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WIN the new iPad

With Altech Autopage Cellular – p29



Tech Outdoors

How to become a Sleekgeek



Xyfi Wi-Fi and 3G router

Connectivity expanded



The Outdoors Issue



GALAXY S III

designed for humans

inspired by nature

109647



With little things like, turning its screen off when you look away or sharing files simply by getting closer to another GALAXY S III. Being able to take 8 consecutive photos and recommending the best one, the Samsung GALAXY S III is really a first of its kind.



S BEAM



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Behind closed doors

I often receive emails from people looking to buy products we write about in the magazine, but recently received a surprising request about something that, for obvious reasons, we've not featured before. "Could you please tell me where I can buy keylogger hardware, the USB type?" Thembi* asked. For those who don't know, a keylogger device records every stroke of your keyboard, and is often used by criminals to steal sensitive data such as banking passwords. Certainly our Thembi cannot be so bold as to ask for assistance in her criminal escapades? I was intrigued, and enquired for what she needs this for. The reply came quickly: "To check up on my boyfriend. He has been getting up to no good and I need evidence."

I could not, nor would not, help our damsel in distress, but kept wondering what "up to no good" means. For the sake of their relationship, I would like to rather believe that when he switches on the PC and closes the door behind him late at night, it's to play an extended session of World of Warcraft, without wanting to disturb her peaceful sleep.

Enjoy the issue,
Mike (michael@techsmart.co.za)

*Not real name



4 Top 5 C-segment hatchbacks

Astra, Focus or Golf? That's the question we tackle when we bring you our selection of the Top 5 C-segment hatchbacks on the road.

6 Gear to start the burn

Spring has sprung and it's time to lose that winter fat and get out there. Here are some of the best gear and gadgets to do just that

18 Data on demand

With the cost of prepaid data constantly falling, connecting via a cellular network is now cheaper than ever. The question is do you choose Vodacom, MTN, Cell C or 8ta?

24 Magix Music Maker MX

Got your eyes set on Grammy Award winning glory? Take it step for step with Magix's Music Maker MX software that allows you to create your own tunes in a matter of minutes.



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Top Tech Titbits



Mars Rover lands successfully

NASA's latest small step proved to quite literally be a giant leap for the one ton Mars Rover, named Curiosity, and the space agency alike, as its mobile vehicular lab set its wheels on the Mars surface after a 13 000 miles per hour descent. While the mission is not intended to find little green men, it may just be the precursor to a human landing on the red planet in the not too distant future. The estimated cost to land on Mars? A cool \$2.6 billion (spread out over almost eight years), not much compared against the US' \$670.9 billion 2012 defence budget.



Nikon launches Android-based Coolpix S800c

In a move that may well mark the start of a divide between connected and unconnected cameras, Nikon has launched its new Android-powered

Coolpix S800c compact camera. This Wi-Fi (but not 3G) enabled camera intends to marry the app and sharing capabilities enjoyed by smartphone photographers, with the greater power of a 16 megapixel sensor and 10x NIKKOR lens. The S800c is a significant nod towards the relevance and popularity of apps like Instagram to current photography.



Samsung leads a new offensive against the iPad with Galaxy Note 10.1

The pen may be mightier than the sword, but can a stylus actually cut the iPad's reign down to size? That is the question Samsung seems intent on answering as it

launched its Galaxy Note 10.1 Android 4.0 (Ice Cream Sandwich) tablet, which relies heavily on its stylus/pen-based input to differentiate itself from the currently leading iPad. The multi-tasking device, which is quite focused on notetaking, sketching and digital writing, further marks the Korean company's foray into another of Apple's markets, namely education.



Nikon, Canon and Sony scoop prestigious photo awards

Nikon, Canon and Sony received a number of awards for their cameras, as the judges at the European Imaging and Sound Association (EISA) announced their top picks. The top award, European Camera of the Year

though, was awarded to Nikon's D800 for exceptionally high resolution capture, thanks to its 36.3 megapixel sensor. Canon's EOS 5D Mark III received the European Advanced SLR Camera award, while Sony's α SLT-A57 won recognition for being the European SLR Camera for 2012-2013. Another Sony, the Cyber-shot DSC-HX20V, was chosen as the best European travel camera.



Google takes a stand against piracy

Google announced that sites that received a multitude of copyright infringement notices would be buried further down their search results. The search giant noted that it was receiving and processing more copyright removal notices every day than they did in all of 2009, which amounted to more than 4.4 million in one month. ❖

Hot New Products



BMW Zagato Roadster

Following the introduction of the BMW Zagato Coupe earlier in May 2012, BMW has showcased the latest fruit of their partnership with design and engineering firm Zagato. The sexiest thing to come out of Italy since Carla Bruni, went from concept to unveiling in just six weeks. Like the Coupe version, this hand-built Roadster is based on BMW's already eye-catching Z4. Unfortunately, the drool-worthy Roadster is not hitting BMW showrooms anytime soon, since it, along with its Coupe kin, was merely a (expensive) design exercise for the German *motorén werke*.



The Dark Knight Rises motorcycle suit

Just because you can't bankroll a secret multi-million R&D lab like Bruce Wayne, doesn't mean you can't cruise the streets in the Caped Crusader's famous suit. Motorcycle movie replica firm UD Replicas' latest offering is based upon the design of Batman's costume in the *The Dark Knight Rises*. This leather motorcycle suit boasts anti-skid Kevlar inserts, and provides an excellent degree of protection should your daring biking escapades lead to a fall. Cost of the full suit comes to a stiff R13 100.

Denon AH-NCW500 Globe Cruiser headphones

Suave - a word that only begins to describe Denon's Globe Cruiser headphones'

stylish design. Meant for the frequent flyer, it cuts out any distracting environmental sounds using the headphones' noise-canceling circuitry. Furthermore, if you've ever struggled with wires in a confined seat, you'll love the fact that thanks to onboard Bluetooth 3.0, Denon makes this a wireless experience. Just like a business class seat, luxury doesn't come cheap - about R4 135 online.



Philips FWP3200D Mini Hi-Fi System

Philip's latest FWP3200D is not exactly your regular Mini Hi-Fi system meant for a bit of Josh Groban on a quiet Sunday afternoon. This 300 W system manages to up the entertainment ante via two rotatable docks, enabling iPhone and iPod owners to mix and scratch music from their devices' libraries. The addition of channel faders enables aspiring DJs to easily swap out playback between two iOS-running mobile devices, whilst a 3.5 mm audio line-in means that MP3 players and other smartphones will also work. It unfortunately will not be available locally, but internationally it retails for about R4 200. ❖



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BlackBerry

TechSmart's

TOP 5**C-segment hatchbacks**

In South Africa the C segment category stands for competitive, with plenty of established players such as Ford's Focus, and Opel's Astra hatching plans to dethrone VW's Golf. Is the VW Golf still the best five door hatchback in this car category?



5

Mazda 3 1.6L Active

Out of the Land of the Rising Sun comes one eye-catching hatchback in the form of Mazda's 3 1.6L Active, whose sporty driving dynamic is accentuated by the low-slung front spoiler and 16" alloy wheels. Going Zoom-Zoom in this Japanese hatchback is certainly on the cards, since it boasts an in-line 1 598 cc four cylinder engine that churns out 77 kW at 6 000 RPM and 145 Nm at 4 000 RPM.

Pricing for the Mazda 3 1.6L Active hatchback starts at R225 780 (incl. VAT), which brings with it safety tech that includes electronic brakeforce distribution and anti-lock brake system (ABS). As reassuring as its safety features is this vehicle's five year or 90 000 km service plan, four year or 120 000 km warranty and three years of Mazda Motion roadside assistance.



4

Opel Astra 1.6 Essentia

It is vital for the Essentia to bring a bit of performance zing to the hatchback table, and this is delivered courtesy of its 1 595 cc four cylinder engine that pushes out 85 kW and 155 Nm. All this whilst managing to keep fuel usage below the six and a half liters per 100 km mark.

Cost for the 1.6 Essentia model starts at pricey R235 200, but this RRP includes a comprehensive set of standard features such as daytime running lights, ABS, six airbags, 17" alloy wheels and cruise control. Additionally, drivers get a five year or 120 000 km warranty along with roadside assistance and a five year or 90 000 km service plan.



3

Hyundai i30 1.6 GLS

Hyundai's lack of pedigree in this segment will be the farthest thing from your mind when you first set your eyes on the new 1.6 GLS and its sublime 'fluidic sculpture' styling that makes for a much more appealing hatch than the bland previous generation.

Powering this sensational looking dark horse is a 1 591 cc engine that churns out 95 kW at 6 300 RPM, as well as 157 Nm at 4 850 RPM. This is enough to propel this vehicle from 0-100 km/h in 10.5 seconds to a top speed of 195 km/h. Fortunately, sensible drivers can expect a frugal 6.4 litres per 100 km.

Climbing into the driver's seat costs you R229 900, with the i30 being covered by a five-year or 90 000 km service plan and five-year or 150 000 km manufacturer's warranty.



2

Ford Focus 1.6 Trend

Ford is intent on performance with its Focus, which is powered by a 1 596 cc powerplant delivering 92 kW at a high-revving 6 000 RPM as well as 159 Nm at 4 000 RPM. Included is Ford's Torque Vectoring Control, which transfers torque to the wheels that have the most grip when cornering in order to eliminate understeer. Beyond performance, fuel efficiency is also high on the Blue Oval's agenda with a

combined usage cycle of six liters per 100 km. Ford's Focus carries an RRP of R235 750 which includes VAT, as well as a five year or 90 000 km service plan, three year (unlimited in terms of km) roadside assistance plan, four year or 120 000 km warranty, and five year (unlimited km) corrosion warranty.



1

VW Golf VI 1.6 Comfortline

Even though the Golf VI was not a monumental design leap over the Golf V, it still snagged both the 2010 South African Guild of Motoring Journalists car of the year award (1.4 TSI version), as well as the 2009 World Car of the Year award.

The 1.6 Comfortline's 1 595 cc four cylinder motor delivers an uninspiring 75 kW at 5 600 RPM, coupled with a very economical 7.1 liters per 100 km fuel usage figure. And while its 11.3 seconds 0-100 km/h acceleration and 188 km/h top end definitely not see the German champ provide buyers with class-leading performance, its beautiful (though not groundbreaking) design, improved ride, excellent build quality and reliability, as well as the best interior in this class, all add up to make this the poster child of the C-segment.

The 1.6 Trendline goes for R233 600 and includes a three year or 120 000 km warranty, 12 year anti-corrosion warranty, and five year or 90 000 km AutoMotion service plan. ❖

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E&OE

Gear to start the burn

With Elan Lohmann of Sleekgeek.co.za (p29) proving that geeks, like us, should not be satisfied with a hunched back and pot belly from disappearing behind a PC (or Xbox, iPad, PS3 or smartphone) all day, TechSmart went to find the best gear for any outdoor challenge.



Puma Faas 250 Trail

Trail running is set to take off big time locally, as more and more weekend warriors are sacrificing smooth tarmac for the rocks, streams, branches and fresh air of the veld. This of course means changes to gear, with a more rugged and well supported shoe needed to deal with more demanding circumstances. Puma's Faas 250 Trail is well adapted, impressing us with its weight (a low 255 g), rugged traction and a water repellent upper. There's also no tongue present, allowing an almost slip-on feel. R1 000, available in black-ribbon red, dark shadow-vivid blue-warm olive or flame orange-dark denim-vivid blue (pictured).



Hi-Tec Para Boot

The Hi-Tec Para boot is like nothing you've ever seen before. Instead of the regular leather upper, the Para is made from rubber, providing next-level waterproofing and protection for hardcore rambblers. The Vibram outsole would not look out of place on a mining truck, while we're sure the rubber duck yellow will allow quick spotting from the rescue helicopter in case you get lost. R1 300, but only available locally next year.



Nike+ SportWatch GPS powered by TomTom

We've been waiting for this watch for more than a year, and finally it has arrived. The Nike+ SportWatch GPS, powered by TomTom, sees a running giant team up with a mapping giant to produce certainly one of the coolest sport watches around. The Nike+ SportWatch GPS keeps track of your location, calories burned, pace, laps and distance, and while it won't push you out of bed in the morning, it cheekily reminds you that you need to hit the road. R1 900.



Oakley RadarLock sunglasses

So which sunglasses did Oscar Pistorius wear during London 2012? Oakley's RadarLock sunglasses allows you to change lenses thanks to Switchlock Technology, which not only makes the process very fast, but also holds the lens firmly in place without uneven pressure. Each frame comes with two lenses and two sizes of nose pads. R2 650 still won't make you half as cool as Oscar though.



Adidas Adizero Feather 2

At 190 g the Adidas Adizero Feather 2 running shoe won't burden your feet too much. In fact, Adidas believes it's the lightest everyday running shoe, also featuring their Sprintframe platform for optimum forefoot propulsion. For us it's the inclusion of the MiCoach Speed_cell that's exciting, seeing that it records up to eight hours of performance data which, unlike the Nike+ system, includes extras such as number of sprints, and time and distance in speed zones. It retails for R1 200, plus R1 000 for the Speed_cell.



Nike Flyknit Spike

In what can be described as certainly one of the best ambush marketing strategies ever, Nike, who was not an official sponsor of the Olympics, stole the show with their marker pen yellow shoes. For previous Olympics, the company designed shoes to fit in with each nation's kit, but this year, Martin Lotti, Nike's global creative director for the Olympics, went for something different. After lots of research it was decided that Volt, as the company dubbed this shiny bright yellow, would attract the most attention. He certainly was right to just do it. The Nike Flyknit spike will set you back R1 800.



Endomondo tracking app

There are a number of fitness apps available for smartphones these days, but Endomondo remains a firm favourite in the office. Available for all the major smartphone platforms, this app tracks your route, distance, pace and duration of your activity (walking, cycling, running etc.), and saves your history to the cloud. Endomondo has recently hit 10 million users, tripling their number of users in a year, which may be as much a testament to the growth of smartphones as it is to the app's popularity.



LED Lenser X7R

We're big fans of the LED Lenser range of flashlights, joining an ever growing list of converted in admiration of its Advanced Focus System for either clear wide coverage or spotlight illumination. The new LED Lenser X7R provides a beam range of up to 320 m, is rechargeable, and with a luminous flux of up to 500 lumens, is certainly one of the brightest flashlights for its small size. R1 850 from www.leclenser.co.za. [MJ]



17 million. Record amount of iPads Apple sold during its fiscal Q3 2012.

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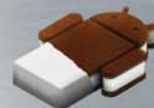
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Ice cream sandwich

Nokia Lumia 610

Illuminating the budget segment



Nokia's Lumia 610 aims to introduce Windows Phone OS to a new, budget-conscious user base, whilst luring smartphone buyers away from Android via a princely design and a more modest price tag.

The Lumia 610 (119 x 62 x 12 mm, 131.5 g) sports a decidedly eye-catching design that exudes quality. It includes a rubberised back cover that is easy to remove, with the rest of the phone incorporating black and high glossy grey plastic. Continuing the premium design theme is the Lumia 610's capacitive touch buttons (back, home, and search) right beneath its 3.7" TFT capacitive touchscreen.

Display

This screen features the standard Windows Phone OS resolution of 480 x 800 pixels, as well as a solid 252 ppi pixel density count translating to detailed text and images, webpages and videos. Nokia's ClearBlack display technology unfortunately doesn't make an appearance, meaning that the baby Lumia is more sensitive to direct sunlight than the rest of its Lumia kin, since it is prone to reflections and glare.

Performance

An aspect where the Lumia 610 is not lacking is performance, courtesy of a Qualcomm MSM7227A Snapdragon chipset featuring an

800 MHz ARM Cortex-A5 CPU and Adreno 200 GPU. Things remain lag-free whilst running apps and navigating the operating system (OS), which in this case is a scaled down version of Windows Phone 7.5 (Mango). This enables Windows Phone 7.5 to run on a device with a 800 MHz CPU and only 256 MB of RAM, a step down from Mango's required 1 GHz processor and 512 MB of RAM. But here is the problem – having a mere 256 MB of RAM means that certain apps such as Skype and Angry Birds will not work properly on this smartphone and can therefore not be downloaded from the Windows Phone Marketplace.

To the point

Nokia's Lumia 610 costs about R3 300, which sees it competing against some tough Android competition in the form of the Huawei Honor U8860 (R3 600), and Samsung Galaxy Ace (R3 000). Alternatively, users who like Windows Phone OS can opt for the Nokia Lumia 710 at R4 000, which will give them access to all of the apps within Windows Phone Marketplace and is powered by a single-core 1.4 GHz Scorpion CPU.

All in all the Lumia 610 is a great all-round device for those whose budgets don't stretch beyond the R3 500 mark, as it offers a good alternative for users looking for something different to Android. [HD] 🌟

🌟 **Full Review** bit.ly/Lum610



BlackBerry Curve 9320

More features to the Curve equation

RIM's BlackBerry Curve 9320 smartphone brings new features to the Curve table, but is it good enough to fend off an array of Android competition?

With measurements of 109 x 60 x 12.7 mm and weighing 103 g, RIM's newest Curve provides their consistently great QWERTY keyboard plus a compact 2.44" (320 x 240 pixels, non-touch, 164 ppi) display. Beneath the 9320's budget bonnet, we find a decent single-core 806 MHz processor, which keeps things ticking along nicely within RIM's latest available mobile platform – BlackBerry 7.1 OS. This OS brings a few new features to the Curve range, including FM Radio (also available on the Curve 9380) and mobile hotspot functionality. It allows users to share an internet connection over Wi-Fi with up to five other devices, although you need an additional data bundle to do this, since BIS (BlackBerry Internet Service) does not cover it.

The RRP of the Curve 9320 is R2 600, pitting it against smartphones such as Samsung's Galaxy Gio (R2 000) and HTC's ChaCha (R2 350). Most BlackBerry users will probably still upgrade to the Curve 9320 instead of one of its Android rivals though, simply because of the value offered by BIS, including free on-device browsing, chat (BBM, Mxit, Whatsapp), email and social networking (Facebook and Twitter).

If you love BlackBerry devices, you will have no quarrels upgrading to the Curve 9320, if not, then there are better priced Android competitors out there. [HD] 🌟

🌟 **Full Review** bit.ly/BBCur9320

"Having a mere 256 MB of RAM means that certain apps such as Skype and Angry Birds will not work properly on this smartphone."

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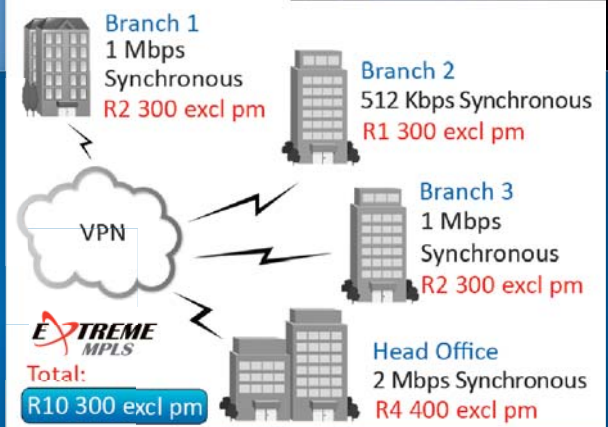
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Samsung Series 7 700G7A gaming notebook

Game, set, match

Samsung's Series 7 700G7A notebook ventures into the domain of high performance gaming notebooks. It's a beast of a machine, and a pleasure to put through its paces.

Although the 17.3 Series 7's plastic cover is nothing to write home about in terms of style, the brushed metal around its backlit keyboard make it more enticing. It's with the touch-enabled panel above the keyboard where Samsung is pushing for some gamer love, seeing that it contains a number of illuminations that light up in Gaming mode. In all, it makes for a solid effort, but is still a long way from Alienware's look and feel.

Performance

Luckily when it comes to performance, the Series 7 700G7A is up to the challenge. Onboard are most of the specs you require from a gaming machine, including an Intel Core i7 2670QM processor, a very generous 8 GB of DDR3 RAM and the AMD Radeon HD6970M (2 GB GDDR5) for its GPU needs. We were a little disappointed that it only features a regular hard disk drive (HDD) instead of a full solid state drive (SSD), since this limited its performance capabilities, with the HDD definitely acted as a bottleneck. But, at 1.5 TB in size, it can handle your HD movie collection. Speaking of which, the machine also contains a Blu-ray drive.

So can the 700G7A handle the latest gaming titles? Well, we tested it with United Front Games' extremely likeable *Sleeping Dogs*, which also contained the extra high definition texture pack we downloaded. Performance during *Sleeping Dogs* on its highest settings (AA turned off) proved to be an easy ride, with the Series 7 scoring a comfortable near 50 fps during our gaming time.

Even more

That's not all though, since Samsung makes use of the AMD's HD3D technology to provide a 3D experience, with a pair of 3D glasses included in the package. Fortunately, Samsung pays a lot of attention to the quality of their screens these days, and the same holds true for the bright (400 nit) full HD 17.3" LED of the Series 7.

Apart from a lacklustre outer casing, we weren't too impressed with the fan noise either. The GPU fan would become audible at approximately 70°C and just became louder and louder. The machine is also close to 4 kg in weight, and, as with most gaming notebooks, the power supply is brick-sized.

To the point

Excellent build quality, an awesome screen and performance that will crunch most of the high-end games, make the Series 7 700G7A one of the better machines on the market. Call Samsung SA for further info on 011-549-7900. [JS + MJ] 🌟



Acer Aspire V3-771

Black beauty

There is still much to be said for large, desktop replacement notebooks, particularly for office workers who want a powerful notebook that is also relatively transportable. On both these fronts, the 17.3" Aspire V3 is certainly an attractive offering.

The notebook certainly exudes class, as it is robed in a glossy black finish, while its keyboard stands out against a chrome sink. Build wise, the notebook is generally impressive, offering a mostly solid chassis, with the exception of the 17.3" screen housing, which does exhibit a modicum of flex, and wavers a bit under pressure. Nonetheless, the 17.3" HD+ LED screen is still beautiful.

Performance potential

Beyond its appearance and the more visible features of the notebook, the V3 has some respectable 'blood, guts and heart'. These included an Intel Core i5 2450M processor, clocked at 2.5 GHz, and 4 GB of DDR3 of memory. A 500 GB SATA hard drive and Intel's integrated graphics 3000, rather than a discrete graphics solution, were also onboard. How this translated into general usage was predictable – smooth operation across the board became the norm.

To the point

Two USB 3.0 ports, two USB 2.0 ports, an HDMI port, a VGA port and an Ethernet port, along with an HD webcam, rounded off a desktop replacement notebook that certainly merits consideration. It has a RRP of R6 000. [RN] 🌟

🌟 **Full Review** bit.ly/acerv3review

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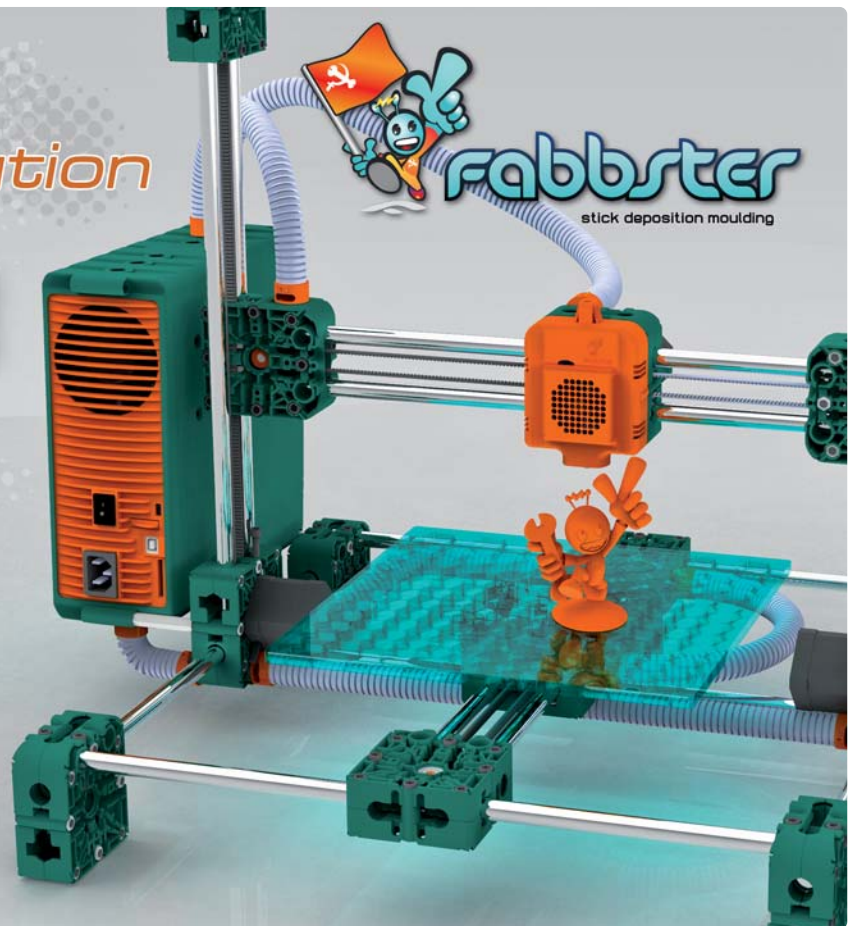


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750 million. Amount of instant messages sent via Mxit each day.



Asus ascends to new IT heights

Leading the way in the new digital era



Asus Zenbook

Founded in 1989 in Taipei, Taiwan by four former Acer computer engineers, Asus gets its name from the Pegasus, the mythological winged horse of Greek mythology. Like the mythical creature after which it's named, Asus has managed to reach new heights in the IT sector.

Energy Star Program. Asus also became the first manufacturer to meet the requirements for the PAS 2060:2010 Standard for Carbon Neutrality, with this certification making the U53SD the first notebook to achieve net zero carbon emissions throughout its lifecycle.

Taking technology to new frontiers

Beyond its green credentials, Asus' products also feature excellent build quality and durability. A testament to this is the number of Asus products that have accompanied explorers on adventurous journeys to places like the top of Mount Everest. Asus' U5 was the first notebook to make it to the top of the world's highest peak, when it was carried to the summit of Mount Everest (8 848 m) by Captain Wang Yongfong during an expedition.

This was not the only occasion when this Taiwanese manufacturer's products had to function amid freezing conditions. On 16 December 2003 two mountaineers, Shi Wang and Jian Liu, set course for the summit of Mount Vinson, which is the tallest peak of Antarctica. The two intrepid explorers each took an Asus S200N notebook along to record their experience, with these notebooks never failing to boot up within this extreme climate.

Future outlook

Asus isn't just taking technology to new frontiers, it is also pushing the borders of innovation. This is being done via new products such as the Asus TAICHI, an ultrabook boasting a double-sided display, which enables it to serve as a tablet when its lid is closed. The company's products scooped a whopping 3 886 international awards and accolades during 2011. With innovative technology the likes of the TAICHI, as well as products like the Windows 8-powered Tablet 810 and Windows RT-operating Tablet 600 in the pipeline, 2012 is shaping up to be even more amazing. ♣

Asus (officially known as ASUSTeK Computer Inc.) is the jack of all IT trades within the IT world, since it designs and manufactures a broad range of enterprise and consumer focussed products that includes motherboards, graphics processors, displays, desktop PCs, all-in-one computers, notebooks, tablets, netbooks and mobile phones.

The Taiwanese firm is the top motherboard manufacturer globally, commanding a worldwide market share of nearly 40%. Around one in every three PCs around the world makes use of an Asus motherboard.

Eco-friendliness – a central value for the firm

One of Asus' core business philosophies is to strive to be among the world-class green high-tech leaders and to provide valuable contributions to humanity and the environment. The company's long list of achievements attests to Asus putting this philosophy into practice.

Asus became the first PC maker in the world to be awarded the IECQ Hazardous Substance Process Management (IECQ HSPM) certification in 2012. This certificate means that the firm adheres to the strict European Union RoHS and WEEE directives, which encompasses the management and control of all substances used during the production process, in order to avoid any potential harmful impact on the environment.

Some of the company's other green accolades include being the only company to come up tops within two different categories within Greenpeace's 2010 electronics survey, which ranked electronic devices according to how eco-

friendly they are. The Asus UL30A took top honours in the notebook category, whilst the company's VW-247H-HF display came first in the monitor section of the survey.

“One of Asus' core business philosophies is to strive to be among the world-class green high-tech leaders.”

Last year all of the firm's notebooks complied with the US environmental protection agency and Department of Energy's Energy Star standards. In fact, the energy consumption of Asus' notebooks and netbooks were 35% better on average compared to the computer standard set by the



Asus TAICHI

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Xyfi Wi-Fi and 3G router

Tiny connector

As cellular service providers start offering more affordable 3G data packages (see p18), using these for home or office usage is becoming increasingly popular. A 3G modem is of course key, with Belgian company Option's Xyfi (pronounced ex-Wi-Fi) now available locally.

In terms of size, the Xyfi is much smaller than regular hotspot modems, only slightly bigger in size than a USB flash disk. In fact, Option describes it as the world's smallest personal hotspot. This is because it does not carry its own battery, rather relying on a USB power source (such as your PC or the optional battery pack) for power.

With this little 802.11n router, you are able to connect up to eight devices simultaneously, with Option claiming speeds of up to 72 Mbps, depending of course on your provider's network.

Easy as pie

To use the Xyfi is an absolute breeze and you'll be surfing within five minutes. Insert your SIM into the device, plug it into a USB slot and you are almost there. From here, you can either install the driver, or simply connect to the Xyfi Wi-Fi hotspot (network name and password

provided inside the box). The Xyfi has a little trick up its sleeve – it can connect to available Wi-Fi networks. For example, you can connect the Xyfi to your work or home Wi-Fi network instead of using your cellular data bundle. If the connection drops for whatever reason, the Xyfi connects to the 3G connection again.

“The Xyfi is the world's smallest personal hotspot.”

Inside the well-designed browser-based administration page you'll first be required to set up a username and password, from where you'll be able to change the name of your Xyfi

connection and passwords, as well as set up the Wi-Fi connection that it can connect to.

Accessories

With a number of accessories available for the Xyfi, our first choice would be the battery pack, which should provide a solid eight hours of battery life. The Xyfi simply slips into the battery pack, making it easy to carry around in a jacket pocket. Also available is a car adaptor, ideal for those more on the road than in the office, while the wall adapter is suitable for families or small offices.

The Option Xyfi is small, easy to use and will have you surfing in no time. It retails for R1 800 from Advinne on 010-130-0010. Mail them on info@advinne.com, or visit www.advinne.com.



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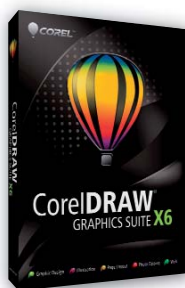


23.16%, 21.46% & 19.41%. Respective market shares of the Top 3 global mobile browsers – Android, Safari and Opera Mini.

CorelDraw Graphics Suite X6

Top 5 reasons to buy & upgrade

Still looking for a reason to buy/upgrade to CorelDraw's latest Graphics Suite X6? Look no further.



Top 5 reasons to buy:

1 Complete professional graphic design software suite

Find everything you need for professional graphic design, illustration, layout, tracing, photo editing, web graphics, website creation and online collaboration in one complete suite that is easy to learn and use. The suite also includes 64-bit support, allowing you to leverage the full power of your computer system.

2 Versatile content search feature, layout and drawing tools

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drawing, bitmap-to-vector tracing, photo editing, artistic media and web graphics tools. Manage styles and colours easily with property dockers and convenient features, such as Style Sets and Color Harmonies. Create beautiful layouts with advanced OpenType typography tools.

3 Valuable learning materials for designers of all levels

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4 High value digital content

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Top 5 reasons to upgrade:

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2 New page layout and document style tools

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3 New Color Harmonies

The new Color Harmonies tool, accessed from the Color Styles dock, combines Color Styles into a Harmony, allowing you to modify colours collectively.

4 Enhanced speed with native 64-bit and multi-core support

Enjoy the speed of multi-core processing power and native 64-bit support. The enhanced speed allows you to quickly process larger files and images.

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Interview: Manoj Bhoola, Managing Director: Avanade



Avanade established a local office just over a year ago. TechSmart talked to Manoj Bhoola, managing director at Avanade, about the South African market and their partnership with Microsoft and Accenture.

TechSmart: Avanade's South African office has been going now for more than a year. What has the reception been like?

Manoj Bhoola: Admittedly, it has not been an easy task launching the business here but Avanade has seen phenomenal growth, and as a team we are astounded at the success we have achieved in our first year of operation.

Specialising in a single technology platform has meant that we are able to develop and maintain a level of expertise in Microsoft technologies not offered by other global services companies. Our close connection with Accenture brings an additional layer of industry and business expertise to our customer's projects, tapping Accenture's rich source of industry-specific knowledge and leading practices. That's a rare combination, and it's one that customers are beginning to notice and appreciate.

Can you give a brief description of what Avanade does?

Avanade's service offering blends insight, innovation and expertise in Microsoft technologies to help businesses derive the greatest benefit from their technology investments. We apply a collaborative approach to working with customers — and we accelerate innovation by tapping into the skills of our worldwide network of experts and the unique insights of our founding companies,

Microsoft and Accenture. We develop solutions using proven and emerging technologies, and offer flexible deployment models: on-premise, cloud-based or outsourced.

Our services are offered through key service lines namely: Application Development, Customer Relationship Management (CRM), Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), Technology Infrastructure, Business Intelligence, Collaboration and Outsourcing.

So locally, what are the problems companies come to you with?

South Africa has a huge and growing base of enterprise Microsoft users. I meet CIOs and IT leaders every day, and one of their common concerns is the lack of deep Microsoft skills in the local market. As technology grows ever more complex and mission-critical, customers notice the lack of specialist Microsoft skills as projects overshoot deadlines and budgets, and don't deliver the promised functionality. This is where we come in, we noticed this gap to offer our expertise in Microsoft technologies to help customers realise results.

Both Microsoft and Accenture are partners in Avanade. Do you work closely with their local offices?

Yes we do. The alliance between Avanade, Microsoft and Accenture combines the strengths of each company — businesses purchase technology from Microsoft, Accenture develops methodologies and processes to ensure they get the best solution for their needs, and Avanade implements. In this way, our clients get proven, fully integrated, and innovative services and a true experience of "the power of three". We are owned 20% by Microsoft and 80% by Accenture.

Innovation seems to be a core concept of Avanade internationally. We take it this is also the case locally?

Although the South African office is less than a

year old, it already has a well-established "innovation factory" that is producing intellectual capital. Our passion for technology translates into higher returns for customers. Our people work with the latest products from Microsoft, even before they hit the market, so they are already proficient when they start work on a client project.

Smartphones and tablets have boomed the past few years. Avanade also provides mobile solutions, correct?

The rise of the BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) concept where employees use their own devices on corporate networks has motivated companies to provide applications that allow for a rich user experience on mobile devices. Against this backdrop, we have positioned ourselves to be able to cater for this market and we are able to help companies develop applications that meet the requirements of the mobile era, across all mobile platforms.

What is your opinion on Windows 8, will it be successful in the market?

I am confident Windows 8 will be embraced by organisations. Avanade is best positioned to assist companies who may have some concerns around application compatibility issues when they do their operating system upgrades.

Seeing that you work with Microsoft, do you own a Windows Phone smartphone? Are you happy with it?

I have been a user of a number of Microsoft-based phones, and my latest phone is a Nokia Lumia. The phone is managed centrally by our IT department to ensure it remains secure, and allows me access to the Avanade network — through the Microsoft Lync client I get access to our telephony system and live meetings. Even though I am on the road a lot, I am never away from my office. So, yes, I am extremely happy with the phone. ☺

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Data on demand

8ta, Cell C, Vodacom and MTN data deals laid bare

With the growing popularity of smartphones and tablets, and the vast majority of users in South Africa relying on mobile connections to access the internet, for many, data usage has become even more important than voice or SMS services.

However, like most things in life, constant or at least consistent connectivity comes with a price tag. The good news is that if you don't want to be tied in to a contract, or simply want to control the cost of feeding the data demon, all the service providers have data offerings that are quite competitive and even compelling. However, what each has in common, is that the larger the data bundle, and the more money users spend, the better value for money they receive.

Finding the right deal across the board from service providers such as MTN, Vodacom, 8ta and Cell C, that best suits you, particularly when comparing them to each other, can be a little confusing or even confounding, as each structure their offerings differently.

8ta

8ta offers the most straightforward means of selecting one's prepaid data options.

8ta data bundle	Cost	Price per MB
100 MB	R40	R0.40
250 MB	R80	R0.32
500 MB	R120	R0.24
1 GB	R200	R0.20
2 GB	R266	R0.13
5 GB	R666	R0.13

Additionally, the company is currently running two promotions. The first of these, the 2 GB + 1 GB, gives users 3 GB for R149 once off. The 2 GB mentioned accounts for the 2 GB of data, while the 1 GB portion of the special is a night surfer offering which comes into effect between 11 pm and 5 am.

In a similar fashion, the 60 GB + 60 GB promotion offers 60 GB of data anytime for a once off fee of R1 800, and is accompanied by a further 60 GB night surfer component between 11 pm and 5 am. It's worth noting however, that the 8ta offerings are limited to areas which fall under 8ta's coverage.

Cell C

Cell C recently raised eyebrows with its regular data rates, which were slashed considerably and were largely expected to send ripples through the industry. The company dropped its rates to R0.15 per megabyte, for in and out-of-bundle usage across its entire data product portfolio, which is a far cry from the R1 or R2 per megabyte rate we see elsewhere. This applies to its range of bundle, which include a 50 MB, 100 MB, 300 MB, 500 MB, 1 GB, 2 GB, 5 GB and 10 GB offerings. The company also has a rather decent variety of prepaid data packages that merit a look.

Cell C data bundle	Once off payment	Price per MB	Duration of validity
Smartdata 3 GB	R399	R0.13	1 year
Smartdata 6 GB	R900	R0.15	500 MB every month for a year
Smartdata 12 GB	R1 999	R0.17	1 GB every month for a year
Smartdata 24 GB	R1 299	R0.05	2 GB every month for a year
Smartdata 60 GB	R9 240	R0.15	5 GB every month for a year

MTN

MTN's internet bundles include its one day prepaid plan, which provides uncapped internet access for a single day within a fair use policy. Users effectively 'subscribe' or opt in to an add on, and pay a set fee to access a service for one month, but aren't obligated to continue purchasing past the expiry. Any unused data carries over for an additional month.

MTN data bundle	Subscription (Validity period total 2 months)	Price per MB
Pay as you use	none	R2
MTN 1 Day (Fair use policy: 150 MB)	none	none
MTN 10 MB	R10	R1
MTN 75 MB	R49	R0.65
MTN 300 MB	R149	R0.50
MTN 500 MB	R189	R0.38
MTN 1 GB	R289	R0.29
MTN 2 GB	R389	R0.19

Vodacom

Also offering several prepaid bundles – in fact, the most number on this list – is Vodacom.

Vodacom data bundle	Cost	Price per MB
MyMeg 10	R9	R0.90
MyMeg 30	R25	R0.83
MyMeg 100	R49	R0.49
MyMeg 250	R99	R0.40
MyMeg 500	R159	R0.32
MyMeg 750	R220	R0.29
MyGig 1	R279	R0.27
MyGig 1.5	R319	R0.21
MyGig 2	R369	R0.18
MyGig 2.5	R429	R0.17
MyGig 3	R499	R0.16
MyGig 5	R829	R0.16
MyGig 10	R1 629	R0.16
MyGig 20	R3 199	R0.16

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ZANDO: Five important lessons in eCommerce

What does it take for a company to succeed in the fast moving world of eCommerce?

Peter Allerstorfer, co-founder and MD of the current darling of the local fashion world, ZANDO, provides five important lessons he learnt since going live.



ZANDO (www.zando.co.za), South Africa's newest online fashion store is evidence of the online explosion that the South African market is experiencing at present. The website launched on the 23rd of January 2012, and since then this eCommerce domain is seeing 200 000 unique visitors a month. ZANDO is fast establishing its position as one of the leading eCommerce players in South Africa, and with more than 300 local and international brands and 8 000 styles featured online, it's easy to see why. Peter Allerstorfer, MD of Zando, shares his experiences.

1. The customer should be the focus of your activities

Listening and engaging is key in an online business. The radical increase in our offering is testament to the growth that we are experiencing and has been a direct result of listening to what our customers want.

2. Your staff is your asset

In support to the growth of ZANDO's business, investing in human capital is a key focus for the business. Identifying and retaining talent is vital to the success of our company.

3. Be data driven and have attention to detail

Paying attention to our customers' needs directly affects what we sell. It allows us to offer the widest range, convenience, great service and fast delivery. As such, no decisions can be made without data. Access to data is essential for measurement, benchmarking and the bottom line. It's all about the details.

4. There are no shortcuts

Hard work, long hours and dedication to your business are key factors when growing a company. There are no shortcuts to success.

5. Prioritise correctly and have razor-sharp focus

In a start-up/new eCommerce company, there are thousands of things to do, so it's all about prioritising. Create a short list of the top 50 things you need to get done on a daily basis and don't waste your time on things that are not important. This enables you to have razor-sharp focus. ❄️



To find out more about ZANDO, visit the online store at www.zando.co.za or follow ZANDO on Facebook or on Twitter (@zando_co_za).

Social media for SMEs: The do's and don'ts

By Donna Palinhos, Head of Content and Community at NATIVE

NATIVE

Social media has become very much part and parcel of the business marketing mix, and like any other marketing tool available, you want to be able to derive the best possible value for your business. Donna Palinhos, head of content and community at NATIVE, SA's largest independent digital marketing agency, provides the do's and don'ts of social media.

Social media principles that apply to large corporates also apply to SMEs. When getting started, all businesses, no matter their size, need to bear in mind that social media is not a PR tool, it is an experience requiring businesses to create a 'home' with unique content about the business.

The Do's

- Have a social media strategy in place that will effectively promote your brand. Don't automatically assume your business belongs on Facebook. Perhaps Twitter or MXit would provide a more meaningful conversation with your target audience.
- Develop your company's brand voice in accordance with its unique brand identity, marketing message and positioning. Social media must look off the cuff but be planned well ahead of time and regularly updated.
- Provide fans and followers with exclusivity to time-sensitive deals, offers, give-aways, events and rewards in creative ways.
- Be conversational and friendly to your audiences to stimulate dialogue and build a sound relationship.
- Measure the worth of your social media strategy. Analyse the activity on your Facebook page or Twitter profile every month – understanding what kind of content resonates best with your audience.

The Don'ts

- Never ignore or simply delete queries and complaints. Answer all queries and deal with negative comments quickly and honestly.
- If the situation is difficult to contain within social media, try to take the conversation "offline". Don't panic if your brand faces slander, negativity and complaint in your online communities. Have a plan in hand to deal with crisis situations.
- Forego the PR and sales-pitch speak. Ask questions that inspire response. Create thoughtful and engaging conversation with your communities.
- Don't take content without crediting its source. Make your presentation of content fresh, engaging and shareable.
- Don't spam fans and followers with a continuous stream of messaging.
- Don't use the same content on Facebook and Twitter. These are different platforms with different audiences, treat them as such.
- Don't ignore Facebook rules when it comes to the use of the cover image (not to be used as a promotional space or for competitions). The requirements of the Consumer Protection Act should also be adhered to. ❄️

The content featured on this page first appeared in the TechSmart SME Guide 2012, available to download or read from bit.ly/SMEguide.

Cloud and Virtualisation Summit Africa coming to Jo'burg soon

2012 Summit set to exceed expectations



The third annual Cloud and Virtualisation Summit Africa takes place at the Hilton Hotel in Sandton from 10 to 11 October 2012. Hosted by international business-to-business conferencing company, Kinetic Events, the event is aimed at business and technology leaders who need to understand how cloud computing and virtualisation is fundamentally transforming the way in which we think about, acquire and use computing resources.

The Cloud and Virtualisation Summit Africa offers innovative resources, ideas and best practice case studies enabling your company to apply them immediately in order to leverage the cloud, assisting you in maximising performance, minimising costs and improving the scale of your projects. Improving resource utilisation through virtualising IT infrastructures is fast becoming precedence for enterprises globally. Successful deployment requires upfront preparation and strategising when carefully determining the appropriate infrastructure components and architecture for the enterprise.

The summit will allow attendees to discover the basic concepts behind cloud and virtualisation, the potential enterprise benefits and key decisions associated with virtualisation projects, and exactly how to get started with virtualisation assessment.

Panel discussions and keynote presentations

A number of important discussions will take place, touching on a number of relevant topics. These include:

- **The increasing impact of cloud computing on business technology**
Cloud computing is revolutionising the manner in which IT and business services are being delivered and managed. With the modern technological advancement, enterprises run the risk of overestimating short-term effects, while underestimating the long-term benefits. The importance of understanding the value and impact of IT developments could see companies investing in capabilities that could potentially compromise their competitiveness within the respective industries.
- **How is cloud computing changing the IT operations management vendor landscape**
Cloud computing requires the successful integration and automation of a greater set of management processes and functions. This results in IT organisations selecting more functionality from fewer suppliers, further improving overall business models and outcomes based on fundamental industry assessment criteria.
- **Cloud computing and the evolving business landscape**
Globally, the increasing demand to meet international industry standards and expectations leaves somewhat of a bitter taste in the mouths of senior executive and determine whether their enterprise is ready to adopt the transformation. With the influx of business information from the cloud, it is critical to assess your processes and ascertain whether they are successfully aligned to meet the enterprise industry changes and further develop and re-strategise corporate process strategies, carefully considering all the factors involved to benefit the long term business goals.

- **Cloud computing – the reality**

Cloud computing has tremendous potential within the African continent. But globally, enterprise executives are continuously asking whether the hype is fast surpassing the reality and looking to address the primary benefits to the enterprise, both long term and short term.

- **Securing cloud computing environments, private and public**

Next-generation security infrastructures and strategies are aiming to improve global industry enterprise IT organisational challenges, including the securing of data in the private and public cloud computing environments.

- **Managing the new economics of the cloud**

Most IT organisations practice some form of financial control over IT processes and often fall short of successfully managing IT from a financial perspective. Cloud computing changes the economics of service provision, and innovative new thinking is emerging.

- **Understanding and managing SaaS and cloud computing risks**

Cloud computing and Software as a Service (SaaS) bring about unique technology, data control, compliance and vendor viability risks, often proving difficult to assess and control. It is important for enterprises considering the adoption of cloud-based services, to understand the associated risks and to define the necessary compensating controls to allow them to be used for information.

- **Securing next generation virtualised data centres and private clouds**

Securing cloud and virtual environments is one of the major concerns among enterprise executives and end-users, resulting in cloud providers and virtualisation vendors effectively delivering solid cloud security solutions that address industry-related issues raised by users. Enterprises are encouraged to discover cloud security models as a revolutionising aspect to the 'cloud puzzle'.

- **How to evolve to the cloud to leverage existing technology investments**

The coordination of technology resources to achieve cost savings through scale, delivery capabilities and interoperability enhancement is crucial to driving productivity. Enterprises that have been given mandate to reduce ICT costs, improve efficiency and effectiveness, and make it convenient to access services, will utilise services and outline services being delivered to efficacy.

- **Architecture**

It is critical for the enterprise to fully understand the concept of the innovative technological advancement of cloud computing and virtualisation. The summit aims to investigate the implications on application delivery within the enterprise and outline the best practices for the successful foundation to cloud computing.

Contact the event organiser

For more information on the Cloud and Virtualisation Summit Africa, visit www.cloudsummit.co.za or contact Shaunei Meintjes on 021-555-0866 or shaunei@kinetic-events.net. Also follow @ITLeadersAfrica and @KineticEventsSA on Twitter for daily updates and news feeds. TechSmart is one of the media partners of the event, and we hope to see you there. 🌟

Canon Ixus 240 HS

Sexy and smart



Canon's compact cameras are divided between the stylish Ixus range, and the more feature heavy PowerShot cameras. But while the shapely Ixus 240 HS certainly has the looks, it hides a fair amount of brains in its compact body.

For us there are two key features we love. For one, a feature that we've grown very fond of as more and more cameras sport these – a 3.2" touchscreen at the back. Not only does it clear this area of the regular clutter of buttons and dials, but in our opinion, it actually makes finding your shooting options easier.

Secondly, the Ixus 240 HS has built-in Wi-Fi. This allows you to download pictures to

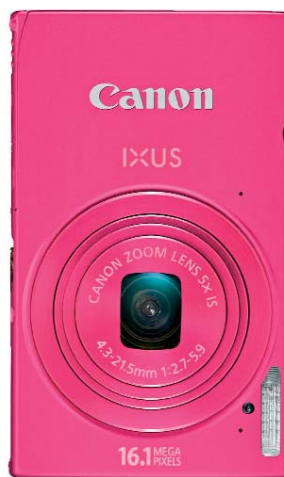
your PC, and now also on your Android or iOS device once you've installed the Canon CameraWindow app. This might require the non-tech savvy to pass the device's setup over to a willing geek, as the process is slightly more

complicated than we would have liked.

Furthermore the camera is no slouch either, containing Canon's Digic 5 processor that, for example, also does duty on their EOS 650D DSLR.

If there is one critique that cannot be passed over, it's the 240HS' small battery. It should last for a night out on the town, but once you start that Wi-Fi connection it munches the power.

And while the sensitivity of the touchscreen sometimes demands an extra press, in all, the Ixus 240HS provides a well-constructed small compact with more to it than meets the eye. R2 800. [MJ] ❀



Canon SA expo is coming again

All the latest Canon kit on show



Given the success of last year's Canon SA Expo, the company is returning for seconds, this time with more speakers and even bigger prizes up for grabs.

Canon SA's forthcoming Canon SA Expo has been formally announced and confirmed for the 30th November to the 2nd December, to take place at the Sandton Convention Centre. As was the case last year, entrance to the expo will be free, and will run from 10 am to 6 pm daily. This year, though, the company intends building on last year's Canon Expo debut, and will be offering more guest speaker sessions than last year, with two sessions running simultaneously throughout the day on all three days. There should also be some nice specials on Canon kit for those interested in buying.

Are you in it to win it?

Leading up to the expo, aspiring photographers will once again be able to

participate in the Canon Photo Competition. Canon SA elaborated that participants can enter one or all four themed categories, which include Reflections; Into the Great Wide Open; Adrenaline and Magic Colours. One winner per category will be selected by a panel of judges and will be announced on 15 January 2013 on the Canon expo website (www.csaexpo.co.za). Each of the four winners will walk away with an EOS 5D Mark III, including an EF40mm F2.8 STM lens.

The top ten entries in each category will also be exhibited in the gallery at the Canon Expo, where visitors will be able to vote for their favourite entries. Entries, which opened on the 15th of August and closes on the 15th of October, must be submitted in electronic JPEG format, not exceeding 2 MB, via email. There are four email addresses correlating to the various themes, namely; reflections@csaexpo.co.za; wideopen@csaexpo.co.za; adrenaline@csaexpo.co.za and colours@csaexpo.co.za. ❀

Canon debuts EOS M mirrorless camera

This M, James Bond would covet



Will Canon bring out a mirrorless system? That is the question that's been on our lips since rivals Nikon introduced their 1 system last year. And now finally it's been answered with the introduction of Canon's EOS M digital camera.

The new camera, which joins the likes of Sony's NEX and the Olympus PEN series, similarly boasts a compact form that accommodates interchangeable lenses. These include new ones specifically designed for the camera, namely the EF-M 22 mm f/2 STM kit lens and the optional EF-M 18-55 mm f/3.5-5.6 IS STM lens. With the help of a mount adaptor, the M can also accommodate Canon's EF and EF-S lenses. Providing the brains behind the operation is Canon's Digic 5 processor, while the all-important sensor is a 18 megapixel APS-C sized CMOS image sensor (as featured on the EOS 650D DSLR), which Canon has promised will offer 'incredible low-light performance' and shallow depth of field.

Quantum of splendour

Images and video can be viewed on the 3" touchscreen LCD monitor containing an excellent 1 040 000 dots, while its multi-touch operation allows photographers to use familiar gestures such as pinch-to-zoom and swiping to scroll between pictures. Most pertinently to low light shooters, ISO speeds on offer range from ISO 100 – 12800 (expandable to 25600 in H mode) for still image shooting. Additionally, the EOS M boasts a full HD Movie mode with Movie Servo AF for continuous focus tracking of moving subjects.

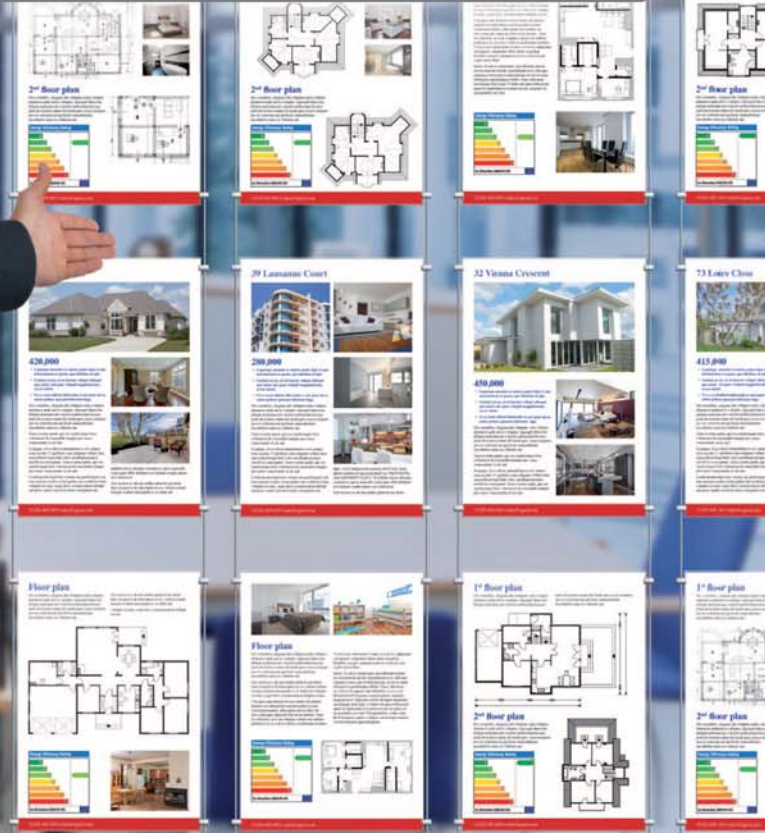
To the point

It may have been preceded by a waiting period and some uncertainty, but the EOS M is exactly what we were hoping Canon had tucked away in its vault. Indications are that a body+lens+flash combo will retail for about R8 000 at the end of October. The Canon EOS M is of one the cameras that we can't wait to put through its paces. ❀

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Samsung WB850F smart camera

Jam-packed

In tune with an increase in quality of their notebooks, Samsung's compact camera range has also seen improvements over the past two years. And while their mirrorless cameras (their NX-range) have won us over, the new WB850F is leading the way on the compact side.

This 16.2 megapixel compact hides a very impressive Schneider-Kreuznach 21x optical zoom. It's basically equivalent to a 23 – 483 mm regular (35 mm) lens and will become



your new best friend in nature reserves, bird sanctuaries and regular holidays. At this long range the shakes usually hinders a steady shot, but Samsung includes both optical and digital image stabilisation.

Which brings us to the question of why the

WB850F is called a smart camera? This is because of the onboard Wi-Fi, which allows you to email pictures, upload to Facebook, Picasa, SkyDrive and Photobucket, or simply download to your PC via a Wi-Fi network without the need for cables.

Unfortunately, on many attempts the Wi-Fi downloading got interrupted, making us think it's actually easier to simply take out the SD card and copy photos to the PC.

And while there is GPS onboard too, we had difficulties getting it running, plus maps are stored to SD card and obviously do not work when you load another SD card.

In general the WB850F's image quality is very impressive and we would not have minded spending more time with it based on lens and image quality alone. But while there are a number of added features, we're not quite sold on the Wi-Fi and GPS. It comes at a decent R3 300. [MJ] 🍌

SanDisk Eye-Fi wireless memory card

Wires be gone

SanDisk's Eye-Fi card has been available for a while overseas, and at long last the card has received approval from ICASA for local distribution.

So what makes this SDHC card so different from the rest? It quite ingeniously includes a Wi-Fi connector inside its regular sized SD card frame, which uploads all your photos to your PC. The set-up process for this is fairly easy, but it means that both your PC and the disk need to be connected to the same router. Using the Eye-Fi Centre software, you can set the



card to delete content as soon as it has uploaded, while it can also upload automatically to certain social networking and photo sharing sites (Facebook, Flickr, MobileMe, Picasa and an FTP server). Unfortunately, Dropbox is not amongst these. None the less, we did not have any hassles setting up the card, although Wi-Fi enabled cameras took us longer. Even so, the convenience of photos uploading to your PC when you enter the house after a long day of shooting is not to be underestimated.

No need for a network

There are also Eye-Fi apps available for iOS and Android devices which should pique the interest of photographers who want to view images on a larger screen, such as an iPad, when doing photo shoots, since these connect directly and don't require you to connect to your network first.

While a regular 4 GB SD card will set you back R100, the 4 GB SanDisk Eye-Fi card retails for R560 (8 GB – R780). Call Tudortech on 011-803-2226. [MJ] 🍌

Magix Music Maker MX

Beats by Dr. You

With Apple users having access to the quite awesome GarageBand, Magix's Music Maker MX helps PC users create beats of their own.

The new version of Magix's Music Maker MX has been released bringing with it the ability to create songs in a question of minutes. So how does it work? Available to you are a number of sounds and instruments from different genres of music, including amongst others Chillout, Electro Pop, Hip-Hop and Alternative Rock. These can be arranged in the arranger field, adding drums, bass, guitar,



synths and vocals to eventually build a song.

Getting started is easy enough, but you'll quickly tire of the limited amount of sounds available. Digging deeper reveals the ability to use synthesizers to create your own drum loops and ambient sounds, with a new Drum engine and Loop designer new to the series.

If there is one thing we learned from using Music Maker MX it is that life behind the 'mixing desk' gets a lot easier once you've invested the time into learning all the shortcuts and understanding how the different loop and sound synthesizers work. Having said that, no prior musical know-how is needed, apart from maybe an ear for what sounds hot or not. The latest version makes it easier to spread your Grammy-winning prowess via the internet, since you can share your tunes via YouTube, Facebook or SoundCloud, or simply save it as an MP3 or burn to CD.

Magix's Music Maker MX will set you back R900, with the Premium version retailing for R1 200. Visit www.phoenixsoftware.co.za for more info. [MJ] 🍌

Huntkey Genisat Entry-Gamer rig

On the hunt for a valuable gaming chassis

If you're in the market for an affordable gaming rig, than Huntkey's Genisat Entry-Gamer is right up your alley. Packing a second generation Core i3 and dedicated Nvidia GeForce GPU, this rig brings capable performance to the budget crowd.

Huntkey's Genisat Entry-Gamer chassis offers ample space, improved airflow with slots for two fans, as well as a screwless assembly design that makes it easy to add or upgrade components such as another hard drive or secondary optical drive.



Powered by an dual-core Intel Core i3-2100 CPU running at 3.1 GHz, along with a Nvidia GeForce GTS 450 GPU, this system is easily capable of running the latest games such as Max Payne 3.

This was confirmed during benchmarking, as this duo managed an impressive score of 368 in Heaven Benchmark v2.0, a score of 10 610 in 3D Mark 2006 and score of 1543.8 within the Passmark 7.0 performance test. We had no issues when playing titles such as Civilizations V, Need for Speed: The Run, as well as Crysis 2 at the highest resolutions.

Beyond this capable processor duo, the Windows 7 Professional operating Genisat also offers users 4 GB of RAM as well as an ample 1 TB hard drive with around 915 GB being available to users. In terms of connectivity a useful six USB slots are offered, with two USB 2.0 ports plus another two USB 3.0 slots at the back and two USB 2.0 ports at the front of the tower. Games and software are installed via a HP DVD writer.

Huntkey's Genisat Entry-Gamer PC packs in a lot of budget gaming value for its RRP of R6 500, with users being able to enjoy the latest game releases whilst also having room to upgrade components later as needed. Available from Incredible Connection [HD] 🌟

Acer Olympics P238HL LCD monitor

Beautiful display to boost your productivity

As an Olympics worldwide computing partner, Acer has the opportunity to release some branded tech with the Olympics themed P238HL LCD display being one of these. But is it worth a gold medal?

This 23" display measures in at 551 x 361 x 17.5 mm and boasts a full HD (1920 x 1080) screen resolution and a massive 100 million:1 contrast ratio, resulting in some beautiful looking photos, web pages and full HD (1080p) movies. Users employ the P238HL's pull-out kickstand to enable it to rest



comfortably upon an office desk or entertainment area at home.

Like a notebook's screen, this display is tilted back with users viewing content at an angle of around 110°, making it easy to utilise the Olympics monitor as a secondary screen for your notebook to boost productivity at work.

Entertainment epicentre

When used at home however, the monitor will not stick out as an unstylish sore thumb in your tech-filled man-cave next to the gaming PC case and Xbox 360, thanks to its stylish glossy piano-black plastic frame.

Connectivity options include a VGA connector, DVI port, and dual HDMI connections, allowing you to use it as a PC display whilst also keeping your PlayStation 3 connected to it. Assisting in this task is the monitor's onboard speakers, which manages to fill a room with sound and offers quality comparable to your standard desktop speakers.

Acer's Olympics monitor goes for an RRP of R3 000, which is a fair bit costlier than conventional HD flat screens such as the 23" LG Flatron IPS236V-PN (R2 000) or even desktop productivity stations such as Samsung's Central Station C23A550U (R2 500). [HD] 🌟

🌟 **Full Review** bit.ly/Olymdis

Epson MG-850HD projector

Bringing an iPhone to the projector party

Innovation is an ever present facet of the tech scene, but rarely seen on projectors. Epson bucks this trend by releasing the first 3LCD HD-Ready home cinema projector that sports an iPod docking station.

Press the panel at the back of the projector (291 x 340 x 115 mm; 3.9 kg) and an



iPhone dock will pop out. Users are able to connect their iPhone, iPod, or iPad to this dock to display photo slideshows, listen to music or watch movies stored on these mobile devices. Beyond the iPhone dock, you are spoiled for choice in terms of connectivity with composite audio and video connectors, an

HDMI slot, microphone input connector, RCA and USB ports available.

Audio visual experience

Thanks to the HD-Ready (720p, 1280 x 720) resolution, 3 000: 1 contrast ratio, as well as an above average 2 800 lumens output, pictures and video remain crisp even in the presence of ambient light sources such as open curtains letting in the morning light. In terms of sound power, the MG-850HD packs two 10 W speakers offering a surprisingly good sound experience. The speakers may lack some bass oomph, but the sound remains clear even at the high volumes.

Additionally, this projector comes with a remote control and carry handle making it easy to move or transport. RRP is a steep R10 000, which could also afford a 1080p-class projector. [HD] 🌟

Apple iOS Apps of the month



Pinterest

A Pinterest app has finally been released for iOS, and quite frankly, it works brilliantly. Signing up via the app takes only a couple of minutes, and then one can start following people, create one's own boards, or search for interesting content within the app in a broad array of categories. The app is free to download, while it has been made available for Android too.



Cooliris

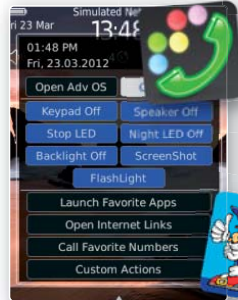
Another slick content discovery app for iOS is Cooliris, although this one is specifically intended for photo sharing. The free iPad app enables users to share photos from Facebook, one's device, Instagram and Google images. Although you can elect to sign in with Facebook, you can alternatively rather create an account with Cooliris to get going. Either way, Cooliris offers a convenient way to share content.



Idea Sketch

We are big fans of mindmapping and frequently grab the nearest available device to jot down, or sketch out, interconnected ideas. Idea Sketch is yet another perfect, free tool to quickly and easily do this. Niftily, a swipe with two fingers automatically and symmetrically organises one's mindmap or flowchart. The app comes with a great selection of shapes and tools, and isn't plagued by ads. ❖

BlackBerry Apps of the month



Advance OS and LED

If you are a fan of multi-utility applications, then this app is for you. Besides allowing you to change the LED colours of your BlackBerry, this app also has a flashlight, an automatic redial feature and screenshot functionality. There are loads of extras, since Advance OS and LED includes 20+ apps in this one app download. No wonder it boasts being "the most powerful utility app made for BlackBerry".



Sonic Advance Free

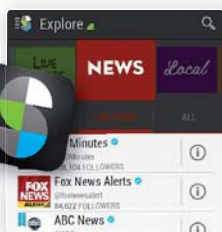
Sonic makes a welcome return onto BlackBerry phones with Sonic Advance Free (the full game retails for \$1). This is a recreation of the first ever Sonic game, so it should bring back a lot of memories for certain readers. As always, Dr. Eggman has an evil plan to rule the world and it's up to a coin collecting Sonic to deal with him in speedy fashion. Warning: this game is very addictive.



Offline Browser – Read Offline

We all love reading articles on the go but sometimes we tend to want to view the articles at a later time. Offline Browser fills the gap, since it allows you to save articles and access them without the need for the internet. Offline Browser will allow you to read articles even if you have poor signal or no data, plus can serve as an article index – keeping track of what you deem important. [IF] ❖

Android Apps of the month



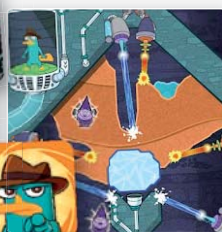
Slices for Twitter

While Twitter clients on Android are a dime a dozen, the well-designed Slices for Twitter is a bit different, as it enables users to browse their Twitter feeds by category and 'slice' their timeline into manageable feeds, as well as bookmark their favourite accounts. The free app further boasts an Explore feature that provides quick access to live events, news and trends. Slices' future looks #bright.



Comixology: DC vs Marvel

While both Marvel and DC Comic's apps work a treat, having access to both the publisher's treasure chests from one app is the way to go. Comixology allows purchase of the latest titles from both, while also including other smaller publishers into the fold. In total the available comics stands at more than 20 000 titles (purchased straight from Google Play).



Where's my Perry?

While Where's my Perry may look similar to Where's my Water, it's no less compelling or fun. The physics puzzler stylishly places players in the shoes of a secret agent/spy who has to navigate through transportation tubes to make his way to headquarters. Perry uses water in a variety of forms, including, liquid, ice and steam. The unlocked game boasts 80 levels and costs R8. ❖

Smartphone top tips

Struggling to master your new smartphone? TechSmart is on hand to provide some helpful tips.

Apple tip

If you find yourself with numerous apps open that you would like to close simultaneously, try the following. Double click the home button to bring up the tray, and then press and hold any open programme till all the icons jiggle. Using multi-touch, place three or four fingers on the x on top of each icon at the same time. Watch multiple apps being banished back to the ether of your device. This is also a good way to stop your iDevice from running down its battery more quickly than normal.

BlackBerry tip

Instead of wasting time pressing the 'alt' and 'm' keys to insert a full stop, rather double tap the space key. It will automatically insert a full stop after every sentence. This same principle applies when typing email addresses, double tap space when you want to insert the @ symbol.

Android tip

Having a number of panels available to load with apps might seem cool, but can in reality mean a lot of side-scrolling. Why not rather put your most often used apps in a folder? Do so by simply long pressing an app from the menu folder and then dropping it onto another app on one of the panels. Android will immediately cluster them together in a folder, with space for up to eight apps. ❖



Web Time Wasters



Supercook

www.supercook.com

Supercook is most certainly an apt destination for the culinary challenged. The site gives users the opportunity to enter what ingredients they have on hand, and then serves a list of compatible recipes to create a tasty meal. However, if one adds further ingredients, then far more recipes are shown. For example, entering salmon and pesto returned one recipe compatible with just those ingredients, along with a link to the site where the recipe was hosted. The option to add dill, butter, or red onion to those base ingredients served up numerous other recipes one could try.



Debatepedia

http://idebate.org/debatabase

One of the true tragedies of our time is what seems to be a diminishment of broad, deep and critical thinking. Sites like Debatepedia, therefore, seem to be more relevant than ever. The site offers an extensive list of cogent arguments both for and against a wide array of topics. Themes on offer include governance, education, free speech, international politics, morals, environmental and animal concerns. Debatepedia also hosts Vbates, which enables one to debate with or against other users from around the world.



Do I have a dead pixel

www.doihaveadeadpixel.com

Do I have a dead pixel is squarely aimed at determining whether your screen is all that it is cracked up to being, or whether it has a flaw in the form of a dead pixel. Visiting the site, and running this test, is therefore particularly advisable just after buying a snazzy new display. The site is simple enough in execution, allowing one to run a test against a range of colours, which will expose if there are any dead pixels on the screen.



Simfy

www.simfy.co.za

By the time you read this, Simfy would have already gone live. The new South African music streaming service offers users a 14 day free trial period in which to stream its more than 18 million songs onto PCs or iPhone, BlackBerry or Android smartphones. Additionally, users can create their own playlists and discover new music via the site. Most impressively, users can even download music and listen to it offline – completely legally. 🌱



Around the web

World's most powerful photos.
bit.ly/powerpho

Animals are dumb – the GIF gallery.
bit.ly/animalgif

Bane versus the cable guys.
bit.ly/nocableforyou

Great discussion on the photos of the Olympics.
bit.ly/whataboutthepics

Mars panorama.
http://bit.ly/iseeamartian

TechSmart's top tweets



Here are the tweets that struck our fancy last month



Danaë Botha @ThePixelPoet

There's nowhere south africans are more democratically united in hatred than while queueing at government departments.

Expand



Sports Abuse @SportsAbuse

FIFA 13 has a new game mode called Arsenal, where at the end of every season you lose your best player

Expand



Seagram Pearce @SeagramPearce

I bet the hardest thing about being a gangsta rapper is never being able to really enjoy a cupcake in public.

Expand



Trevor Noah @Trevornoah

Government to remove logos on cigarettes. Only warning labels left. People can't read warning labels thanks to no textbooks.

Expand



Sipho Hlongwane @comradesipho

There's nothing like not having medical aid to turn a bit of stubborn gastric hydrogen sulfide into deadly appendicitis.

Expand



Dean Oelschig @DeanOelsch

Since last year Skype has given so many problems. Since last year Skype was owned by Microsoft. Coincidence? I think not.

Expand



Kurt Echardt @Mammoth87

Colleague reckons Judo isn't a real sport. It's more like competitive hugging. #lol

Expand



Deep Fried Man @DeepFriedMan

The ultimate insult on Twitter is to be unfollowed by a spambot.

Expand



Brent Williams @Brent007

Don't tell me skies the limit when there is footprints on the moon ..

Expand



Khaya Dlanga @khayadianga

I love watching the world as it tweets by.

Expand

TechSmart.co.za online poll results

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Sci News



Black-belt brains

Brains beat brawn. At least if a recent report in the journal *Cerebral Cortex* is anything to go by. Scientists compared the power of a short-range punch delivered by black-belt karate practitioners and people without any martial arts experience while recording brain activity. Not

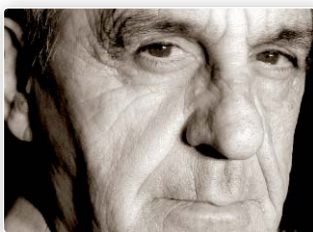
surprisingly the karate group punched harder, likely because of precisely synchronised wrist and shoulder movements. The brain scans showed that the white matter of the cerebellum and motor cortex, areas known to be involved in coordinating muscle movements, is organised differently in karate experts and novices. It seems that the arrangement of white matter determines the efficiency with which neural messages are transferred. In the case of the karate brains, the arrangement appeared to support highly synchronised muscle movements. It seems power is all in your head.



African (t)elecomms

African elephants get in touch with other big ears far away using extremely low-pitched sounds. But exactly how they manage to produce these deep rumbles has long been a mystery. Now, an article in an August issue of the journal *Science*, reveals that elephants use

their vocal chords in the same way humans do. Using a larynx excised from a zoo elephant that had recently died, scientists were able to reproduce elephant vocalisations in the laboratory by passing streams of warm, humid air over the vocal chords. The air movement caused the vocal chords to vibrate periodically at a low frequency. This confirms that air flow along the vocal tract gives elephants their voice, rather than irregular intermittent muscle contractions as found in some other wild animals. Trunk calling anyone?



Long live science

Stopping wrinkles in their track is the holy grail of cosmetics research. And now scientists say they may be one step closer to this. According to a study in the *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, the mechanism behind the action of a common ingredient of anti-aging creams has now been

ironed out. Weak food acids called alpha hydroxyl acids (AHAs) are often used in these cosmetics because they are known to help exfoliate old skin and expose underlying new skin. The study showed that AHAs seem to lower the pH in cells in the upper layer of the skin. This, in turn, opens the cell membranes to increased inflow of calcium ions from the surrounding fluid. The overdose of calcium ions causes the upper skin cells to die and flake off, setting the stage for new cells to take their place. Who said science is not beautiful? 🌱

Green News



Toyota set to break new EV ground

Although many car manufacturers have boarded the eco bandwagon by adding a hybrid- or electric car to their stables, market segment leader Toyota now aims to be the first to market with a electric SUV (sports

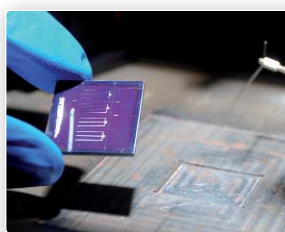
utility vehicle). The company's RAV4 EV makes its debut within the US market this winter, sporting a pricetag of \$49 800 (approximately R413 000). Toyota and Tesla developed this car's 115 kW electric powerplant for which the batteries can be fully charged in around six hours using a 240V charger, in order to deliver an expected driving range of about 160 km in the normal driving mode. In the sport driving mode drivers will get less mileage, but will be able to accelerate this car from 0-100 km/h in just seven seconds onto an illegal terminal velocity of 160 km/h.



Helping to flush inequality down the toilet

According to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, four out of every ten people (2.6 billion) living on the planet do not have access to proper sanitation facilities. This is due to the need for modern flush toilets to be connected to proper city

sanitation infrastructure and water facilities to function. This lack in adequate sanitation makes it easy for diseases to spread. The Gates Foundation is looking to flush this problem down the history toilet via its Reinvent the Toilet challenge, which offered a \$100 000 (around R829 500) grand prize to a new type of toilet that is not reliant upon any piped water-, sewage-, or electrical connections. A team of engineers from California Institute of Technology came up tops with their solar powered toilet that re-uses water, and turns human waste into hydrogen gas that in turn can produce energy.



IBM and co set world record for PV energy conversion efficiency

The Materials Science team from IBM joined forces with solar energy solutions provider Solar Frontier, Tokyo Ohka Kogyo and solar cell maker DelSolar to develop an efficient and affordable

photovoltaic (PV) cell, constructed out of abundant natural materials.

This green dream team has seen the fruits of their labour, with the new CZTS (copper, zinc, and tin) thin-film cell device, achieving a new world record of 11.1% for PV solar-to-electric power conversion efficiency within this class of semiconductors. According to IBM, this is a whopping 10% better than any previous reports. IBM and its partners now hope to boost the device's efficiency to the level where it will start to make a contribution towards the availability of lower-cost solar electricity. 🌱

More awesome science

5 surprising facts about the Curiosity Mars rover bit.ly/5marscool

Geek mythology and Nikola Tesla bit.ly/thedudetesla

What internet habits say about mental health bit.ly/intermental



Green living tip of the month

There is no shame in poverty, but neither is there virtue. Far more than comfort, health and happiness, wealth provides choices. No one who is destitute is able to choose their interaction with their environment. For this reason, appropriate financial steps are a central part of living a green life. From *Going Green* by Simon Gear, Penguin Books.



Tips towards a sleeker geek

Better health starts now

Spring might have sprung, but your body is still carrying the excesses of winter. The virtues of Sleekgeek.co.za are spreading, getting geeks like us into much better shape. Elan Lohmann, founder of Sleekgeek provides some helpful tips.



1. Make a start – right now!
2. Steve Jobs was correct. Even with our health you must find an activity and plan you enjoy else you will never be any good at it, nor sustain it. But you may need to invest time to find that thing you love. When you do, you will never look back.
3. Formulate a plan with goals, almost like a personal business plan. Decide what fitness level you want to achieve by when and set an incentive. Tell everyone else so that you have pressure to perform.
4. Understand that a better body is easier than you think with some discipline. Having cancer is hard. Coming off heroine is hard. Not eating a cupcake is not hard, it is a choice.
5. Understand that when you choose a healthy alternative that you are gaining, and not sacrificing. It is a means to achieve your goal.
6. Deprivation is not sustainable, so try different things until you find something you can enjoy. Getting fit and healthy should be fun and rewarding, never a chore.
7. We are geeks so we love gear, gadgets and tracking analytics. Use all the tools available to challenge not only yourself but also your friends.
8. No excuses. Remember that when it comes to your body you can have results or excuses – but you cannot have both.
9. Be patient with results, they can take a while to appear and often most give up too soon. Persist. When they come they will be exponential and worth the work. They say it takes four weeks for you to see your results, eight weeks for your friends to notice and 12 weeks for the world. Don't give up.

Interested in a better you? The Sleekgeek.co.za people get results, with amazing transformations occurring in eight weeks. You can also take up their Summer Body Challenge (with R80 000 in prizes) and build the new you. If you need further motivation and support from an incredible community that does not judge, join their Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/sleekgeek.

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APEN

The A5 aPen includes a stylus and a receiver that hooks into your iPad or iPhone's 30 pin connector, digitizing your handwriting or drawings via a number of compatible apps, including the company's own free Studio Basic Light. It's the easiest, most fun, way to get those ideas, notes, work projects, your next Picasso, or that funny doodle out of your head and into your iPad.

BLADEFISH 5000

This Sea Jet underwater scooter is perfect for scuba diving, snorkelling and swimming. The innovative, compact design of the unit allows for high power and long run time while only weighing 4.9 kg.

inCarBite

Road trips should be fun, not filled with dread about your favourite devices getting mishandled. The inCarBite case and headrest mount keeps your iPad safe and sound on your car's headrest for the entire journey, so your back seat passengers stay entertained. Different models available.

Useless Machine

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Fenix LED Torches

The Fenix brand are one of the most exciting ranges of LED Torches to hit the market in recent years. These high quality flashlights have everything you could ask for: powerful, small, light and water proof with incredibly long battery life.

Belkin Bluetooth Music Receiver

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TechSmart's To Do List for September



To watch

**Dredd 3D**

28 September

While most superhero movies have managed to do justice to the comic books they have been based upon, square jawed Judge Dredd is yet to receive this honour. Stallone's 1995 effort is commendable, but, for the love of all things sacred, we got to see Dredd's face, a big no-no for fans of the British comic book. *Dredd 3D* unfortunately does not look any better, this time seeing the Judge (played by Karl Unban from *The*

Lord of the Rings and *The Bourne Supremacy*) hunting a drug selling gang. Expect decent action fare, but nothing close to par to what the comics offer.

**The Bourne Legacy**

21 September

What happens if your highly skilled killing services are no longer wanted? Aaron Cross, member of black ops programme Operation Outcomes is about to find out. The question is, of course, can the Bourne franchise survive without Jason Bourne? It might just, seeing that it stars Jeremy Renner (so-so in *The Avengers*, great in *The Town*), while writer on the three previous *Bourne* movies, Tony Gilroy, now

does duty as director. *The Bourne Ultimatum* left us wanting more, so hopefully this movie can plug the gap.

**Ruby Sparks**

21 September

Ok, so maybe the movies mentioned above might not go down so well on a first date. But for those with a (justified) fear of romantic comedies, *Ruby Sparks* offers a viable alternative, seeing that at the end of this hour and a half you will not feel that man is drowning in its own stupidity. Directed by the folks responsible for indie-favourite *Little Miss Sunshine*, it stars the excellent Paul Dano (*There Will Be Blood*,

Cowboys & Aliens) as a novelist that writes a girlfriend into existence. Not exactly your typical creative writing problem we are usually stuck with.



To play

Parrot AR.Drone 2.0 quadricopter

We had a blast with the previous AR.Drone, but what can be better than the new updated 2.0 quadricopter? Controlled via an app on your Android or Apple iOS device, this new flying machine now includes onboard HD-ready video (720p). Good news for learner pilots is the inclusion of a 3D magnetometer that makes life for newbies a whole lot easier, seeing that you don't need to concern yourself with mastering the orientation of the AR.Drone. For old hands a Relative Flight mode is selectable, while videos can be shared via the ever growing community on YouTube. It will set you back R3 500 from www.smac.co.za. 🍀



Darksiders 2

Death lives

It is somewhat ironic that it is Death that breathes new life into the Darksiders franchise, as the sequel offers a grand, breathtaking adventure that we had to tear ourselves away from.



Rather than picking up where *Darksiders* left off, *Darksiders 2* takes place in parallel to the events of the first game. While you needn't have played its predecessor to enjoy the second title, it certainly neatly fits into the story if you have.

From despair to dust

Essentially, *Darksiders 2* focuses on Death, one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, who tries to prove his brother, War, innocent of prematurely causing the apocalypse and the end of mankind. His plan is to undo the extinction of humankind, thus mitigating the crime of which his brother stands accused. Rather than being accompanied by taxes, Death is instead joined by his steed, Despair, while his path is often illuminated by Dust, his row.

Combat ready

While there are familiar elements to the gameplay, there is certainly plenty that is new. Whereas his brother was a comparatively slow and heavy brute, Death is lithe, agile and very fast. Rather than wielding a single sword as his main weapon and a slower scythe as a secondary, heavy one, Death dual wields two scythes as his fast weapon, niftily complemented by axes or hammers as the secondary option.

Big differences

One of the bigger changes to *Darksiders 2* is the implementation of role playing elements, which enables Death to find a myriad of weapons dropped by enemies, as well as hidden in chests. Additionally, Death can spend skill points on Wrath abilities, in either Necromancer or Harbinger skill trees, which enable him to summon undead creatures or execute magical attacks respectively.

"Whereas his brother was a comparatively slow and heavy brute, Death is lithe, agile and very fast."

Even so, there are plenty diabolical puzzles and dungeons to battle one's way through, numerous hidden items to find in the form of Boatman's coins and pages of the *Book of the Dead*, and a far vaster world to explore, that isn't limited to a ravaged Earth. One of our favourite characters from the first title, the creepy demon merchant Vulgrim, also makes a welcome return.

To the point

A highlight of the game is the often magnificent and distinctive environments on offer. These are excellently complemented by very good voice acting and a superlative score, all of which once again made for an immersive and compelling game. *Darksiders 2* comes highly recommended. R515. [RN] 🍀

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