge/repeater functionality for larger offices.



Wireless Turbo Router: $209
Wireless Turbo Access Point: $409
Wireless Turbo PC Card: $129
Wireless Turbo PCI Card: $159

3Com OfficeConnect 11g series

www.3Com.com

Also featuring both WEP and WPA for maximum security, 3Com's OfficeConnect series may be aimed at the business user, but these powerful products are affordable enough to be attractive to the home user. The access point and broadband gateway have adjustable antennae, and the gateway features four wired Ethernet ports. A PC Card adapter is also available.

Cable/DSL Gateway: $183
Access Point: $198
PC Card: $116

X-Micro WLAN 11b series

www.x-micro.com

The biggest problem with going wireless is that if WiFi isn't already built into your notebook or PC, it can be pretty expensive to add it. X-Micro's new line of wireless products is designed for affordability, sporting standard 11b features like WEP, but at a lower cost. The wireless router works with either DSL or cable modem, comes with an adjustable antenna and features four wired ports on the rear. You'd almost expect value-based products to cheap out on the manual or onboard configuration tools, but it's easy to set the router up and get everything working.



continued on page 21

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To get more information and resources about how to help protect your PC and to register for future PC safety alerts from Microsoft, go to:

www.microsoft.ca/protect

Home theatre for the holidays

Sharp Aquos

www.sharpelectronics.com

Flat's where it's at when it comes to the cutting edge of television, and Sharp's Aquos has been on that edge for a while. The Aquos line has expanded substantially, with standard 4:3 aspect models ranging in size from 13 to 20 inches, and widescreen 16:9 models ranging from 22 to 37 inches. These models definitely cost some extra cashola, but if you're short on space, they will fit almost anywhere — you can even hang them right from the wall. Better, with a 170-degree viewing angle in all directions, you'll be able to see the screen from wherever you're sitting, no matter how small the room. Smaller models feature S-Video, composite, component and CATV inputs, and higher-end models also feature computer inputs; check the Sharp Web site for a full breakdown of models and their features.



13-in. standard: $1,000 - $1,150
15- in. standard: $1,150 - $1,500
20- in. standard: $2,000 - $2,300
22- in. widescreen: $3,500
30- in. widescreen: $7,000
37- in. widescreen: $10,500
—Sean Carruthers

Sony DVD Recorder RDR-GX7

www.sonystyle.ca Estimated price: $1,300

Hooked on DVD but still want to record your favourite television programs? In addition to DVD movie playback, Sony's RDR-GX7 can record to blank DVDs (-RW or +RW formats). The nice thing about recording to DVD is that you don't have to search for a blank spot on the disc, like you would with a video tape, because the recorder automatically finds it. With CATV inputs, you can record TV programs directly off the wire, but there are also inputs for other components, allowing you to digitize your old videotapes or movies directly from your video camera. The discs you record will be compatible with Sony's DVP-NS725P progressive scan DVD player ($230), which will also play regular DVD movies and MP3 CDs. —SC



Panasonic Diga DMR-E60PP

www.panasonic.ca Estimated price: $1,000

Panasonic's version of the DVD recorder is a bit cheaper than Sony's, but it only handles DVD-RAM and DVD-R media. In addition to CATV, it features composite and S-Video input for recording from other sources, and it has slots for PC Card and SecureDigital media, so you can record your digital photographs to DVD or play a slideshow right from the machine. It also has a DV input on the front, so you can record your digital videos straight to DVD.



—SC

RCA CRCU900 Universal Learning Remote Control

www.rca.com Estimated price: $99

Let's see... big-screen TV? Check. VCR? Check. DVD player? Check. CD player, receiver, satellite dish? Check, check, and check. An end table to hold all the remotes they come with? ¡Ay caramba! Back in the days when four A/V components constituted serious tech, learning remotes were the only way to keep your sanity. But as gadgets became more complex it became impossible to find a decent universal remote that didn't have either a few hundred buttons for every conceivable function or one that forces you to learn perplexing button substitutions. Thank goodness, then, for universal learning remotes with LCD touch screens. Depending on the device you're controlling, the display shows only the relevant buttons — the AM/FM button disappears when you switch from the receiver to the TV, for instance. RCA's CRCU900 is notable because, unlike many multifunction remotes, it's not much bigger than a regular remote, though it's a little heavier. And with the ability to control up to eight devices, there's a good chance you'll be able to retire most of the other remotes from active service. A macro function makes it a snap to execute a sequence of commands with one button. Other LCD remotes control more devices and offer more features, but for the simple purpose of consolidating your remotes into one easy-to-learn device, it's hard to beat the elegance of the CRCU900.
—Emru Townsend

Kameleon 8 Remote Control

www.radioshack.ca Estimated price: $150

The Kameleon 8 remote control can operate up to eight entertainment devices such as a DVD player or satellite, and can be used with a PVR (personal video recorder) as well. It is quite stylish looking, with digital buttons that only light up when in use rather than raised buttons. The Kameleon 8 is available exclusively at Radio Shack.
—Jessica Malone



Logitech Z-680 speaker set

www.logitech.com Estimated price: $600

As the home PC gets better and better as a stand-in for a home theatre setup, with DVD playback, surround sound, and high-quality graphics, it's not unthinkable to spend more money on a decent multimedia speaker set. While Logitech's Z-680 is pricey, it's also an amazing configuration: not only is it THX certified, you can hook it up to your computer and your component DVD player at the same time, thanks to multiple inputs on the rear of the volume control pod. In fact, it not only has a trio of 1/8-inch plugs for analogue surround input, it also has optical and coaxial SPDIF inputs, which means you can have three input sources, and cycle between them using the remote. And with 500 watts of room-shaking power, you'd better make sure your house's foundation is sound.

—SC

Panasonic SC-HT810 Home Theatre

www.panasonic.ca Estimated price: $1,000

There are a number of all-in-one home theatre configurations that come with the surround speaker setup and a DVD player. If you want an all-in-one but don't want to give up your videotapes just yet, say hello to this bundle, which features both DVD and VHS in addition to the 500-watt 5.1 surround sound speakers. The DVD component handles both DVD audio and video, and will play Windows Media and MP3 files too. It can also play back DVD-R and DVD-RAM files recorded on other Panasonic recorders.—SC

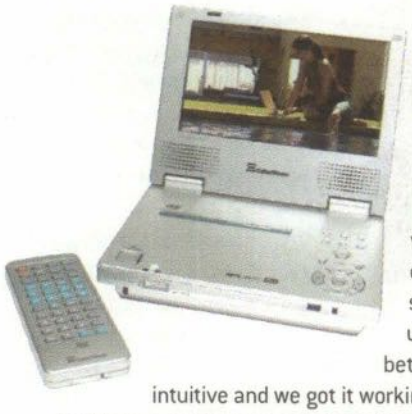


DVD for the road

Cyberhome DVD player

www.radioshack.ca Estimated price: $500

New on the market and priced affordably, this portable DVD player has a 7-inch in 16:9 format screen that can also display movies in 4:3 format. The unit also plays Video CDs (VCDs), as well as audio and MP3 CDs, and will display JPEG images. The battery is rated at four hours but squeezing in two movies before it runs out of juice is very optimistic. Image quality is good and speaker sound is passable, but using headphones is much better. Its controls are fairly intuitive and we got it working fairly quickly without having to consult the manual. The Cyberhome is a good, affordable portable DVD solution. I especially like the jacks for video and audio out, allowing you to plug the unit into a TV, or to connect to digital still or video cameras.



—Nestor Gula

Stocking Stuffers

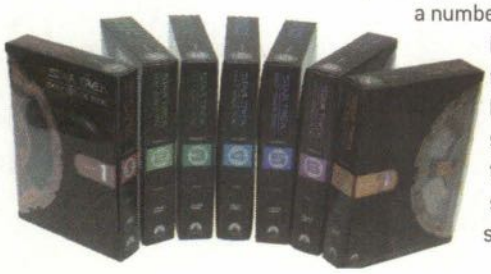
DVD corner

Once your home theatre is all set up, you'll want something to play on it. Here are a few ideas.

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine sets

Paramount www.startrek.com Estimated price: $150 to $200 per season

For the Star Trek geek on your list, Paramount has released all seven seasons of the series Deep Space Nine this year. In addition to all of the episodes, each set comes with a number of "hidden" interviews, short features, and behind-the-scenes looks for that season. Each set squeezes seven DVDs into an attractive and compact package that won't take up much space on your DVD rack.



—SC

Alien Quadrilogy

Twentieth-Century Fox, www.foxhome.com/alienq/ Estimated price: $140

The nine-disc Alien box set is bound to be at the top of many for sci-fi fan wish lists: all four of the movies are included (with extended Director's Cuts). The extra discs are filled to bursting with extras, such as behind-the-scenes looks at the pre-production, filming, and post-production required for all of the movies, design and artwork galleries, trailers, short features, and even Sigourney Weaver's original screen test. Because there are so many discs crammed into this small box, the packaging is somewhat unwieldy, but for true fans, a bit of package wrestling is a small price to pay for having this comprehensive set.

—SC

For more top DVD picks: >_ more @ hubcanada.com

Books for kids and parents

Awesome Internet Sites for Kids
www.smork.com
Estimated price: $20
This 155-page, kid-friendly title catalogues children's sites worth visiting. Best thing, it includes a Web version, so you won't have to type in URL after URL.

Homework Help 4 Kids (Vol 1: grades 1-3; Vol 2: grades 4-6)
kapablekidz.com
Estimated price: $20
You might want to consider these books as you ponder how to successfully integrate the Internet with your child's education. Each section is prefaced with guidelines from the Ontario Elementary School Curriculum and provides an endless selection of Web sites for learning and practice.

Professional toy testers

Here are some professional toy testers whose aim is to help you make sense of the pre-Christmas onslaught.

Canadian Toy Testing Council
www.toy-testing.org
For the past 50 years, the Canadian Toy Testing Council has been giving kids, ages three months to 16 years, six to 12 weeks to take toys home and test their design, function, durability, and play value. The final result is age-appropriate star ratings in various categories. Children's Choice Awards go to new toys that are "fun, innovative and the absolute best in their area of play."

Neighbourhood Toy Stores of Canada
www.neighbourhoodtoystores.ca/goldstarwinners.htm
If you have a favourite toy store, chances are it has helped the Neighbourhood Toy Stores of Canada determine what toys deserve Gold Star Awards. The criteria? "Top quality toys that give the best play value to children."

Thumbs up kids picks for the holidays

Here's a sampling of some of the new smart toys, technologies, games, and books we've tried out for the under-12 set.

Hands-on

Lyra RD1071

www.rca.com Estimated price: $200
RCA's media relations guy suggested 10 year-olds could easily use this MP3 player, but after witnessing an eight year-old transfer tracks and sit mesmerized for an entire Saturday, I'm lowering the bar. It's incredibly easy to use and the 128 MB memory is expandable.

PowerTouch Learning System

www. fisher-price.com/us/powertouch
Estimated price: $80
This Fisher-Price product is meant for kids three years and up and is a direct competitor to the highly successful Leap Pad Learning System. The main difference is that kids use their fingers, not a stylus, to spell out words, which is easier, but not always as precise. Unlike the Leap Pad , there's no need to press "go" to identify a page — PowerTouch magically determines what page it's on. My testers point out that the handle "makes it easier to carry." More than 60 learning activities, and a library of books featuring popular characters like Clifford, Blue, and Arthur.

Pixter 2.0

www.fisher-price.com/us/pixter/
Estimated price: $75
Unfortunately, Pixter Color isn't available in Canada, but you can get your hands on the 2003 (third) version that lets kids four years and up beam pictures they've drawn on the screen to other Pixter owners, just like Palm-owning parents, albeit from a maximum 1.5 m distance. Older cartridges run on the new device.

Cool programs

Barbie Horse Adventures Mystery Ride (PC)

www.vugames.com Estimated price: $30
Barbie becomes Nancy Drew as she sets out on the trail of a prize horse. Besides solving the mystery, players get to ride and groom their horses, and try on a series of — what else? — beautiful Barbie outfits.

Nancy Drew: Danger on Deception Island (PC)

www.herinteractive.com/prod/ddi
Estimated price: $33
Nancy's vacation is cut short in this ninth title in this game series. It turns out there's an orphaned orca whale in the harbour and some distress and mystery concerning what should be done about it. For ages 10 and up.

Plumo at the Park (PC/Mac)

www.cogniscienceinc.com
Estimated price: $25
Here's a delightful Canadian surprise that my testers were already familiar with, since they've played the first two titles at school. Playable in English, French, and Spanish, although once into the game, language is of little importance. For ages three to seven.

Learn to Play Chess with Fritz and Chesster (PC/Mac)

www.viva-media.com Estimated price: $40
My chess-playing nephew could hardly restrain himself when he saw this winner of the 2003 Bologna New Media Prize. It includes an entertaining story with lots of opportunity to learn about and practice chess-playing skills.

Mia's Language Adventure: The Kidnap Caper (PC/Mac)

www.kutoka.com Estimated price: $30
This latest adventure of the (Canadian) mouse Mia focuses on learning French or Spanish as a second language. As always, Mia has to find sparklies, solve a mystery, and stay away from the nasty rats. For ages six to 10.

—Mara Gulens



PowerTouch Learning System

The gift of WiFi continued from page 16

Wireless router: $80
USB adapter: $45
PC Card adapter: $40

Kensington WiFi Finder

www.kensington.com Estimated price: $34

Now that you've added a wireless card to your laptop, how do you find WiFi hotspots when you're on the road? You can fire up your laptop and walk around until you get a signal or, for a mere $34, invest in Kensington's WiFi Finder. Just press the button and the LEDs tell you if you're in an open hotspot: red for no and green (a series of three lights indicating the strength of the signal) if you are. It'll only give you a positive result if you're in an 11b or 11g area that isn't protected by encryption, which means you won't waste time firing up your notebook only to find out that you need a WEP key. The two user-replaceable CR2032 watch batteries are designed to last up to a year. It does come with a keyring attachment, but it's probably a bit big for that — just make sure you have a jacket pocket handy and you're set.

—Sean Carruthers

*Converted from US$139 (Aerielink Wireless Router) US$79 (Aerielink Cardbus Card)

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Jennifer Robinson

Six-time Canadian champion Jennifer Robinson has been figure skating for 20 years and has been a member of the national team for the last 10. In January, she'll be trying for her seventh Canadian championship in Edmonton.

Robinson grew up in Windsor, Ont., although she now calls Barrie home.

"I actually wanted to play hockey before I wanted to figure skate, but they didn't really have leagues [for girls] back then. So I took up figure skating after I went to the Ice Capades with my mom and saw them skating," says Robinson. "I liked all the costumes and the speed and jumping."

She was an athlete at the 2002 Winter Olympics, where she watched the judging scandal surrounding Canadian pairs figure skaters Jamie Salé and David Pelletier unfold.

"We didn't realize how big it actually was, because in the [athletes'] village you only get the two official broadcasters, so we didn't realize how worldwide it was. That night, when they came back after winning the silver medal, a whole bunch of us slipped some notes under their door and congratulated them. It was so in the public eye, but that's helping our sport because if it didn't happen our sport would still be the same."

That scandal actually resulted in a new judging system that employs a range of new technologies.

"It's really cool. It's all touch-screen. There's instant replay, you have your own little monitor, and if there is something you want to review, you just call it up and it will instantaneously show you the take off and the landing and the jump. It shows you in slow mo, fast, anything you want. You put your marks in and it is just so much faster."

From a skater's point of view, Robison says this system is better.

"If you looked at skating in the past, you would see a skating champion, for example, who would do a double axle. You'd get, say, five points. Then you'd see a skater from another little country, or who is skating in their first group, and they'd do the same element, just as good, and they would get no points for it, so there was no consistency. So this way with the new system, if you do a double axle, you get 1.2 points. That's what you're guaranteed to get."

Robinson says she enjoys the fact that her Web site (www.skating-inc.com/Skaters/Robinson) allows her to keep her fans apprised of what she is doing and answer fan mail more efficiently.

"I've had that Web site for about two and a half years. I write little journal entries, and then there's a form where [fans can submit] letters, and then I've got a special way that I can write them back.

"I really like the Web site because a lot of people used to write fan letters, but now this has just totally changed that sort of aspect and it's great — a lot of people want to know what you are thinking as you are skating, and if it didn't go well, why didn't it go well, and they just want to know, as well to [give] a lot of support."

Because she travels so frequently, Robinson says she relies on email to stay in touch. There is often a computer set up for the athletes at events, and Robinson says she makes good use of her Hotmail account.

Robinson says one of her favourite gadgets is her portable Sony DVD player, which she takes with her on all her trips.

"I love it! I got it from my parents for Christmas two years ago and it's just the perfect thing when you're traveling, especially where there's a time change. I watch it on the plane all the time too."

At home, Robinson has a DVD player and she and her husband are saving for a big-screen Sony Wega this Christmas. As well, Robinson uses her HP computer to check her email and surf the Web.

During the 2002 Winter Olympics, Heritage Minister Sheila Copps gave all of the Canadian athletes a BlackBerry. Robinson says she continues to use the wireless email device and PDA to manage her schedule.

"Every Olympic athlete [got] one. It was awesome because the Canadian team in the Olympics is massive, so they gave you a book with pictures and bios and everybody's email address. It was a great way to meet people during the Olympics that you may not have the courage to go up to and introduce yourself to. You could just send an email."

Robinson's next competition is the National Championships in Edmonton, followed by the Four Continents Championships in Hamilton later in January.

Check Skate Canada's Web site at www.skatecanada.ca for more information.

By Jessica Malone





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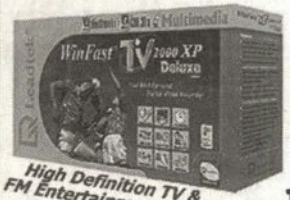
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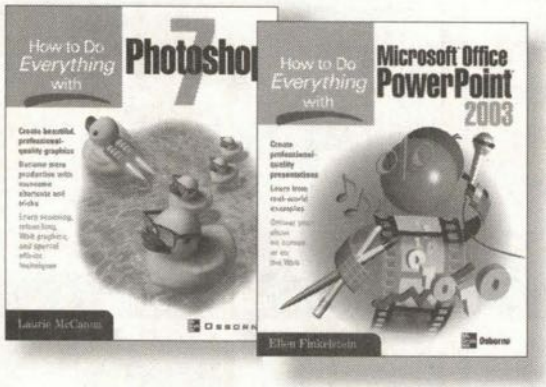
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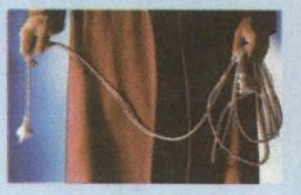
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Power projects



Energy Quest (www.engergyquest.ca.gov), which aims to educate students about energy and how it can be saved, is, not surprisingly, a government-supported site from the land of brown outs: California. Though essentially a resource for students and teachers in that state, it can be accessed by anyone with a Web browser, and includes energy-related news, profiles of energy pioneers, energy conversion calculators, interactive games, and links to additional resources.

The Science Project section provides an outline of what makes a good project for science fair participants. It also includes how-tos for fun projects — a solar hot dog cooker, measuring the energy in a peanut, making a simple thermometer, splitting water into hydrogen and oxygen — that can be made with readily available materials like pencils, 9-volt batteries, elastic bands, and candles. The projects include supply lists, diagrams, alerts for projects that require adult supervision, and an explanation of the what students should discover when doing each experiment.

The Saving Energy link leads off with a history of California's energy crisis, but is followed by a list of tips, broken down by rooms in the house, that are written for kids but will probably enlighten a few parents too.

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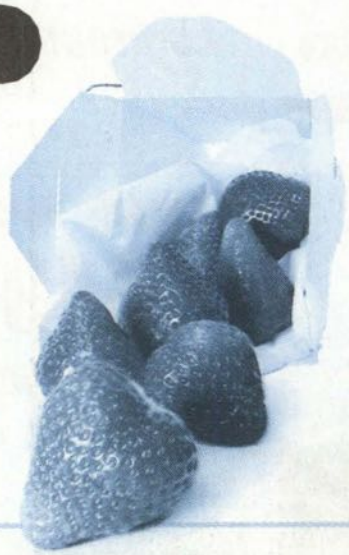
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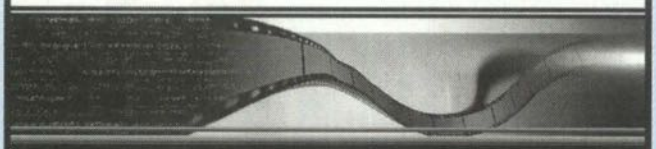


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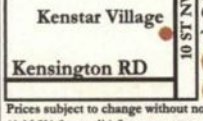
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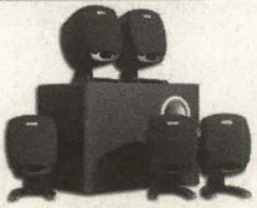

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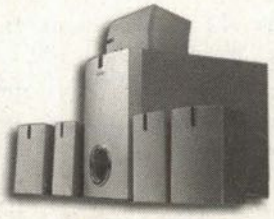

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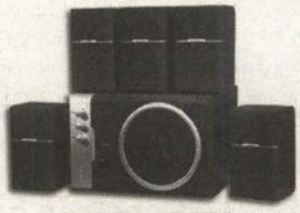

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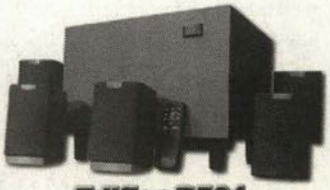

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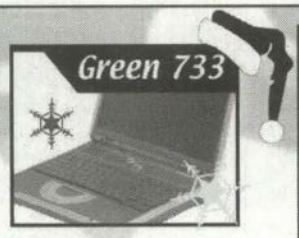
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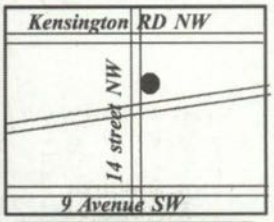
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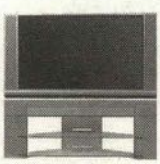
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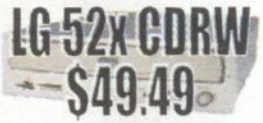
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For the organized — or even better, the organizationally impaired — a PDA is a great gift idea. If your giftee is already toting a handheld, there is a wide-range of add-ons, software, games, and cases that will help them get the most out of their digital sidekick.

Pocket PC

Dell Axim X3

www.dell.ca Estimated price: $549



With 64 MB and a 400 MHz processor, the lightweight (140 g) Dell Axim X3 Pocket PC has enough memory and computing power to handle all applications (it comes with versions of Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, and Explorer on board). Though it isn't exactly a replacement for your desktop or laptop PC, you can use it to work on spreadsheets, play games, send and receive email, and surf the Web (via integrated WiFi connectivity). The Axim X3 connects to your computer via sync cradle, cable (both are included), or Bluetooth (using an SD card, available separately). A standout in this handheld is the bright 3.5-inch screen, which makes any multimedia come to life. It has a headphone jack, but you can also listen to audio via the built-in speaker. A microphone for making voice notes is also included.

—Nestor Gula

Palm OS

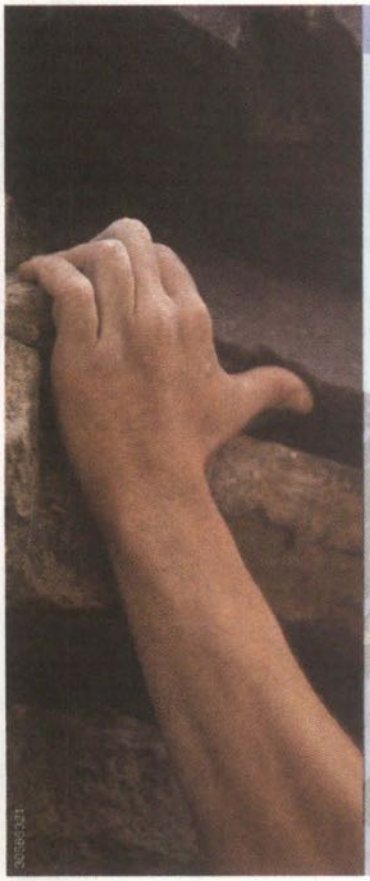
PalmOne has added new models to its consumer and business lines, providing gift ideas for Santas in all budget ranges. All of the following models have rechargeable internal batteries, run Palm OS 5.2.1, and are Windows and Mac compatible.

Zire 21

www.palmone.com Estimated price: $149

This very affordable model is also very basic. It has a 160x160-pixel monochrome display, 8 MB of built-in memory, two buttons (calendar and contacts) combined with up and down navigational controls clustered below the display, and comes in an attractive white plastic case with plastic stylus and blue rubber cover flap. The Zire 21 syncs via Mini-USB cable or infrared link. It has no media card slot for adding memory. It's very basic, but it's a good choice for those making the leap from a paper-based organizer.

continued on page 24



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continued from page 23

Tungsten E

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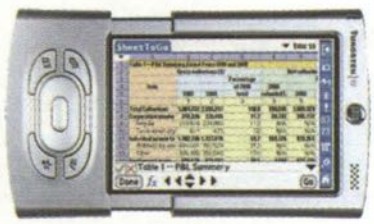
Though it's a business-oriented line, the multimedia features in the Tungsten models make them appealing for non-business uses too. The E model, with 32 MB of built-in memory, a 320x320 colour screen, headphone jack, and SD card slot, connects to a PC via a Mini-USB cable or infrared link. It has a shiny metal case and five-way navigator with four control buttons (calendar, contacts, to-do list, and notepad). With its card slot, colour screen, and headphone jack, the Tungsten E does triple duty as an organizer, photo album, and audio player (MP3 and Real Audio formats). A good tool for those who want a PDA that mixes business and multimedia features.



Tungsten T3

Estimated price: $599

With a 400 MHz processor (the others use 126 MHz processors), 64 MB of built-in memory, and a 320x320-pixel display that slides open to 320x480, the sleek brushed-metal T3 is a very nice device that expands on the E's multimedia features. The extra screen real estate, and ability to change the view from vertical to horizontal, means wide-format photos aren't downsized to fit the screen and there's plenty of room for the on-screen keyboard for text entry. Like the E, it can be used as an MP3 player, but the T3 adds voice recording and video playback to its multimedia arsenal. It has a five-way navigator and four control buttons, and has Bluetooth as well as USB (via the included cradle) and infrared connectivity.



—Megan Johnston

Accessories

Belkin Wireless PDA Keyboard

www.belkin.com Estimated price: $75

There's a wireless keyboard from a company called Pocketop that uses a clever mirror system to reflect the keyboard's infrared signals to a Pocket PC or Palm handheld's IR port. This wireless PDA keyboard from Belkin uses the same principle, although it's noticeably bigger overall than the Pocketop. The trade-off is that this model's keys are closer to those of a standard keyboard, which many people will find easier to use. The CD included with the keyboard has both Palm and PocketPC drivers (which can also be found on Belkin's Web site). Most handhelds are supported, but notable exceptions are the Palm Zire 71 and Tungsten T.



—David Tanaka

StylusCentral PDA Aluminum Hard Cases

www.styluscentral.com Estimated price range: $25-49

You've spent a lot of money on a sleek-looking handheld, so why let it get dinged and scratched? StylusCentral's series of anodized-aluminum cases are designed to protect your PDA while fitting comfortably around it, holding it snugly in place with a neoprene lining. I tried the model for the Palm Zire 71, which includes storage slots for two spare SD cards and openings for easy access to the Zire 71's various slots, connectors, and even the reset button. In fact, once you put the PDA in the case, there's not much reason to take it out. The only thing missing? A belt clip.



—Emru Townsend

Palm Executive Multifunction Stylus

www.palmone.com Estimated price: $30

If you switch between pen and Palm and presentation, you may wish you didn't have to juggle different pen-shaped items. The solution? Palm's Executive Multifunction Stylus. With a twist of your wrist, the pen tip changes into a plastic Palm stylus; flip the whole thing around and you can use it as a laser pointer or a flashlight. Even better, despite the Palm logo on the side, it can be used on any touch-sensitive screen, piece of paper, or meeting-room wall.



—Sean Carruthers

Belkin Stylus Multi-Pack

www.belkin.com Estimated price: up to $12*



If, like me, you tend to lose your PDA stylus on a regular basis, you may want to check out Belkin's stylus multi-packs. Each package contains several replacements, so you always have another ready when one goes missing. There are replacements for several Palm and Pocket PC models. (See the PDA accessories section of the Belkin Web site for your model.)

—SC

Games in your palm

Yahtzee

www.handmark.com Estimated price: $27*

If you are a fan of Yahtzee and Palm, download the electronic version of Yahtzee. The game looks great on a high-resolution colour screen. The scorecard is on the left and dice are on the right, with a big oval Roll button just below them. When you hit Roll, the animated



dice tumble and realistic audio adds to the effect. The play is true to the original — but no sneaking an extra roll. Handmark also makes Scrabble and Monopoly under license from Hasbro.

—DT

Calypso

www.fun4palm.com Estimated price: $20*



Calypso is a downloadable Tetris-like game (falling pieces you fit into a grid). The base is a hexagonal grid with tinted areas that change colour when you successfully fill them. Like Tetris, it can be highly addictive, and you need your wits about you because the pieces fall faster as the game progresses.

—DT

Atari Retro

www.gomdm.com Estimated price: $50

There's something about vintage video games that never gets old. Atari Retro features versions of classics such as Asteroids, Breakout, Centipede, Missile Command, Yar's Revenge, Adventure, and Pong. They all come on a single SD card, which is compatible with Palm OS 5.0+, Pocket PC 2002+, and Nokia N-Gage operating systems.

—SC



PalmPak Game Essentials

www.palm.com Estimated price: $50

If you're not into the old arcade classics, this SD card features a variety of other games, including SimCity, Atum, Shanghai, Billiards, and Vegas VIP Casino. It's compatible with all Palm OS devices with an SD slot.

—SC

*Converted from US$9.25 (stylus multi-packs), US$20 (Yahtzee), US$15 (Calypso)

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SAMSUNG 171N LCD 17" Slim $545
SAMSUNG 152T LCD 15" DVI $399
AOpen 52x24x52 CDRW $35
LG 4040B 4X DVD+/-RW $152
hynix DDR400 512Mb $89
ATI Radeon 9600Pro 128 $189
Western Digital 800BB 80Gb $83
ASUS P4P800 Deluxe $168
ECS K7S5A Pro $54
ACT SYSTEM Pro 2000+ 256m,40G, CDRW, Lan $338
*Not exact as show
SAMSUNG
172W 17" 16:9 wide screen Dual mode LCD panel $699
Platinum Partner
Bring to you the best price and service
BENQ
FP991 19" Dual mode Pivot LCD panel $799
Platinum Partner
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30640621
2629 Kingsway, Vancouver,BC, V5R 5H4 Phone: 604-435-2038 Fax: 604-435-1298 Toll Free:check online

Tuning into holiday sounds

If your holiday music tastes lean towards the Pogues' "Fairytale of New York" or anything from the Boney M Christmas album, you may have been barred from using the home stereo system. Happily, with a portable music player you can play anything you like without offending those around you. Here are a few tools to help get your solo party started.

Portable MP3 players

Apple iPod 20 and 40 GB

www.apple.ca Estimated price: $579 and 729

Still the coolest MP3 player going, Apple has introduced new iPods, in 20 and 40 GB capacities. Both come with a FireWire dock (USB 2.0 dock/cable sold separately) and wired remote control. The new iPods are compatible with both Mac and Windows right out of the box. Yeah, an iPod costs a bit more, but it's still hard to beat its elegance and ease of use. (See HUB September 2003 for more on the iPod.)



—Sean Carruthers

Creative Nomad MuVo NX 128 MB

www.nomadworld.com Estimated price: $230

The Nomad MuVo NX is a tiny flash-based player that doubles as a 128 MB USB memory key. Although the NX version of the player is the same size as the standard MuVo, it adds an LCD window and a full menu system, which means that not only can you see what's playing, you can delete files, adjust EQ settings, and more. The MuVo NX can also be used as a voice recorder, thanks to a tiny built-in microphone. The whole thing runs on just one AAA battery. A 256 MB version of the MuVo NX is also available.



—SC

Lyra RD2760

www.rca.com Estimated price: $379

This model is similar to other Lyras except that it's thicker — thicker because this player is loaded. It has a miniature 1.5 GB internal hard disk that can store about 25 hours of music in MP3 format or 50 hours in MP3Pro format. It's still quite small, measuring 5.8x5.8x2.8 cm, and weighs just 91 g. It comes with an armband but is small enough to tuck into a shirt or jacket pocket.



Transferring files is easy: most computers will recognize it as an external storage device and all you have to do is drag and drop the files on its desktop icon. It sounds great, the user interface is simple and battery life is good — a single charge lasts up to eight hours. The Lyra RD2760 is a great portable music device and proof that MP3 players will be continue to get smaller, more powerful, and more affordable.

—Nestor Gula

Accessories

Belkin iPod add-ons

www.belkin.com Price: $149 (Media Reader), $75 (Voice Recorder), $40* (TuneDok)

Belkin checks in this Christmas season with a trio of accessories for your iPod.

If your digital camera is getting full but you have no way to offload the images, Belkin's new Media Reader for iPod allows you to stick your camera's memory card into the appropriate slot, then copy the files to your iPod's hard drive. It uses the dock connector found on new iPod models and is powered by four AAA batteries. It's compatible with CompactFlash, SecureDigital/MMC, Memory Stick, and SmartMedia cards, and has a sliding door to cover the slots when they're not in use. The hitch: you have to upgrade your iPod's firmware to version 2.1.



The Voice Recorder attachment hooks to the top of your iPod, and if you have v2.1 of the firmware already installed, there's nothing else to do — just attach it and select "voice memos" in the Extras folder. You can't use it at the same time as your headphones, but it's easy to attach and remove, and has a protective cover for its connectors when not in use.

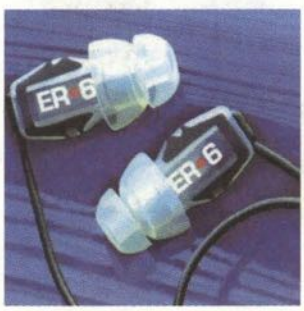
If you like to take your iPod on the road, the TuneDok is a great companion for the car. It includes a base with a pivoting stand that fits into a cup holder in your car. Once you've put your iPod in the TuneDok, you can adjust its height with the ratcheting neck design, and use the suction cup to hold it in position.

—SC

Etymotic ER-6 Isolator headphones

www.headphonezone.com Estimated price: $198

If you want a really compact set of headphones for your MP3 player that also cancel out noise and sound great, take a listen to Etymotic's ER-6 Isolator earphones. They're designed to fit right into your ear canal, like earplugs, and you have your choice of silicon or foam tips. The great news is that because they block out ambient noise (15 to



20 dB reduction), you can listen to music at a much lower volume, protecting your hearing. They're certainly pricey, but once you've tried them out, the sound quality speaks for itself. —SC

MMGear M500FL 5.1 headphones

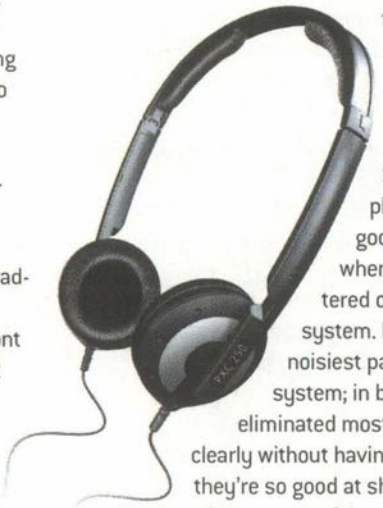
www.mmgear.com Estimated price: $90



The great thing about 5.1 surround sound audio is that you feel like you're right in the middle of the action, but when you have to switch to headphones you end up going right back to stereo. Not so with MMGear's new 5.1 headphone set, which comes with three separate 1/8-inch plugs for front, rear, and centre channels. Inside the headphones, are three mini speakers in each earpiece, placed one in front of the other to simulate front center, and rear. The downside is that you have to plug your headphones to the rear of your PC, or use adapters to connect directly to the rear of your DVD player (if its audio is even configured that way), but with a 3 m cable you have a long leash. They're not audiophile quality by any means — there's some distortion at top volume and you won't feel the bass like you would with a subwoofer — but they're certainly an interesting way to get surround sound while keeping it to yourself. (If you can't find this locally, check out www.neo-eshop.com.) —SC

Sennhesier PXC 250 headphones

www.sennheiser.com Suggested retail price: $179



If you're a frequent traveller — even if it's only a daily walk/train/bus to work — you probably plug yourself in to a Walkman or MP3 player for some personalized zone-out music, and crank the volume up to get past the ambient noise of engines and other people. Save your ears: Sennheiser's padded PXC 250 headphones not only look good and feel good, they sound good — especially when much of the outside world is filtered out via the NoiseGard compensation system. I tried the headphones sitting in the noisiest part of a bus and on Montreal's metro system; in both cases, activating NoiseGard eliminated most of the din so I could hear my music clearly without having to turn it up. Only one problem: they're so good at shutting out traffic noise, you'll have to be extra careful on the street.

—Emru Townsend

*Converted from US$30.



Hewlett-Packard ScanJet 4670

www.hp.ca
Estimated price: $300

If you need to add your older photo prints, slides, or documents to your digital archives, you've probably been considering a scanner. They've been pretty standard for several years now, essentially consisting of a box with a flip-up lid, but HP's new ScanJet shakes up the design. It has a scanning component that resembles a picture frame that opens up like a book: drop your document or photo inside, close it up, and then watch as it scans through the clear window. If you have a bigger item, or one that's hanging on a wall, just lift the scanning window out of the base, hold it up to the item you want to scan, and press the button on the side of the scanner. The downside is that you have to stay within about 1.25 m of your computer thanks to the length of the USB cable, but the new design gives you a lot more flexibility than the old-school flatbed. There's even a slide attachment.

—SC

Buying a digital camera? Read this first!

There is a dizzying array of digital cameras on the market today. Whether you're looking for a simple point-and-shoot or something more advanced, here are a few things to keep in mind:

The megapixel myth: Don't assume that the more megapixels (MP) a camera has, the better it will be. You will get bigger images with more megapixels, but they'll take up more space and take longer to write to memory. A 3 MP image will make very good 8x10 prints, and 2 MP images are fine for use on the Web, email, and 4x6-inch prints.

continued on page 29

Digital gifts for the shutterbug

In November, we reviewed more than 20 digital cameras for a range of budgets (online at www.HUBcanada.com). Since then, we've had a chance to look at a few more models — and some photography-related tools — worthy of consideration for the digital photographer's holiday wish list.

Digital cameras

Fujifilm FinePix F700

www.fujifilm.ca Estimated price: $899

The Fujifilm F700 uses SuperCCD technology to achieve a resolution level of 6.2 MP (megapixels). The lens is sharp and has a 3X optical.



Fujifilm's cameras have always had a very good user interface and this continues in the F700. The menu is clearly laid out, easy to use, and intuitive, with single-button access to the most commonly used features. Encased in an elegant aluminum body, this camera is surprisingly lightweight (195 g), even with the proprietary rechargeable Lithium Ion battery pack, xD card, and strap.

—Nestor Gula

Kodak EasyShare DX 6490

www.kodak.ca Estimated price $730

Distinguishing this 4 MP model is a 10X optical zoom lens (equal to a 380 mm telephoto at full zoom). Its design, a departure from Kodak's consumer line, has an edgy prosumer SLR look. It uses an electronic viewfinder system and offers a number of exposure modes, including fully manual. The 2.2-inch LCD screen on the back looks even bigger because the camera itself is surprisingly small. Despite its compact dimensions, the handgrip is comfortable. Adding to the favourable ergonomics is a set of controls that are simple and efficient: a combination scroll wheel/switch just under the shutter button allows you to quickly run through menus and sub-menus using just your index finger. On the back, a circular dial with a four-way toggle in the middle controls the main modes, while close-up, flash, and timer modes have dedicated buttons. Overall, image quality is very good: 8x10-inch enlargements will be no problem with this camera. The camera uses SD memory cards, but also has 16 MB of built-in memory. It comes with an EasyShare 6000 dock, and can be used with the EasyShare Printer Dock 6000 (sold separately) to make prints without firing up the personal computer.

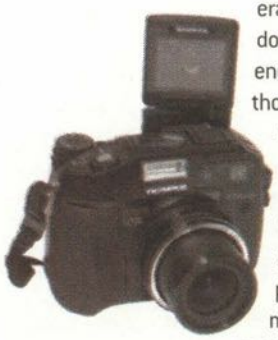


—David Tanaka

Olympus C-5060 Wide Zoom

www.olympus.com Estimated price: $1,000

For some, the main complaint about digital cameras is that the lens just doesn't have a wide enough angle to get those shots that require it, especially indoors. The 5.1 MP C-5060 has a 4X zoom lens that's equivalent to 27 mm in 35 mm photography, which means you can fit more in the frame. The camera also offers a lot of manual control over your shot, has a flip-up LCD that can be spun around for self-portraits, and comes with a remote control. Flash is built in, but there's a hot shoe for an optional Olympus flash. It's a bit pricey but the configuration is bound to please the more demanding prosumer.



—Sean Carruthers

Sony Cyber-shot DSC-U60

www.sony.ca Estimated price: $399

Encased in a solid plastic shell, the 2 MP Cyber-shot DSC-U60 is a rugged waterproof digital camera that can be submerged underwater (up to 1.5 m). As a beach accessory it is excellent — sand can't get into the lens and spilling a drink on it won't require extensive repairs. If it gets dirty, you can just run it under the tap. There is no zoom, but you get a really nice wide angle that is perfect for underwater or group photos. The camera's slightly skewed look



seems strange, but makes it easy to operate with one hand — with all of the buttons controls easily accessible. Weighing in at about 195 g with batteries (a pair of AAAs), Memory Stick, and strap, the camera is lightweight, too.

—NG

Sidekicks

PhotoFit Premium

www.tpfit.com Estimated price: $375*

You can find examples of panoramic scenes made by piecing together individual prints dating to the mid-1800s. Panoramas are popular again, and that same process of making big scenes from small frames is still used today. Thanks to computer software, photos can be stitched together so accurately that the joins are all but invisible. PhotoFit can work with single rows (or columns) of images to make wide (or tall) composites, or multiple rows and columns to make them tall and wide. The program will render the panoramic image as a normal-looking photo where straight lines remain straight, as a 360-degree image in the round (which requires a special viewer like QuickTime) or as a pseudo dome to approximate the image taken with a fisheye lens. PhotoFit organizes panorama making into five steps, from gathering the source images through to printing. Each step is shown within the PhotoFit Manager window, which is context sensitive so relevant options are available to you during each step. The program includes a colour balancer that works quite well to equalize the brightness levels of the photos. Just make sure you have a capable system: on my dual-Athlon test system with 1 GB of RAM, the rendering of four photos into one panorama took a few minutes. Note: both a freeware version and a "light" version called PhotoFit Harmony ($70*) are also available if you find the price of the Premium version too daunting.

—DT

MicroSolutions RoadStor

www.micro-solutions.com

Estimated price: $429

More memory is a sure hit for any digital photographer, but the RoadStor might be the gadget they didn't know they wanted. Accompanied by its own carrying case with slots for the remote control, rechargeable battery, and its cables, the RoadStor is about the size of a hardcover book, and operates as a standalone CD burner that will back up the contents of memory cards onto CD-R or CD-RW discs. But this eager-to-please unit does much more. Hook it up to a TV or a desktop PC (USB 2.0 capability required) and it plays DVDs and displays pictures from cards or CDs. It serves as an external card reader and CD burner for your computer; and it will play audio CDs and MP3 files on either CDs or memory cards, with or without a TV or PC connection.



The RoadStor is compatible with SecureDigital, CompactFlash (Types I and II), MultiMedia Card, SmartMedia, Memory Stick, and microdrive formats. It will copy to and from the CD, but only reads one card at a time, so you can't copy directly from one card to another. It supports multi-session burning, so you can keep shooting and backing up the pictures until the CD is full.

The included manual has easy to follow instructions and photos to show the proper connections; the unit offers RCA audio/video input jacks and an S-Video input jack. The audio jack will accept standard headphones (not included), but you'll need the remote to control the volume. The RoadStor is compatible with Windows 98, Me, 2000 (SP3) and XP, and Mac OS 10.1.3 or above.

—Sharlene Myers

*Converted from US$277 (PhotoFit Premium), US$52 (PhotoFit Harmony).



Final PhotoFit Premium panorarma stitched from six images measures 5,400x2,000 pixels.

continued from page 28

Physical dimensions: Go to a store and see how the camera fits your hand. Is it too heavy? Does it fit in your pocket? Can you operate the controls comfortably? The physical aspects will be very important to your enjoyment of a camera.

Optical vs. digital zoom: Nearly all digital cameras have both optical and digital zooms. Optical zoom means a lens magnifies the image, while a digital zoom is an effect created in the camera's software. Avoid buying a camera based solely on the digital zoom as it's a poor indicator of the camera's quality.

Feature menu: How simple is it to access the features of the camera? Some can be very complex, so it's worth spending some time in a camera store trying to navigate the features on the models you're considering before making your choice.

Shutter lag: Some digital cameras have a longish lag between pressing the shutter button and actually capturing the picture. Before purchasing your camera check it out to see if you can live with this lag.

Memory: A few cameras have internal memory, but most use either CompactFlash (CF), Secure Digital/MultiMediaCard (SD/MMC), xD Picture Card (xD), Memory Stick, or SmartMedia (SM) removable memor. (SM is no longer used by the main manufacturers).

The batteries: Typically either proprietary or AA; some high-end cameras will also accept lithium ion batteries meant for film cameras. Proprietary batteries sometimes have a longer life, but you have to take a charger or spare batteries (expensive) when you travel. AA batteries are readily available (and affordable) and if you buy a set of Nickel Metal Hydride (NiMH) rechargeables, you will have plenty of long-lasting power. Some cameras already ship with rechargeable AAs.

—Nestor Gula

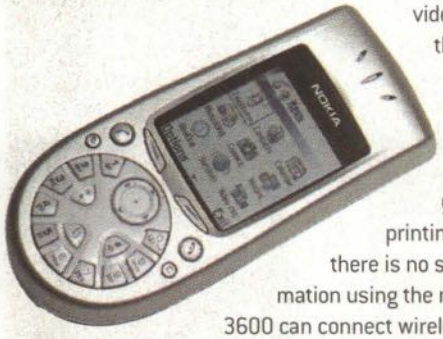
Ringing in the season

Want to stay connected with your loved ones wherever they may wander? If so, here are a few new wireless phones and services we've looked at.

Nokia 3600

www.nokia.ca Price: $580, $349 (with two-year contract)

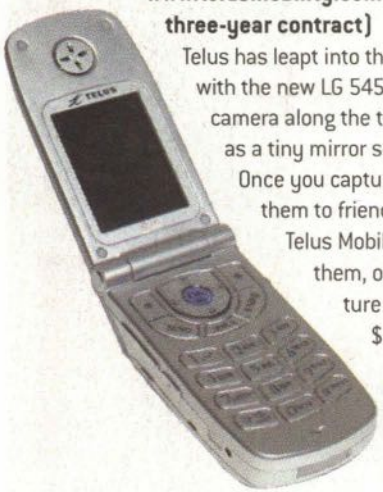
Nokia's 3600 shines when you're using it for the basics: voice calls, emailing, and text messaging. It also surfs the Web, but at a glacial pace. Despite that, it does allow you to download Symbian and Java applications (including games) on the go. With the built-in camera, you can take still pictures or video clips, and send them out immediately via email. A cool feature, but at a top resolution of 640x480 pixels, you probably won't be printing them. Because there is no stylus, you enter information using the round keypad. The 3600 can connect wirelessly to your computer via infrared or Bluetooth, and comes with a 16 MB SD card for storing pictures and programs. It also has a TTY/TDD (Telecommunication Device for the Deaf) with a phone adapter, and has hearing aid support with a LPS-3 Loopset. Not bad for a phone the size and weight (135 g) of an average cell phone. It's available from Rogers AT&T.



—Nestor Gula

LG 5450 camera phone from Telus

www.telusmobility.com Price: $380, $230 (with three-year contract)



Telus has leapt into the world of camera phones with the new LG 5450, which features a 0.3 MP camera along the top edge of the phone, as well as a tiny mirror so you can take self-portraits. Once you capture images, you can send them to friends with camera phones (on Telus Mobility's 1X service), email them, or post them on your own picture site on Telus' server. It costs $0.25 per image sent, in addition to monthly voice and data plans.

—Sean Carruthers

Rogers totalphone

www.totalphone.ca Estimated price: $140

The totalphone package from Rogers AT&T debuted in October in the form of the sleek, silver Motorola C256. The small, lightweight (under 80 g) GSM/GPRS cell phone has a 96x64-pixel colour display, and features like email, voice dial, games, text messaging, AOL Instant Messenger, Web service, and an organizer for daily tasks. The phone comes with a removable battery, charger, and SIM card. The service portion of the totalphone combo allows for easy setup for anyone with a bank account. No credit checks or contracts required: the user makes pre-authorized monthly payments or top ups through their bank account or credit card. Also, no deposit, activation fees, or separate system access fees are required. Monthly fees start at about $30. The handset comes with a one-year warranty. The package can be purchased and service activated at Rogers Video outlets across Canada or via the totalphone Web site.



—Jessica Malone

Sony Ericsson P800

www.sonyericsson.com Estimated price: $1,000

What can the P800 do? A better question is what this PDA/phone combo can't do. All the must-have features are there, including a built-in camera, Web browser, and high-resolution colour screen. It also adds handwriting recognition (much like Palm's Graffiti), a voice recorder, and MP3 player (visit the Web for a stack of other downloadable applications). The very cool stylus makes you feel like you're working on a PDA, and Bluetooth means wireless connectivity. Does this spell the beginning of the end of Pocket PCs? Not quite yet: it's a bit overwhelming, and the wealth of features may have new users running for a paper, pen, and landline. (Note: For syncing PDA data, a PC running Windows 98 or later is required.) The P800 is available from Fido (www.fido.ca) for $950 with new service activation.



—Mara Gulens

Kyocera Slider from Bell

www.bell.ca Price: $224, $99 (with two-year contract)



Like clamshell designs, the Kyocera Slider (the SE47) is a compact handset that expands to reveal its keypad — in this case sliding open instead of unfolding. The CDMA phone weighs less than 115 g and includes a speaker phone feature, voice dialing, WAP Web browser, and text messaging, as well as a scheduler, calculator, alarm clock, and stopwatch. The speaker phone is excellent, with call receipients saying they were unable to tell the feature was being used.

—Megan Johnston

TechTV's Annual
HOLIDAY BUYING GUIDE

Throughout the month of December
TechTV will bring you up to speed on coolest and latest
Tech items to ***GIVE*** and ***GET*** this Holiday Season.

Here is just a taste of what some of your favorite shows
will be covering all month long.

XPLAY

WEEKDAYS 4-5PM ET

- Best Games for all gaming consoles
- Ultimate Games for the Holidays

FRESH GEAR

TUESDAYS 8:30PM-9PM ET

- Hottest gadgets on the market
- Favorite tech gadgets to give or to get

techlive

WEEKDAYS 8-8:30PM ET

- Gift giving tips and advice
- User type buyer guide

THE SCREEN SAVERS

WEEKDAYS 7-8PM ET

- Top gifts under $50
- Staff holiday tech wish list
- Great holiday DVD picks.

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Dreaming of a Blue(tooth) Christmas

With the number of Bluetooth-enabled gadgets available this holiday season, it seems like this wireless technology is finally coming into its own. Here are a few we checked out.

Actiontec USB Bluetooth adapter

www.actiontec.com Estimated price: $55



If you want to get rid of some of the wires around your computer, adding Bluetooth is as simple as plugging in an adapter like this USB model from Actiontec. Wirelessly connecting with Bluetooth-enabled devices like printers and handheld computers is the best-known function, but Bluetooth also allows you to wirelessly link computers. For example, I used Actiontec's USB adapter to set up a simple network between two PCs, and easily transferred files back and forth. Bluetooth used to be a pain to set up; it's still not completely transparent, but getting better.

—David Tanaka

Belkin Bluetooth Wireless Optical Mouse

www.belkin.com Estimated price: $100

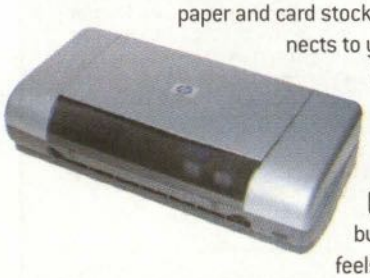
As the name suggests, Belkin's latest wireless mouse connects using Bluetooth. It comes with a USB Bluetooth adapter that can be used for other purposes, like file sharing with another Bluetooth-equipped computer. The right-handed design is very comfortable, with a contoured side that's covered in a rubbery non-slip surface for your thumb. Belkin calls it a four-button mouse: there are two normal buttons, a scroll wheel switch, and a side button for your thumb. The scroll wheel is made of a soft translucent plastic that flashes blue at different rates to indicate discovery mode, normal mode, or low battery. —DT



HP DeskJet 450 CBi

www.hp.ca Estimated price: $499 ($429 without Bluetooth)

The DeskJet 450 is a battery-powered portable printer that is also a photo printer in its own right, with a print resolution of 1,200 dots per inch and six ink colours. It handles letter-size sheets (including photo paper and card stock up to 3 mm thick) and connects to your PC via USB, parallel, infrared, or even Bluetooth with an optional Bluetooth card. This DeskJet is quite beefy for a portable (33.8x16.3x8.2 cm and 2.2 kg) but like HP's previous portable, feels like it will stand up well to life on the road. Print quality is very respectable, as is speed, especially for text only.—DT



Logitech Bluetooth family

www.logitech.com

Logitech has gone heavily into Bluetooth with its new line of products. There's a new version of the Cordless Freedom Desktop MX ($250), which comes with a wireless keyboard, optical mouse, and a mouse recharging base that doubles as a Bluetooth hub for use with other Bluetooth devices. The MX 900 Bluetooth Optical Mouse, with the recharger/Bluetooth hub base, can be purchased separately ($140). The Mobile Bluetooth Headset (price to be announced) can be used with a number of Bluetooth-compatible phones; it comes with its own recharging base and can last up to seven hours between charges. The mouse and headset come with rechargeable batteries; the keyboard comes with four standard AAs (if you want rechargeables, you'll have to buy them separately).





—Sean Carruthers

Logitech diNovo Media Desktop

www.logitech.com Estimated price: $325*

Part of the sales pitch for Bluetooth is its ability to connect a number of devices over short distances, but most companies haven't gone beyond connecting a phone and PDA, or a notebook PC and a printer. Logitech's diNovo goes beyond the traditional Bluetooth configuration, with several pieces that are designed to work together: a keyboard, mouse, and a Bluetooth hub that doubles as the charging base for the mouse. The major innovation here is that the keyboard module splits into two wireless components: the main keyboard and the number pad, which has an LCD screen at its top. Dubbed the Media Pad, the latter acts as a regular number pad when used with the keyboard, but doubles as a remote control when you're away from the PC. It shows track information when you're playing MP3 or CD audio, displays instant message notifications, alerts you when you receive new email, and even functions as a standalone calculator.



—SC

For more information on Logitech's Bluetooth strategy, and a compatibility chart, see www.logitech.com/bluetooth for the details.

***Converted from US$250.**

Gifts for your notebook PC

At the desk

More people are using notebook computers instead of desktop PCs, which means they are likely spending hours hunched forward to squint at badly elevated screens and putting their hands in uncomfortable positions to reach awkwardly placed keyboards. Two solutions exist, though both require an external keyboard and mouse — a small price to pay for physical well-being.

iCurve Invisible Laptop Stand

www.griffintechnology.com Estimated price: $45

Griffin's transparent, sturdy iCurve stand raises your notebook 14 cm, bringing the screen closer to eye level. Its arms are padded to keep the notebook from sliding off. The base is smooth enough to easily rotate it with a notebook on it, but optional feet are available if you'd rather it stay put. Another bonus: the space under the iCurve makes for a good spot to slide your keyboard when you're not using it.
—Emru Townsend

Humanscale LPTHLD02 Laptop Holder

www.humanscale.com Suggested retail price: $315

Humanscale's stand is pricier but has a built-in document holder, adjustable height (five levels), a pass-through for cables, and provisions for a notebook security cable. It doesn't rotate, but the L2 Notebook Manager, due in early 2004 from Humanscale, does.
—ET

Getting carried away

Kensington Skyrunner Contour Case

www.kensington.com Estimated price: $100

If you travel regularly with a lot of different gadgets, you want something that has room for all your toys but that you can carry comfortably. Kensington's Skyrunner Contour Case is designed to make the travel experience better, from a side panel contoured to curve against the side of your body, to a padded shoulder strap and comfortable carrying handle. It has several large compartments inside and zippered compartments on the outside. It's made of lightweight ballistic nylon, which means the case doesn't add to your burden.
—SC

APC TravelPower Backpack

www.apc.com Estimated price: $180

Carrying gadgets is one thing, but packing all your power cords too can be just plain annoying. APC's TravelPower line gives you one big transformer with multiple adapter tips and adjustable voltage, so you can leave all of the other power cables at home; it even has USB ports on the side of the power brick, so you can charge gadgets that get power via USB. Previously only available in a traditional notebook case, APC has added this backpack version to the series. It has tons of small pockets as well as larger compartments. The back panel and straps are padded and it has an adjustable sternum strap.
—SC

HUB DIGITAL LIVING

PRESENTS ITS Bi-Monthly

PHOTO SPREE



THE CHALLENGE: Still Life

WIN!

LEXMARK P3150 ALL-IN-ONE

The Lexmark P3150 All-In-One Photo Printer is a personal photo processing centre with onboard camera card readers, a flexible flatbed scanner and PC-enabled one-touch photo reprinting. The P3150 generates brilliant borderless 4" x 6" and 8.5" x 11" prints, and makes it easy and convenient to incorporate traditional photos into your digital world thanks to the quality 48-bit flatbed scanner.

LEXMARK



THE RULES: You must use a digital camera to capture the subject. Work can be submitted via email (contest@hubcanada.com). Accompanying your photo should be the make and model of the camera you used, the names of any software you used to modify the image and, if possible, the f/stop and shutter speed you used to take the photo.

Submit your photographs, along with the information from the form below, by December 16, 2003. You can submit up to three photographs, all of which must be accompanied by a submission form. Entries must be submitted via email. Files should be no bigger than 500 KB and no smaller that 300 KB. One photo per email.

Contest Rules: Prizes must be claimed by February, 12 2004. Winners must provide valid identification upon claiming prize. The prizes awarded are not transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash. To enter and to be eligible to win, persons must be residents of Canada, and not employees or be domiciled with an employee of CCP Media, its affiliate companies, or advertising or promotional agencies. The winners will be selected by HUB on December 17, 2003 from among all eligible entries received on or before contest close date. Winners will be contacted by telephone or email. In the event that they cannot be contacted within the first week following the contest another entrant will be selected. All entries become the property of HUB and may be used in subsequent advertisements for the contest. All entries must be submitted by their artist and must be original work.

HUB's Photo Spree contest form. All submissions must contain this information. Send to contest@hubcanada.com

Deadline: December 16th, 2003

Name: .....
Address: .....
E-Mail: .....
Phone Number: .....
Age: .....
Occupation/School: .....
Title of Entry: .....
Camera Used: .....
Software Used: .....

Scrub it clean

You wouldn't sell a car caked with dirt, would you? If you're planning to give away or sell your computer, take the time to scrub it clean first. Earlier this year, two MIT graduate students searched 158 second-hand computers and discovered a wealth of personal information left behind, including credit card numbers and financial and medical records. **(Read the press release at http://web.mit.edu/newsoffice/nr/2003/diskdrives.html).**

Simply dragging all your files into the Recycle Bin or Trash Can isn't good enough; neither is reformatting the hard drive. If you want to make sure your information is safe from prying eyes, you'll need something that rewrites the hard drive's data completely. Wipe Info, part of Symantec's Norton Utilities and Norton SystemWorks, is one such utility; you can find less expensive solutions by searching for "disk wipe" or "disk shred" at freeware/shareware download sites.

The three-year itch

Now that the pace of PC replacement is speeding up, what do we do with the old Pentium III?

So you bought a top-of-the-line computer with ample hard drive space, a blazingly fast processor, buckets of RAM, and up-to-the-minute software. You spared no expense, dropping almost $3,000 on your dream system.

But that was 1998, and now that 233 MHz Pentium II is barely keeping up with your kids' $249 PlayStation 2.

In the modern era, few things symbolize the idea of obsolescence better than the personal computer. We all know about the upgrade treadmill, and anyone who's been around computers long enough knows that at some point you just can't upgrade the processor or beef up the memory anymore.

In a sense, this is where the e-waste problem begins. Thanks to the accelerating pace of hardware and software development, computers just don't last as long as they used to. In Environment Canada's 1999 Information Technology (IT) and Telecommunication (Telecom) Waste in Canada report, the authors estimated that 60 per cent of the personal computers then in Canada were expected to have a first-use lifespan of four years, with the rest lasting five; looking ahead to 2003, they extrapolated that computers with three-year lifespans would make up 60 percent of the total, with the rest reaching only two.

Hard to believe? Think about it: printers, scanners, monitors, and other components also become obsolete, but none of them have as short a lifespan as the PCs they're connected to. (Out of curiosity, I sifted through my collection of receipts and discovered that the monitor I'm currently looking at has been connected to four different computers so far.)



That means a lot of computers, more so than any other components, are currently lurking in basements and closets, just waiting to be thrown out—if they haven't already been. But if you want to keep them out of landfills, what can you do?

The best solution, when possible, is to find your computer a new home. Assuming you've already tried to give it away to family or friends, you still have some options.

My favourite solution happens to be the one requiring the least effort: donate it.



Smoking hot in '99: Pentium IIIs (above), Apple G3 (below, left)

Elementary schools and charitable organizations often have a need for PCs, and usually don't need the latest multimedia speed demon to get things done. However, bear in mind that you can't just waltz in carrying your hardware and drop it off, expecting to be rewarded for your kindness; call first, explain the situation, and ask if they even need any computers. If so, find out if they have any minimum system requirements.

If you'd rather not do your own legwork, Computers For Schools takes donated computers and puts them to use in classrooms and libraries across Canada. You can visit the Computers For Schools Web site (cfs-ope.ic.gc.ca/) for more details.

Your other option is to sell your computer, as a unit or by individual components. There are many stores in or near metropolitan areas that sell older computers at reasonable prices; most buy from companies clearing out dozens or hundreds of computers at once, but some also buy from individuals.

You can also try selling online. There's eBay, of course, but you can also try using Usenet newsgroups. Using a free newsreader like Outlook Express, Netscape News, or the online Google Groups, search for newsgroups with the words "forsale" or "marketplace" in their titles and post a for-sale notice on all that apply. (Don't, for example, post on ont.forsale if you're in Alberta.)

You shouldn't expect to get rich selling even a year-old computer — lower your expectations to at least being compensated for your time, and knowing that you've kept your machine out of landfill just a little bit longer.

At some point, however, a computer is simply of no use to anyone. And that raises new issues I'll discuss next month.

By Emru Townsend

www.hubcanada.com/dvc

HUB
DIGITAL LIVING

DIGITAL VIDEO CONTEST

Let your imagination (and camcorder) go wild.

Submit up to 3 ***original*** digital videos, along with the form below, by February 23rd, 2004. Anything goes, but keep it clean. All videos must be burnt to a CD, and must be no more than 5 min. in length. Winners will be announced in the March 2004 issue. Must be in QuickTime or Windows Media Player format. All elements of the video must be original and not infringing on any copyrights.

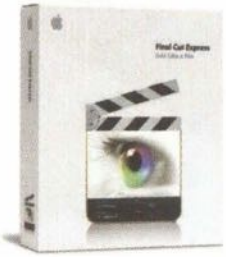
GRAND PRIZE



The 17-inch iMac

Designed around an ultra-compact base, the Apple iMac features a stunning 17-inch widescreen LCD that appears to float in mid-air, allowing users to effortlessly adjust its height or angle with just a touch. The 17-inch iMac packs powerful features like a speedy 1GHz G4 processor, extreme NVIDIA graphics, and a fast DVD-burning SuperDrive which lets you burn your own movies and photos on a DVD disc that plays in almost any standard DVD player. The iMac also offers two FireWire® 400 and five USB ports for fast, simple,plug-and-play connections to digital devices such as digital cameras, DV camcorders and iPod digital music players.

PRIZES



Final Cut Express

Featuring the same interface as the Emmy Award-winning Final Cut Pro, Final Cut Express is a robust editing solution for digital video enthusiasts. It provides professional-level editing, compositing and real-time effects for full-featured DV editing. Final Cut Express is an innovative combination of power and ease of use. It's optimized for the DV format and comes with all the high-quality compositing, titling and effects capabilities you need for professional-level video.

Video editors can use Final Cut Express to capture, manage and edit digital video; apply transitions, filters and effects in real-time; create titles, composite layers, and produce high-quality graphics and animations; and perform colour correction. Final Cut Express projects can be exported for use in iDVD™ or DVD Studio Pro®, saved back to tape, or exported to any QuickTime® format, including MPEG-4.

WINNING VIDEOS will be featured on CTV's WebMania

NO E-MAIL ENTRIES. *Those e-mailing entries could be subject to visits from angry HUB network admins (and trust us, you don't want that to happen). For complete rules and regulations go to www.hubcanada.com/dvc*

HUB's digital video contest Entry Form. Deadline February 23rd, 2004

Name:.....
Address:.....
E-Mail:.....
Phone Number:.....
Age:.....

Occupation/school:.....
Title of Video:.....
Camera used to film your video.....
Hardware used to generate your video.....
Software used to generate your video.....

Mail your entries to: HUB, Digital Video Contest, 625 Church Street, Suite 600, Toronto, ON, M4Y 2G1

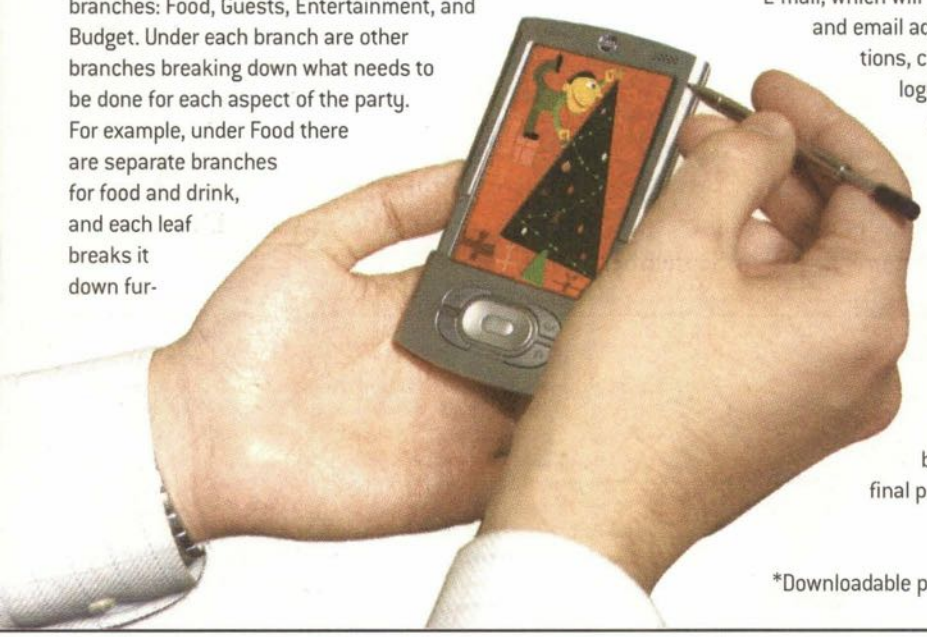
How to: Plan holiday parties with your handheld

'Tis the season for entertaining, and whether you're hosting a dozen people or a hundred, it always means there's more to do, and more to remember, with each approaching day. This is where a handheld can really prove, well, handy. Here are a few tips on getting the most out of your handheld as you plan your holiday party.

Setting up a plan

The To Do list in the Palm OS is fine for everyday chores, but sometimes you need a little more organizational finesse, such as when you're planning a special event. This is where project-planning software can help — for the purposes of this project, I'm using BrainForest 3.0 Mobile Edition for the Palm OS (UltraSoft, www.ultrasoft.com, US$19.95*, 30-day free trial available). With BrainForest, I can set up all the aspects of the party (or any other project) in one outline, breaking each down into its respective tasks and assigning individual start and finish dates to avoid a last minute crunch.

BrainForest consists of outlines called Trees, Branches, and Leaves. I've set up a party plan tree that includes four branches: Food, Guests, Entertainment, and Budget. Under each branch are other branches breaking down what needs to be done for each aspect of the party. For example, under Food there are separate branches for food and drink, and each leaf breaks it down further into specific menu items that can be assigned their own start and finish date — especially handy if some items need to be purchased or made in advance. As you complete each task, you can check it off, or if you set the program to project mode, you can mark items partially complete, using a percentage. Completed leaves automatically complete their branches.



The program has a timeline view that lets you see all of the designated tasks on a calendar, so you can balance out the workload if you notice you've planned too much for one day. Plus, each item can include an attached note, so I've broken down the budget into Food, Drinks, and Entertainment, then attached notes to enter all the expenses for each one.

Using your contact list

If you plan to send out invitations, there are a few tricks you can use to speed up the process. If you use Palm Desktop for Windows, pull up your addresses, and then select all of your guests by clicking on each one while holding down the Ctrl key. Once you've made your selections, you can email everyone at once by clicking on Edit, then E-mail, which will open a new message with all of the invitees' names and email addresses entered. Or, if you'd prefer to mail invitations, click Edit, then Send to, then Microsoft Word. A dialogue will open to ask you if you'd like to turn the resulting address table into form letters, mailing labels, or envelopes (you'll need Word 2000 or newer to make this work).

If you're using Palm Desktop for Mac, open the address book and click the checkbox beside your potential guests, then click Print. A dialogue box will pop up to customize your printing, with choices to print the addresses as mailing labels or envelopes. Be sure to designate only marked addresses for printing, or you'll end up with labels for everyone in your address book. The dialogue box provides a preview button so you can check the final product before printing.

By Sharlene Myers

*Downloadable products, only available in US$.



"Have your say and get $5000!"



Influence HUB:Digital Living

HUB:Digital Living is offering you the opportunity to contribute to the magazine's content by participating in the eVox panel. By becoming an online panel member, you will be asked, periodically, to share your opinions on issues relevant to the digital community.

and get $5000

In addition to giving you a platform to share your views, you will have the opportunity to receive cash. Panel members participating in these opinion surveys will be eligible to win $5000, drawn at random by Decima Research. Draws will take place each quarter, starting in September.

How it Works

By agreeing to join the eVox panel, you are giving permission to HUB:Digital Living to provide your email address and name to Decima Research Inc. This is the only information HUB:Digital Living will provide to Decima and any other information provided to HUB will not be shared.

You will then be sent an email from the eVox panel inviting you to complete a profile and formally join the panel.

No Obligations. No Hassle.

Readers can choose not to join the panel at any point and can cancel their panel membership at anytime. No questions asked.

How Reader Information be Used

Reader information will always be reported in aggregate, meaning

- verbatim comments will not contain any information that could identify a specific panelist, and
- all other information will be combined with several panelists to ensure anonymity.

Whenever possible, reader information and opinions will used as the basis for editorial content in HUB:Digital Living. In addition, HUB may also share information with other stakeholders in the digital market. This could include manufacturers, retailers, and other associations.

Protecting Your Privacy

To ensure the privacy and security of your personal information, HUB: Digital Living has partnered with Decima Research Inc to administer the eVox panel. As an independent third party, specializing in research, Decima will never share your personal information with any other organization.

As a member of CAMRO (Canadian Association of Market Research Organizations), Decima Research strongly supports CAMRO's Standards and Rules of Practice regarding Internet research. In order to gain your trust and ensure that your privacy is held to the highest standards in the market research industry. Decima Research welcomes any questions, concerns or comments that you may have regarding our privacy policy. Please feel free to contact us by e-mail at info@decima.com

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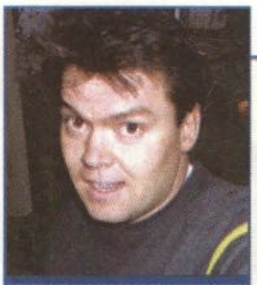
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A vaccine for obsolesence



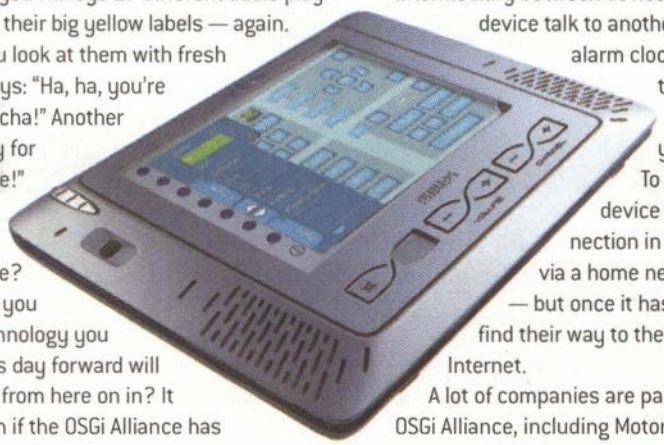
Andy Walker

There you are in the electronics superstore eyeing 27 different audio players. "It's MP3 compliant!" announces one big yellow sticker. "It's WMA ready!" declares another.

WMA or MP3 are both digital music file types. The former is a Microsoft technology and the latter a more widely used format.

So what happens when the music player makers decide in, say, three or five years that MP3 and WMA are obsolete and should be replaced by something newer? Well, walk out to the curb — like you did with your eight-track player and Betamax 15 years ago — and dump the device on the sidewalk. Then head for the electronics superstore where you will eye 27 different audio players and read their big yellow labels — again. This time you look at them with fresh eyes. One says: "Ha, ha, you're back. We gotcha!" Another says "Hooray for obsolescence!"

What if I told you that might change? What if I told you that any technology you buy from this day forward will upgradeable from here on in? It could happen if the OSGi Alliance has its way.



OSGi stands for Open Services Gateway Initiative. It's a mouthful and even though I've spelled out the acronym for you, my guess is you're still scratching your head. Yeah, that's what I did.

But, after talking to three people from the OSGi Alliance, I managed to figure it out.

Here's what it does. It's a technology that allows for two things. First, it slows obsolescence in consumer electronics. It's the plumbing that allows updates to the embedded programming that runs a device. You probably know that inside every electronics device are chips that make it work. And in those chips are programs. In most cases the program can't be updated, but in an OSGi-compliant device it can be. And that update can come from the Internet and find its way onto a device and completely upgrade it to fix problems or extend the device's life. OSGi also allows for the addition of new functions, allowing the device to do new things.

This doesn't mean an update via the OSGi framework (as it is called) will turn your MP3 player into a camcorder. If the hardware can't handle a task because of its physical limitations, OSGi can't help.

"The benefit the consumer will see is that devices are less likely to become obsolete," said Dan Bandera, IBM's program director of emerging device standards and strategy. "There's also the ability to add new features after you bring it home from Best Buy or Sears," explained Bandera, who is also an OSGi Alliance board member.

Let's say your phone is simple. Maybe it has a screen that shows the time and date and can ring and is able to dial out, but that's all. One day, caller ID is invented. So the phone gets a software upgrade using OSGi and suddenly it can display a caller ID on its screen. That's the power of OSGi.

Beyond new features, OSGi can also act as an intermediary between devices. It can help one device talk to another. In future, your alarm clock might use OSGi technology to alert the toaster that you're up and about. To get new data, a device will need some connection in and out — maybe via a home network or Bluetooth — but once it has that, updates can find their way to the device from the Internet.

A lot of companies are participating in the OSGi Alliance, including Motorola, Philips, IBM, Toshiba, Samsung, Siemens, and Nokia. So it appears as if OSGi will become a certainty.

Philips is one of the first companies to produce an OSGi-compliant device, called the iPronto (shown), which is an oversized remote control for your TV that can also control the heating, display video from the security camera at the door, and plenty of other home control functions. Of course with OSGi, it'll be able to do all kinds of other things in future.

The biggest challenge for the OSGi Alliance is to get the word out to people like you. But it struggles with clarity.

When I asked a rather befuddled PHd-powered OSGi spokesperson what OSGi was, he responded: "It's middleware based on Java, so we extend the Java environment and that allows us life cycle management and definition of common interfaces."

Imagine that on a big yellow sticker.

Andy Walker is a Canadian journalist based in California.

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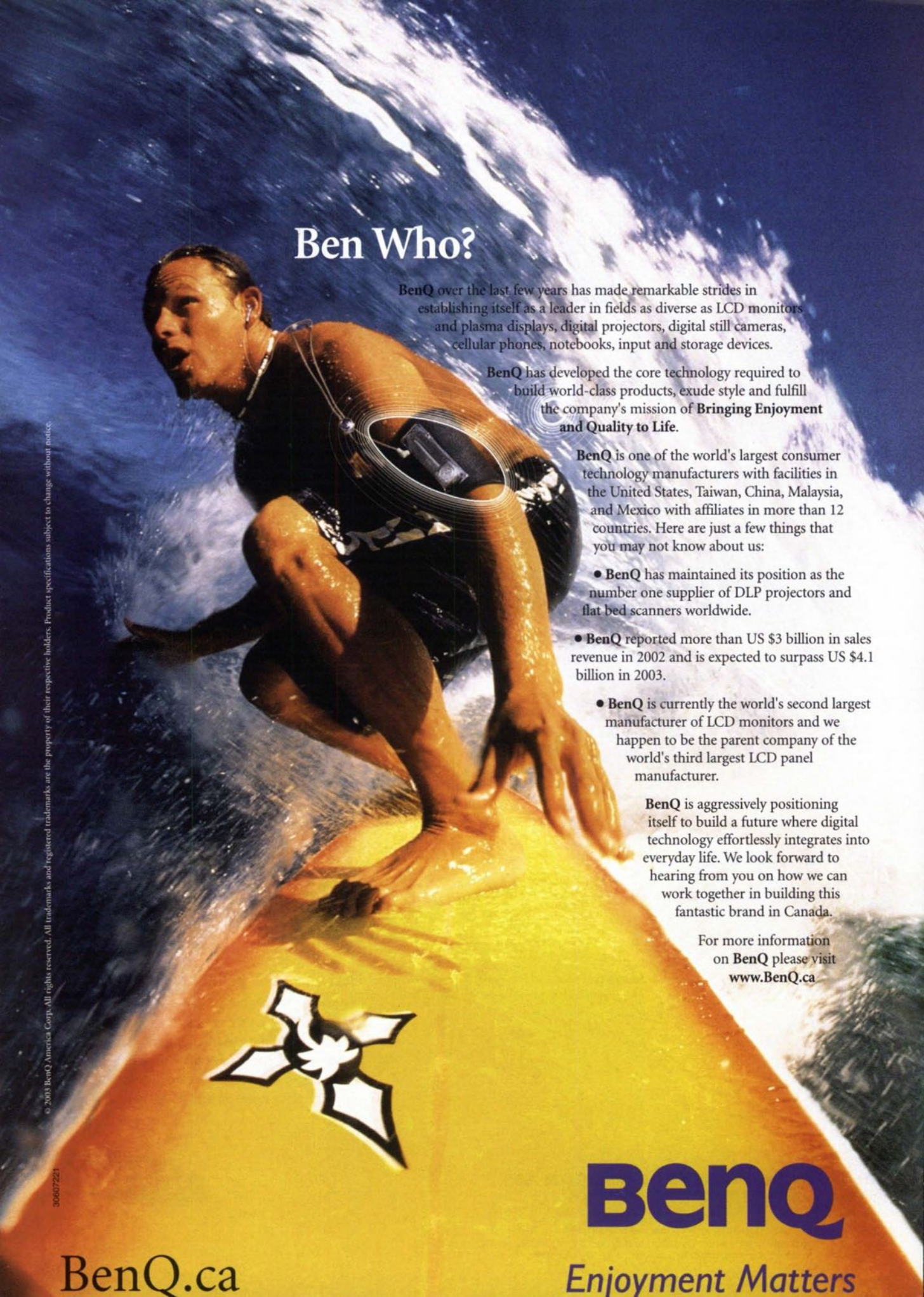
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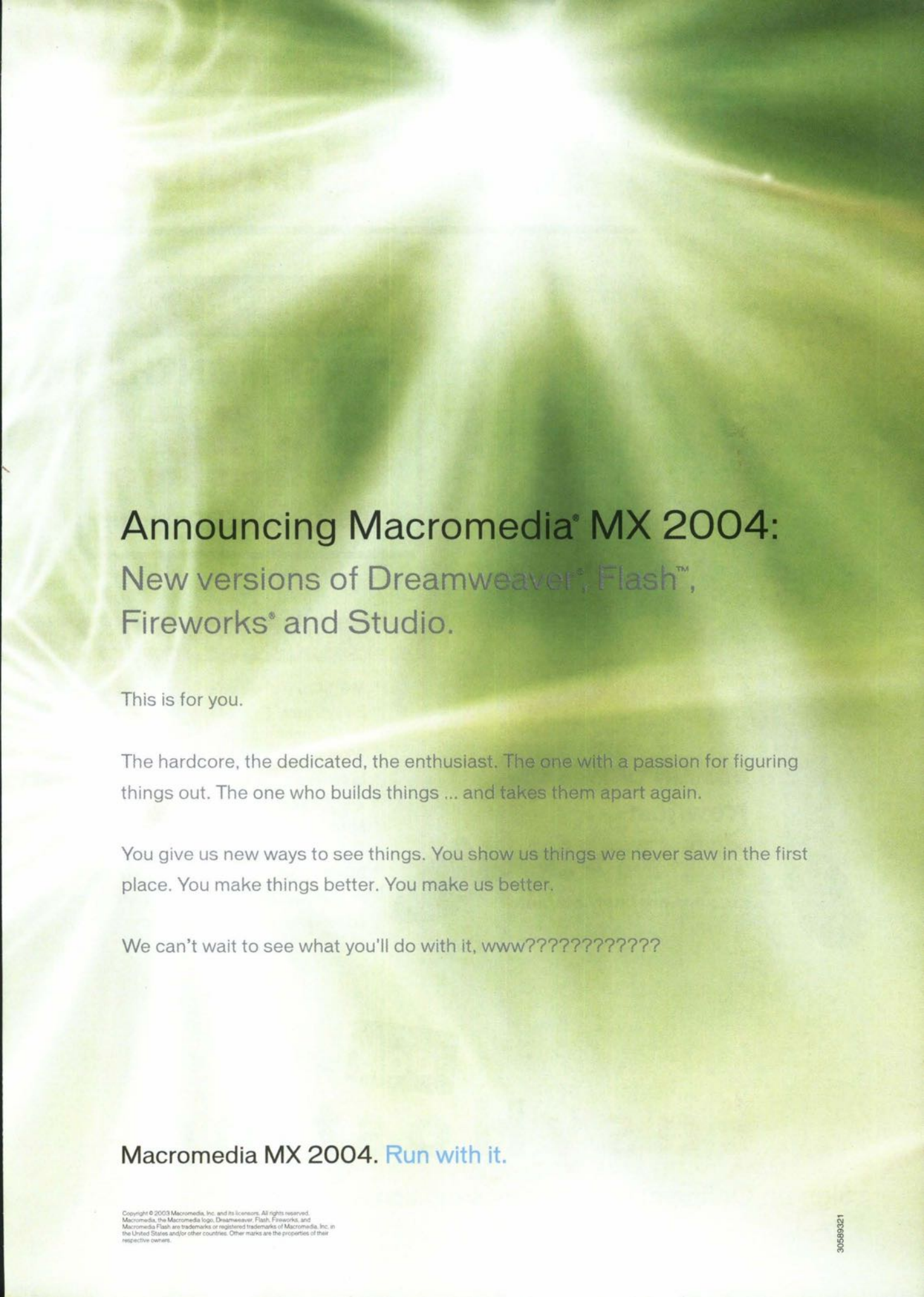
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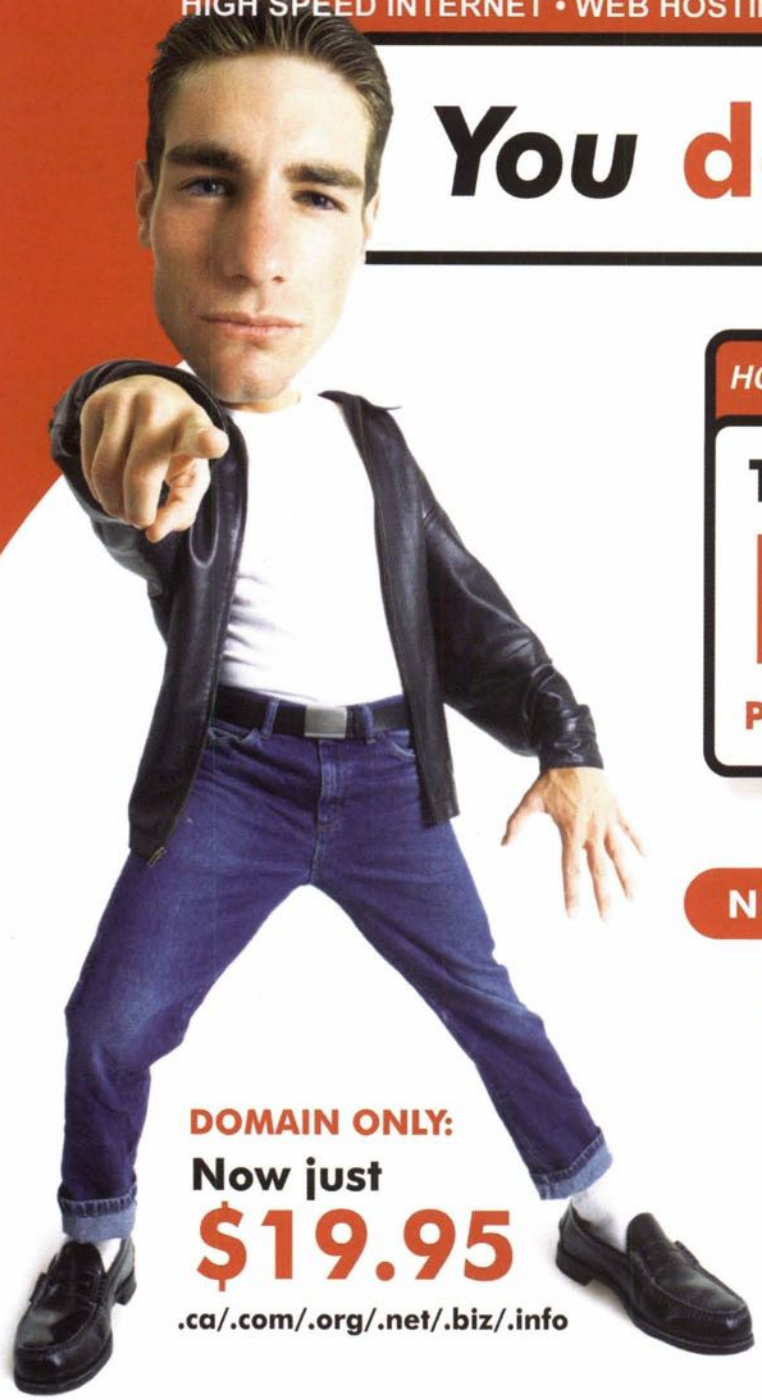
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BenQ has developed the core technology required to build world-class products, exude style and fulfill the company's mission of Bringing Enjoyment and Quality to Life.
BenQ is one of the world's largest consumer technology manufacturers with facilities in the United States, Taiwan, China, Malaysia, and Mexico with affiliates in more than 12 countries. Here are just a few things that you may not know about us:
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• BenQ reported more than US $3 billion in sales revenue in 2002 and is expected to surpass US $4.1 billion in 2003.
• BenQ is currently the world's second largest manufacturer of LCD monitors and we happen to be the parent company of the world's third largest LCD panel manufacturer.
BenQ is aggressively positioning itself to build a future where digital technology effortlessly integrates into everyday life. We look forward to hearing from you on how we can work together in building this fantastic brand in Canada.
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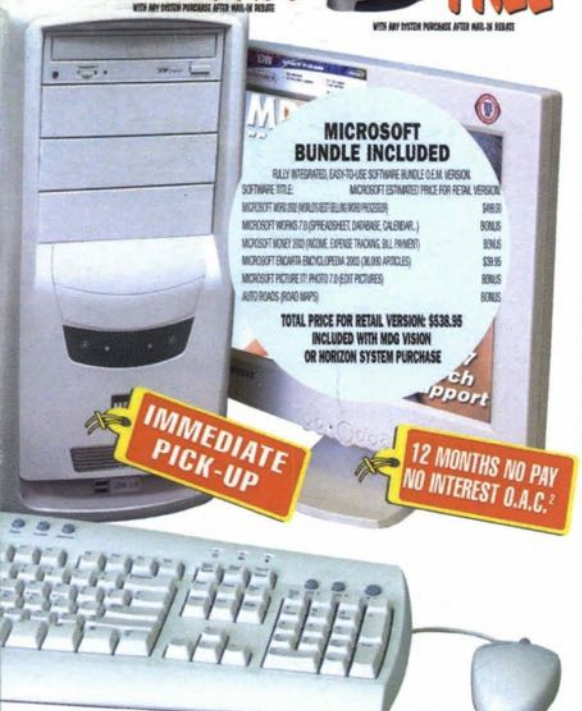
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