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ISSUE 64

January 2009

ISSN 1726-3358

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This year businesses will continue to weather the storm of global recession that is progressively rolling toward us. Some industries, like the property and automotive markets, are already in the woes of this storm. TechSmart hopes to bring you sunshine on a rainy day with our Tech Forecast for 2009. All in all it seems that the technologies that will emerge strongly in this year will mostly benefit the consumer.

In this issue we get some tips from Julian Pienaar from Lenovo about what to look out for when buying a notebook, and we look at Dell's awesome beast, the XPS 1730. We also checked out Mitsubishi's latest HD projector, reviewed Canon's new PowerShot SX IS and Sony's Handycam HDR-SR12, both ready and able to shoot in HD. Then specially for the freeware fan-boys we give you the lowdown on Ubuntu 8.10 Intrepid Ibex.

Next month's theme is "Gadgets & Goodies", certainly one to look out for if you still need to buy your beloved a Valentine's gift. [ED]

Suzanne Grobler <suzanne@techsmart.co.za>

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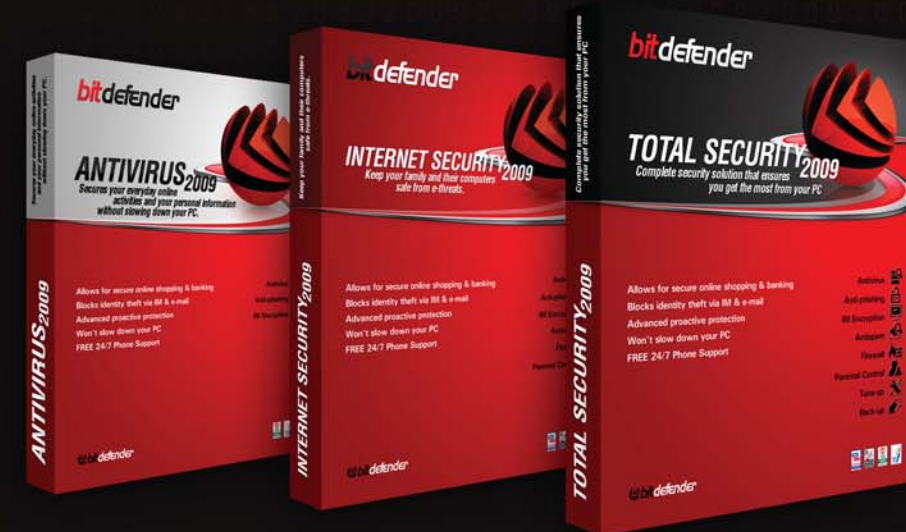
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Letter of the Month

Hey guys!

Look, I'm not going to beat around the bush here... I really, REALLY, REALLY!!! want Ubisoft's Shaun White Snowboarding! The urge to have the game is more intense than anything I've experienced before, except for the burning desire to get my eager paws on the latest copy of TechSmart. You should know that I'm a LONG TIME fan now and proselytize your magazine EVERYWHERE I go. I've converted many and am still going strong :) Soon we shall conquer the world!

Handy tip for browsers: When you need to look up the meaning of a word, simply go to www.google.com and type define followed by a colon, a space and then the word. Example: define: proselytize. Thanks again for an ALWAYS stunning mag! Hope ya'll have a splendid festive season! Len



Hi Len. Thanks for your letter and congrats on winning Shaun White Snowboarding for Xbox 360 courtesy of Megarom Interactive. [ED]

Dear TechSmart,

You experts will most probably laugh at my stupid questions, but there are so many conflicting reporting in this regard that I now turn to you to get some clarity.

Firstly, what exactly is the difference between Digital-TV (DTT) and HD-TV? Secondly, does one need a separate decoder for transmissions by MultiChoice on the one hand and the other channels (SABC 1, 2 and 3 and e-tv) on the other hand? (I know that MultiChoice is at present marketing a decoder for its HD-channel 170, whilst the SABS is busy testing a decoder for Digital-TV transmissions, which will most probably become available in July next year.) Thirdly, according to a recent newspaper report there are at present no plans in the pipeline for HD-TV on DTT. What on earth will the implications be? Does that mean my Full HD Television set will be of no use for DTT? Lastly, please provide any other information which may shed further light on this topic.

Phillip

Hi Phillip,

Digital is confusing a lot of people out there, so your questions are greatly appreciated. DTT (or Digital Terrestrial Television) is basically the broadcasting of digital signals via a conventional transmitter. The benefits of doing this include broadcasting a greater number of channels on a single frequency and/or better quality of picture and sound.

The SABC currently broadcasts in analogue but it is

necessary for us to migrate to digital format by 2015 at which point analogue signals will no longer be internationally protected from interference (we will most likely migrate by 2011 however). This will free up valuable broadcast spectrum which can then be used for other purposes.

You will need to purchase a separate set top box to receive SABC broadcasts. The MultiChoice decoders receive signal via satellite while the new DTT decoders will receive signal via your standard rooftop antenna thus the two systems are incompatible.

The new DTT set top box will cost between R600 – R700 each and you will need as many set-top boxes as you have TVs (initially at least) if you wish to watch multiple channels simultaneously. You will not, however, need to upgrade your TV set so long as it has AV inputs. In addition, you will not have to pay a monthly subscription to receive SABC broadcasts like you do for DSTV, but the new set top boxes will allow for an Electronic Programme Guide and other onscreen interactive and information services.

Lastly DTT is not HDTV. HDTV in widescreen format (16:9) provides the highest resolution and picture quality of all digital broadcast formats. While DTT can support HD broadcasts there are no plans in place at the moment for the SABC to broadcast in HD. So you'll have to watch in standard resolutions for the time being. [TM]



With his laugh a minute personality Gerhard Steyn is an entertainer's entertainer. As an accomplished singer, song writer and actor, Gerhard seems to never tire of performing. After the breakup of Windpomp, Gerhard launched his solo career with "Teen Die Berg" an album he co-wrote. As "Kosie die lyfwag" in 7de Laan and "Andre die universiteit se rugby-kaptein" in The Res, Gerhard is also no stranger to television.

Would you describe yourself as a technophile or a technophobe?

More like TechnoSAURUS.... haha

Do you own any tech gadgets that you just couldn't live without?

Toaster?! Haha... Seriously – My laptop and GPS.

Are you into digital photography?

If posing and smiling a lot for fans taking pictures counts... then I guess so.

What are your favourite web time wasters?

Facebook & YouTube

Have you converted to HD yet?

Apparently my plasma is compatible, so I'll get round to it soon.

Have you had any problems with people illegally distributing your music online?

Yes, but I actually think it's kind of cool when people go that far to get one's music, but me saying that, doesn't keep it from being illegal.

What emerging technologies are currently playing a role in your career as a singer?

It's hard to keep up with technology... the other day I was being daggered by sales lines to buy a remote dustbin... but I couldn't see the use... I mean C'MON?!

Did you always dream of becoming a singer?

Yes I did... but as a youngster I never stood in front of the bathroom mirror singing Roxette into a hairbrush... potential hairball choking hazard...

What was the last big tech purchase you made?

A GPS.

Any New Year's resolutions?

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Sanyo's eneloop

Hybrid has been the buzz word over the last few years, since the advent of the Toyota Prius really, and now we can look forward to a hybrid bicycle. Sanyo has announced the launch of the "eneloop" Electric Hybrid Bicycle.

The "eneloop" is a two-wheel drive, three speed bicycle; with the back wheel powered by pedal power and the front by an energy looping motor. Basically, the system captures energy from braking when the bike goes downhill, charging its motor, and therefore can add up to twice the rider's pedal force when going uphill thus increasing the travel range achievable by most people by decreasing the human energy required.

The bicycle will be available from February 2009 in Japan and internationally in the near future.

Facebook Connect

Remembering a myriad of usernames and passwords across web platform is rather frustrating. Inevitably you may stop using a site altogether because you have forgotten the login details which enable you to enjoy the benefits of a user account.



Facebook Connect is a centralised web identity service, although not the first, which will allow Facebook users to use their Facebook login details to log on to a number of third party websites.

The benefits of such a universal login system are numerous and obvious to users, but privacy concerns will play a major role in Connect's uptake. Among the first sites to make use of Connect will be the Discovery Channel, Digg, CNN, CNET and Hulu.

Cyber criminals exploit global recession

The McAfee Virtual Criminology Report 2008 has drawn the rather sober conclusion that cybercriminals are using a perfect storm of severe economic recession, continued growth of social networking and a general climate of consumer anxiety to launch more effective and more numerous online attacks for their financial gain, a trend expected to grow in 2009.

Says Jayson O'Reilly, regional director: Africa (acting) of McAfee, "Cybercriminals are exploiting the global recession by luring in susceptible victims through the promise of easy money."

The escalation in transnational cybercrime, with little or no tangible means of effectively fighting such crime, is a worrying trend as many commentators feel that this will further impact consumer confidence and thus dramatically hinder the pace of global economic recovery in 2009.

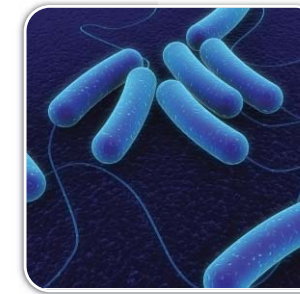


E. coli amaglug-glug

E. coli is bad for you! This is common knowledge, but researchers as the University of California, Los Angeles, claim that it is good for your car. Sort of!

Researchers reported in a recent issue of *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, that alcohols produced by a modified *E. coli* strain form far longer carbon chains than those found in naturally produced alcohols such as ethanol, making these alcohols ideal biofuels.

Most common naturally-produced long-chain alcohols contain between two and five carbon atoms, but by altering the basic genetic structure of *E. coli*, researchers were able to stimulate the production of chains of up to eight carbon atoms. These alcohols are therefore more powerful and less corrosive fuel sources making them comparable to jet or diesel fuels.



Green K9s

Is it a dog's life or a dog's breakfast? According to a research report published in a recent issue of *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, dogs are able to experience emotions similar to envy or jealousy.

In a recent study some 29 dogs were placed side-by-side in front of bowl of food with pieces of sausage on one side of the bowl and brown bread on the other. After responding to the command paw the animals were either rewarded with sausage or bread or not rewarded at all.

The unrewarded K9's refused to continue participating and even ignored the experimenters, a trait found in humans and primates. Unlike primates however, the dogs showed little concern about the quality of the reward they received. Thus it is thought dogs are far more emotionally sensitive than previously considered.



Carbon hunting

For once scientists are happy to have found more CO2 than expected. Carbon dioxide has been discovered in the atmosphere of a planet, which orbits a distant star.

The discovery was made on HD 189733, a Jupiter sized planet 65 light-years from earth, with the use of an infrared sensor on the Hubble Space Telescope. The planet's atmosphere also contains methane, carbon monoxide and water.

The discovery of carbon dioxide is of particular interest to scientists as it could help pinpoint the location of extraterrestrial life in the universe, carbon being the building blocks of all life on earth. HD 189733's orbit is however far too close to its star making it too hot to support life.

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Forecast 2009: The Technology Climate

In the early 1900's Thomas Edison, who invented just about everything (or claimed to at least), forecast that his alkaline battery was so far advanced that manufacturers would soon be using it to power their motor cars. And in the 1890's Nicola Tesla, the inventor of AC power and major rival of Thomas Edison, said that he could build a system that could generate electricity, transmit it into the surface of the earth and send it all across the world for people to access using wireless receivers.

As part from their major differences, these two visionaries of the early 20th century do have one major thing in common: they both got it totally wrong! We hope we don't make the same mistake as we give our big predictions on the technology "front" for the year 2009.



Cloud Computing

In 2009 we'll take the first big step into a "versionless" world, free from the perpetual software upgrades and torrent of email updates. It also won't matter how powerful your computer is, as much of the processing will be done "in the cloud".

Whether or not you're aware of it, you'll probably have made use of cloud computing already. If you use webmail of any sort then you're "Cloud Computing". The idea behind cloud computing is to move all the capabilities of a piece of software, like email, to an online platform, where you can access it from anywhere and gain access to services and support. A good example of this would be Gmail with Google Docs, where you can access all your documents, online, and edit them from anywhere in the world.

We spoke to Jürgen Galler, the director of product management at Google about the cloud on the horizon. "[In the cloud] users can reach their email and calendar and collaborate on documents from wherever they find themselves, be it in an Internet cafe, the Caribbean, or at home and from whatever device they're using, whether a laptop, BlackBerry or mobile phone."



Unified Communications

2009 will see the emergence of a single, unified communication platform allowing end users and businesses to communicate with each other using multiple devices, over a single channel. UC introduces the world to a more stable and efficient communications environment.

"Unified Communications" is a buzzword making the rounds these days in IT circles. It's essentially all about how businesses currently communicate with each other and their clients and how they'll be communicating in the future. So that's UC in a nutshell, but what does it mean for business?

"The [promise] of Unified Communications is to create an IT infrastructure that incorporates a company's many end devices and software applications – including traditional phone, smart phones, PDAs, Blackberries, email, fax, instant messaging, video and web conferencing. It requires combining the networks for data and telecommunications into a single platform," says Michael Jaeger, Director of Product Marketing at CA.

cont... p12



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Forecast 2009: The Technology Climate cont...



Tech Convergence

2009 will see manufacturers continue to ride the convergence wave.

As technology improves and microelectronics become smaller, companies are making devices that blend the best elements from across their product ranges to give you the best of both worlds, sometimes the best of four or five worlds. To help us gain further insight into this perfect storm of technology, we spoke to Roger Machin, Product Manager for Canon consumer imaging South Africa. "Hybridisation continues with most compact cameras having a video capture facility – moving towards a much wider range of cameras in 2009, probably with Full HD video capture capability. Video capture in DSLR cameras was quite a new thing in 2008 and could well be a selling feature in 2009 as the demand for more features in DSLR cameras increases."

While this is true for cameras, this is not the exception in the industry, convergence will continue in many technology sectors and the marketability of products will depend even more heavily on the number of applications you can perform on a single device.



Consumer Services

In 2009 we will experience a veritable downpour of services and support for consumer electronics, where manufacturers offer customers an applications platform to allow them to get the most out of their hardware.

If you've been to a restaurant and tell your friends about how fantastic the place is, the chances are that the service will be the stand out feature, apart from the food. Manufacturers too are starting to understand this.

Says Matthia Nalappan, General Manager for Nokia South Africa: "In 2009 we will see a growth in the use of online services and applications, by users. This means the creation of a world in which users will be able to personalise their mobile online experience; making it easier to connect at any time and any place. Nokia's Ovi service is the ideal example of this, with mail services, map services, photo sharing, music downloads, file storage and online synchronisation of your contacts and calendar, which can all be accessed via your handset."



GreenIT

2009 will see a cooling breeze coming off the ocean of controversy over "going green" as it's predicted that companies could save as much as 14.5 per cent on running costs from implementing "greener" IT processes.

This is an obvious trend that you don't need a degree in statistics to spot. Everywhere around us there is a drive to make things recyclable, reusable, energy efficient and generally less of a threat to the planet's well-being. As countries become more aware of our impact on the planet there is a drive to ensure that what we do in the IT sector, which makes up a very large chunk of the world economy, has the minimum impact on the Earth. If companies fail to adhere to new legislation there will be a large impact on the wallets of business owners, in the form of penalties and fines.

According to Eugene Pfister, partner of IT Advisory Services at KPMG: "Green IT is no cynical invention; a nice, 'touchy-feely' way of racking up a few quick and easy points on the PR front. The quest to 'green' an organisation's IT is fast becoming a very real Board level imperative." *cont... p14*



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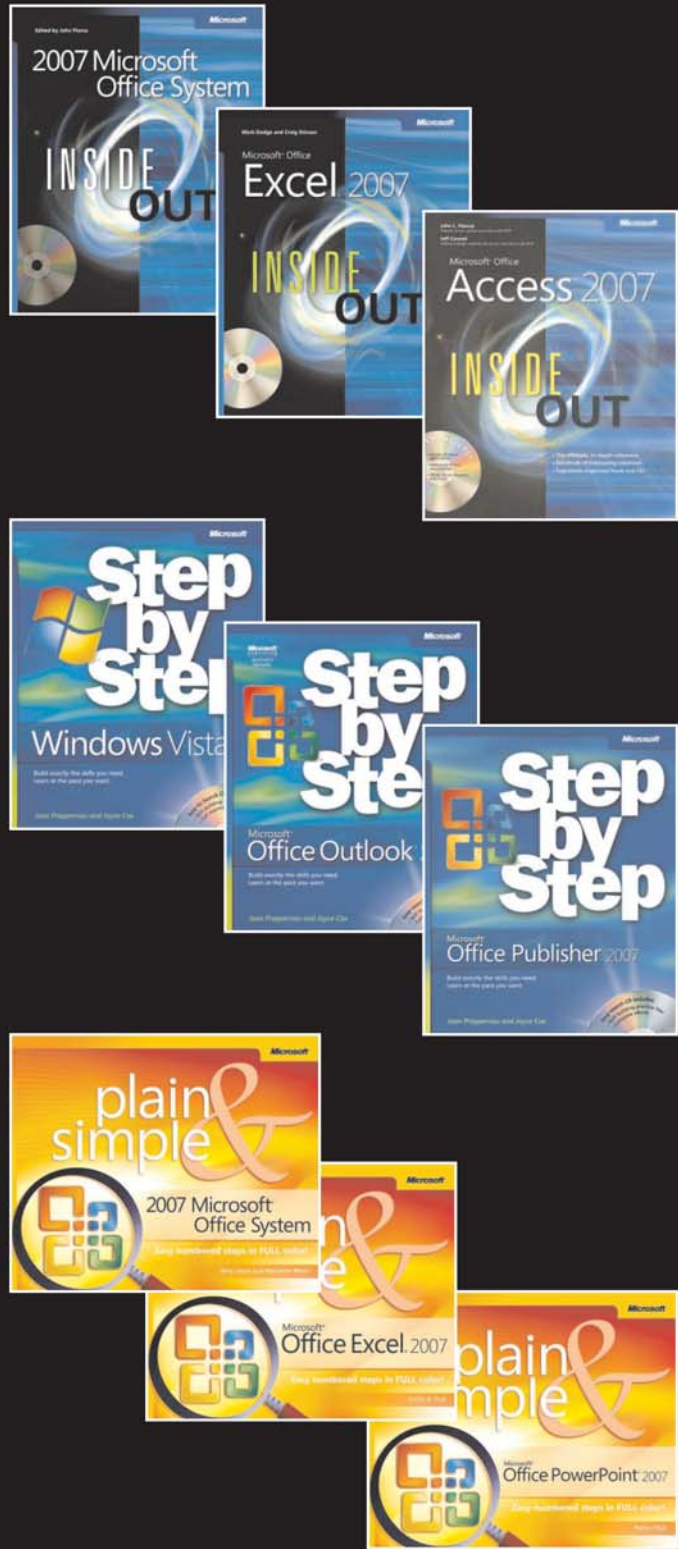
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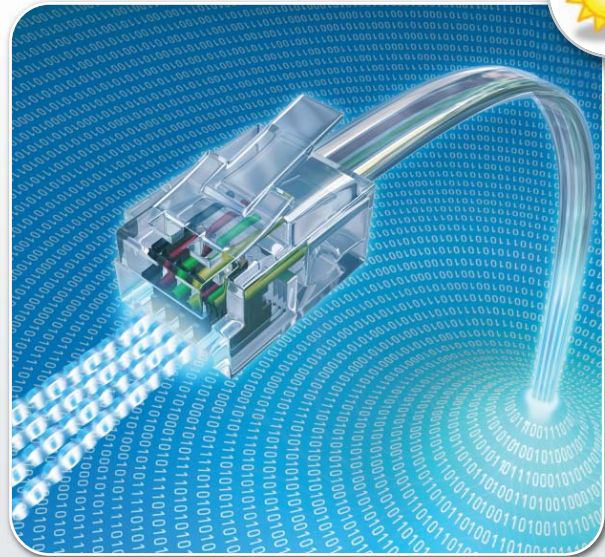
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Forecast 2009: The Technology Climate cont...



Cheaper and Faster Broadband

There is a broad band of Internet connectivity coming off the East Coast of Africa in mid-to-late 2009. This should see a jet-stream of Internet usage in our daily lives.

Soon South Africa will have faster Internet access than ever before, due to the installation of the SEACOM undersea cable. We have yet to scratch the surface of the possibilities that the Internet, and the communication that goes with it, have to offer.

Says Con Mallon, Symantec consumer product director for EMEA: "What I think will be of interest in 2009, it not a technology in and of itself; rather an approach. The Internet continues to establish itself as fundamental to our daily lives. With each passing day, more people come to join the Internet and those of us already using it become more reliant on it."

The only way South Africans will be able to take full advantage of all these new trends like unified communications and cloud computing is if we have fast, affordable access to a reliable broadband connection. Going into 2009, this might finally begin to be a possibility. We chatted to Matthew Lang, MD of Sony South Africa, about how the electronics industry is being shaped by the phenomenon of the web.

"The [innovations] that will shape the consumer electronics market in 2009 are the enabling technologies such as broadband connectivity, digital television as well as the penetration of high definition technologies in the home."

There will be a global climate for change this year, with the IT sector warming up to a number of innovations changing the world's ICT landscape. The forecasts of greater men have failed to materialise, but we have great confidence in our IT weather report for 2009.

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Home Theatre at your fingertips

What is an HTPC:

A Home Theatre PC (HTPC) or media PC is a convergence device that combines the functions of a personal computer and a digital video recorder. It is connected to a television or a television-sized computer display and is often used as a digital photo, music, video player, receiver and digital video recorder.

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Sony VAIO Z-VGN-Z12GN The Strong Silent Type

The Sony VAIO series of notebooks: James Bond uses one in Quantum of Solace, so you know it's gotta be good right?

Well product placement has the knack of making us suspicious, more suspicious than we would ordinarily be when testing a notebook. The first thing you must be wary of when having a look at the specs for the VAIO Z series is that Sony gives you the starting price, but then on the landing page lists only the best specs and most impressive features.

We were all excited as we thought that Sony's slogan of "Blu-ray for all" meant that this VAIO, the VGN-Z12GN, would come with a Blu-ray drive. But the fact that it had an HDMI output connector turned out to be little more than a red-herring. This very pretty (it must be said) notebook has only the standard resolution. Again though, the 13.1" (WXGA++: 1600 x 900) TFT colour display is very good as notebook displays go.

On this point about screens we must take a look

at the way the VAIO is put together. The lid with screen is extremely thin. Good, you might think, but it's so bendy and twisty. Too bendy and twisty we say. But enough complaints, let's talk business. The VGN-Z12GN has an Intel Core 2 Duo Processor P8600 (2.40GHz) processor with 2GB of DDR3 RAM and a whopping great 250GB hard disk, specs not to be sneezed at. The VAIO uses two graphics adapters (depending on whether you want speed or stamina) NVIDIA GeForce 9300M GS notebook GPU for Speed Mode and a Mobile Intel Graphics Media Accelerator 4500MHD for Stamina Mode.

Overall we do like the VAIO a lot; we just wish that the marketing department at SONY would be slightly more open about the fact that only one model in the Z series comes out with Blu-ray.

Get it for **R21 899** (incl VAT) from Computer Corporation on 08616-08616.



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Dell XPS M1730 What's in a name?

The names **Beast, Hercules, Titan** or even **Hulk Hogan** spring to mind when you first consider Dell's XPS M1730, the company's flagship notebook. Such names evoke a sense of grandeur and sheer tyranny. They also cause you to envision a mountainous figure with sharp, glowing, handsome features.

In our opinion then Dell's naming convention is a little "retentive" and considering the machine's audacious over-the-top design and serious performance a cheesy gladiatorial type name would have suited it to a tee.



The XPS M1730 weighs a hefty 4.8kg. It has a foot print of 406 (w) x 50.7 (h) x 302.6 (d) mm, and its mock carbon fibre casing, with shocking 'hydrographic' wings atop its lid, is adorned by a number of LED lights, customisable in up to 16 colours. The M1730 is therefore anything but subtle or for that matter mobile.

The M1730 packs some serious punch in the performance stakes. The unit we reviewed had an Intel Core 2 Duo T9300 2.5GHz CPU, 4GB of RAM and two built-in Nvidia GeForce 8700M GT GPUs, connected by SLI bridge, each with 256MB of dedicated video memory. The M1730 also includes an Ageia PhysX physics processor

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which provides independent physics acceleration for gaming, a world first in a notebook. You won't be surprised then when we tell you that its gaming performance is very good, allowing you to run most modern 3D games at high settings, achieving more than acceptable frame rates. The M1730 also has a 1920 x 1200 pixels 17" WUXGA LCD panel with glossy finish which makes the device an absolute media magnate.

The addition of an embedded Logitech LCD above the keyboard is a nice touch as well allowing you to monitor system information, display the time, and certain in-game information.

In terms of features, performance and crazy styling the XPS M1730 is currently unmatched. But, don't expect to get much battery life out of the machine, an hour if you're lucky. It's a high performance rig and as such is a desktop replacement unit. At **R28 999** (incl VAT) it's no bargain, but then again you get what you pay for! Get the Dell XPS M1730 from Computer Corporation on 08616-08616.

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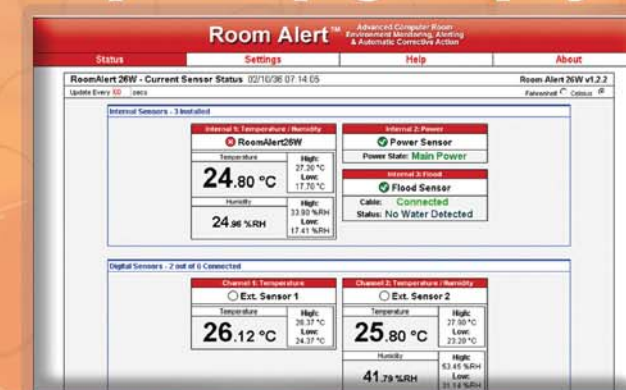
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Mitsubishi HC1500 Projector Consider the alternative

In this year, 2009 that is, all indications are that we will experience a massive growth in the amount of digital content available, particularly high definition content. HDTV will experience greater market penetration, blu-ray discs and players will become more common features in home entertainment, more home movie makers will be standing behind HD camcorders and of course HD gaming will become common place.



In anticipation, more people are rushing out to buy HD television sets than ever before, almost without considering the alternative for even a second. HD projectors, more than just flamboyant buys, offer flexibility and can work out far cheaper than purchasing a large screen LCD TV.

The Mitsubishi HC1500 can project images from between 40-inches and 275-inches diagonal in HD. You couldn't hope to buy a HDTV

set that offered a 275-inch screen for under a million bucks, principally because they don't make them that big. Although we don't really recommend projecting images that huge as the picture quality won't be ideal.

The HC1500 also provides an image brightness of 1600 Ansi Lumens, a contrast ratio of 2500:1, a native resolution of 1280 x 720 and a 16:9 (wide screen) aspect ratio.

As a DLP projector you get superior brightness and contrast ratio to what you could get from an LCD projector, but thanks to the use of a TI DDP3020 Dark Chip 2, the HC1500 can match LCD projectors for vivacity of colour and great screen size over short projection distances.

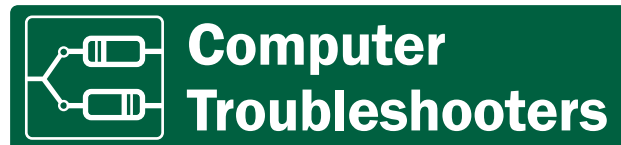
The quality of the projector is most notable in flesh tones (human flesh colouring on screen), black levels and shadow details,

which are all excellent. Basically you get the HD experience you are looking for from a projector that costs only **R16 899** (incl VAT) and has a lamp life of up to 3000 hours and a 3-year guarantee.

Personal demonstrations can be arranged – call Jannie on 082-853-3257 or Billy on 072-243-3004 for more info.

To purchase call EMS Africa on 011-482-4470 or connect to www.emsafrica.co.za.

Computer Troubleshooters How not to destroy your PC 101



We've all experienced it... an insatiable desire to mutilate our PCs. Many an individual who has had to work on a PC for an extended period of time, just about the entire working population these days, will admit to having tallied the advantages of living in the Stone Age. There seems little point in sinking R10 000 in a machine and then sinking your foot into its screen shortly thereafter.

That's precisely why you should pay someone else to sort out your PC when it's giving you trouble. Computer Troubleshooters is a global franchise team of computer professionals who can be found in more than 400 locations.

Basically they can help you with hardware setup, support, troubleshooting, upgrades and repairs. They can setup networks, provide you with antivirus software and Internet protection, provide software training, as well as regular cleaning and maintenance of your PCs.

What's more they can also develop a website for your business or develop custom software according to spec. Computer Troubleshooters is more than just a bunch of garage computer geeks, they're computer professionals and they're worth every Rand for a little sanity.

Contact Hannes (Pta East) on 083-420-3615 or Vincent (Centurion) on 084-223-5320.

MicroStar One man's trash is another man's treasure



The vast majority of South Africa's e-waste is landfilled, be it at permitted hazardous waste disposal sites or municipal waste sites. Due to the noxious nature of computer waste it is important that the latter occurs to a minimum. The other thing to bear in mind is that your old and unwanted computers may be of use to someone else, which means you could earn money from your trash.

Questions do however abound. Who will buy my old computers? What will happen

to all the data on my old PC? How will I know that my e-waste has been disposed of responsibly? The answer to these questions is MicroStar.

MicroStar organise equipment removal from your office or storage area. They also ensure the integrity of your corporate data by removing all identification labels from your hardware and wiping

all data from your hard drives. In addition they run a buy back program so that you can earn money from your old machine or alternatively purchase refurbished PCs at bargain prices. They also provide you with a guarantee to deal with your e-waste responsibly, as they record and track the disposition of all equipment and can provide you with reports on such.

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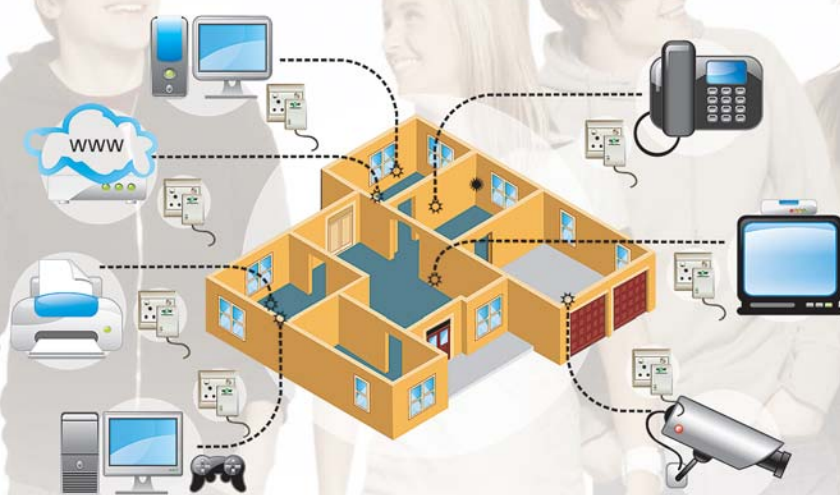
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HOW TO: Make an Origami CD Case



With it being the beginning of the year, what better way to get started than by making the resolution to sort out the thousands of CDs you have lying around. You'll find a whole lot to throw away, but for the ones you want to keep, make origami CD cases to keep them in.

You can download the real-size version of the origami sample (right) from www.techsmart.co.za. Simply print it out and follow the incredibly simple instructions below. When you're done, go to www.papercdcase.com to make as many as you need.

1. Fold the left and right sides (lines labelled "1" and "2").
2. Fold the bottom edge up to the line labelled "3". Then fold it back.
3. Fold the top edge down to the line labelled "4" and then fold it back. Then fold the top edge down the line labelled "5" and then fold it back. This will make the spine and top flap.
4. Spread the sides of the pocket to the sides to create "wings". Beginners can do this by folding lines "6" and "7" (first wing) and then lines "8" and "9" (second wing). Or, fold "6" and "8" and then "7" and "9". The fold lines may be off slightly depending on your printer.
5. Tuck the wings behind the front part of the pocket. The two letter "A"s should touch each other and the two letter



- "B"s should touch each other. Flatten the pocket. Your CD will go in the pocket.
6. Make little dog ears in the top flap (labelled "10" and "11").
 7. Tuck the top flap into the pocket and you're done! [AG]

Buying the correct notebook is not as easy as walking into a shop and asking for one – it takes research and time. Julian Pienaar, Presales Technical Support Manager at Lenovo SA gave TechSmart the following top six tips on what you need to consider when buying a notebook.



Consider what you will be using the notebook for.

Each machine has a different set of capabilities and functions which you may or may not need. For instance, if you need a notebook for graphic design, you will need, amongst other things, a powerful processor, a dedicated graphics card and at least 2GB memory; if however, you are looking to use it merely as a networking tool, then you will need a less powerful processor, less memory, a screen size of your choice and at least a DVD writer. For an 'on-the-run' lifestyle you need to consider the screen size, bearing in mind that the bigger the screen is, the heavier it will be. Netbooks, retailing at around R5000, are ideal for these purposes but may not contain the computing power needed for every day work.

Decide if you are going to be connecting to the Internet and how.

If you plan on using a 3G or iBurst card, you need to ensure that a PC Card or Express card slot exists. There are also USB, or Bluetooth options if you wish to use your cell phone as a modem. Will you need to connect through WiFi? This function is usually included in the notebook, but always confirm on purchase.

Does the notebook have a power manager tool to manage battery life?

Some notebooks have an integrated power manager which gauges how much battery life is left over; and then slows down certain processes and dims the screen in order to ensure longer battery life. You can also enquire whether you can purchase extended batteries or a car charger. This has the useful capability of being able to charge your notebook on the run as well as if power outages occur at critical moments.

Will your data be secure?

If security is a great concern to you, you may want to consider investing in a notebook with a fingerprint reader. You also need to consider what sort of backup utilities are provided with the notebook in order to secure your information and ensure backups occur regularly. Bear in mind that antivirus software normally has a trial period of 90 days; whereafter the software needs to be purchased, in order to keep your desktop secure and as virus-free as possible.

Remember the hidden costs for software.

Having an operating system installed on the notebook does not automatically mean an Office and mail client is loaded. Office programmes are usually an additional purchase, unless you buy a package where it is already installed on the machine and worked into the price of the notebook.

Check the warranty.

Most notebooks come with a 1-year carry-in warranty, which means that you need to take it back to the shop where you bought it from for repairs. It is useful to find out whether you can extend the warranty to three years, which normally costs about R400 more. Do you have the option of purchasing a warranty protection upgrade? This may cost as little as R20 a month over three years. Also, is it an onsite warranty, meaning a technician will be sent to you to repair the notebook at your premises?

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Canon PowerShot SX1 IS A Shot to the Heart

Canon has just given its PowerShot compact camera range a serious shot of adrenalin, straight to the heart, with the new 10 megapixel PowerShot SX1 IS, which replaces the PowerShot S5 IS. The SX1 is the very first Canon compact to include a 10 megapixel CMOS sensor, 4 frames per second continuous shooting, full HD video and Canon's new DIGIC 4 processor.

The SX1 has a 28mm lens with 20x optical zoom, so you can take photos in a variety of conditions, from action shots at the cricket, to capturing wildebeest sweeping majestically across the African plains. The Canon's lens zooms and focuses in near silence thanks to Canon's Ultrasonic Motor (USM) technology. The SX1 gives the photographer great confidence to take photos with high magnification as Canon's optical stabiliser keeps the whole picture

very still.

The 10 megapixel CMOS sensor lets you take shots that can be blown up to poster size, without losing all the detail you want. The SX1 also lets you shoot in full 30 fps HD video that you can play back on your HD TV via the built-in HDMI connection. The SX1 is also the first in Canon's compact range to include the DIGIC 4 processor that was previously only found in Canon's SLR range of cameras. The DIGIC 4 drives a number of memory-



intensive features, like facial recognition and the FaceSelf-timer.

We really like that fact that you can also use the Canon as a full manual zoom and focus camera, so you can get exactly the shot you want. On the downside we were not too impressed with

the Canon's flip-open display, that is just too flimsy and the fact that the flash doesn't pop up automatically, like in Canon SLRs, but overall the SX1 sets the bar very high for the new generation of compact cameras.

RRP: **R7499**

Sony Handycam HDR-SR12 Setting the Trend

As we start moving towards an era where standard definition becomes more and more obsolete, the early adopters of HD technology will have to make up their minds as to which HD camera is best for them, so that the rest of us can follow. And as hard-drive based camcorders go, you can't get much better than the Sony Handycam HDR-SR12.

The SR12 is essentially the same as the SR11, except that it has double the recording capacity, at 120GB. The body design for the SR12 is very attractive, with Sony opting for shiny black, with metal accents, as opposed to the usual grey you see on most camcorders. The SR12 is about the same size as a mini-DV camera, due to the onboard hard disk. You'll find that flash-based camcorders are typically

January 2009

slimmer than their hard disk counterparts, but can be a bit difficult to hold.

Just one year from the release of the SR7, both the SR11 and SR12 now shoot in full 1920x1080 high definition (when filming in the 16-megabit-per-second AVCHD recording mode). There are three other recording modes for you to

choose from, if you're not going to need the full HD experience for everything you film. The highest quality setting gets you just over 14 hours of footage, the second gives you about 45 hours and the lowest setting (now at standard definition) gives you from about 30 hours to 80 hours.

Sony has really gone all

out on this one, with a 12x optical Carl Zeiss Vario Sonnar zoom lens and a 5 megapixel sensor (an effective 10 megapixels, when taking stills.)

If you've managed to hang on to your Christmas bonus and are looking for a high-end camcorder, then you can't go wrong with this one.

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Pleo Dinosaur Stone-age High Tech

It's been some time, well about 65 million years, since there were any dinosaurs walking around the place and it doesn't look like scientists are trying very hard to bring them back either, but if you really must have a baby dino of your very own, why don't you get yourself a Pleo?

Pleo is made by the very people who brought the world Furby, that first taste of artificial pets. Pleo is quite a lot more advanced than Furby, but hasn't lost any of the charm. Pleo starts out as a new hatchling that you have to raise, and as it grows older it will gain a personality of its very own. Once you get to know Pleo a bit better you can log on to the Pleoworld.com companion site, where you can connect, find training tips

and download new enhancements for your family's latest edition. Like the Furby, this is one seriously hi-tech toy, with a sophisticated sensory system including a colour camera, sound sensors, two infrared sensors, 14 motors, over 100 gears, eight touch sensors, and an orientation sensor.

Get Pleo for **R3999** (incl VAT) from The G.A.D.G.E.T. Shop on 012-346-2726 or www.thegadgetshop.co.za.



E-sky Lama V4 Helicopter No Sopwith Camel

The Lama V4 is a completely assembled and ready to fly micro helicopter with a coaxial counter-rotating head design that is so stable even a first-time flyer will have it up and hovering in next to no time, well maybe not no time, but you get the picture.

The LamaV4 offers features that other similarly designed micro helicopters can't. You get the power and precision of ESKY 8g servos, an advanced 4-in-1 controller, and a lightweight body that really stands out. The LamaV4 features counter-rotating main blades that cancel out the rotational torque that makes hovering a

challenge in conventional model helicopters. This means your helicopters won't be whipping around on its own axis and then into a wall or your leg.

The G.A.D.G.E.T. Shop also provides a full range of spares if you end up sending the V4 into a collision course with an immovable object.

Get it for **R1590** (incl VAT) on 012-346-2726 or www.thegadgetshop.co.za.



iPod Touch iPod vs iPhone!



You really do need a side-by-side comparison to tell them apart. And here's the thing, the new Touch has every single feature that the iPhone has, minus

the phone and GPS. But at half the price, who cares! What's more, people will think you have an iPhone, so you have the double satisfaction of being admired by your peers and in having fooled them all!

The new design is great, the silver back is even better than the iPhone, we think. And the multi-touch touch interface is probably the best touch-screen we've seen so far. The Touch also has WiFi connectivity so you can surf the Internet, wherever there's a WiFi hotspot.

So here's a TechSmart top tip: If you want an iPhone buy an iPod Touch. RRP: from **R3298** (incl VAT).

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So here's a TechSmart top tip: If you want an iPhone buy an iPod Touch. RRP: from **R3298** (incl VAT).

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KILO GPS Tracker

The KILO unit continuously keep track of distances travelled by the unit. This consists of a start position and an end position with the actual distance travelled and can be downloaded on the website. An ideal tool for petrol and travel claims.



R3399

Oregon Action Cam

R1499

Snow, rain, or a dunk in a kayak? No worries - ATC2K is waterproof up to 10 feet! PC and MAC compatible, ATC2K works seamlessly with most video editing software. Expandable up to 2GB (not included) on a standard SD card.



Pleo Dinosaur

Pleo, a one week-old baby Camarasaurus dinosaur, is a robotic marvel and the newest member of your family! Pleo interacts with you - moving organically, expressing emotion, autonomously exploring and responding to the world around him. Pleo can hear, see, sense touch, and detect objects.

R3999

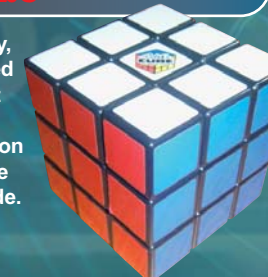
Gear4 BluFM

When paired with a Bluetooth mobile phone, BluFM will allow you to talk and listen through the car stereo using its built-in microphone and FM transmitter. BluFM is compatible with any MP3 player via its 3.5mm cable.

R899

Rubik's Cube

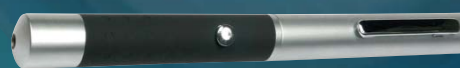
More than just a toy, Rubik's has inspired everything from art to particle physics! More than 300 million Rubik's Cubes have been sold worldwide.



R145

Green Laser Pointers

The laser is great for use in astronomy, laser shows, and by general hobbyists. At night, it creates a solid green line in the sky as far as the eye can see.



Various models available from

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R3699

Celestron SkyScout

The SkyScout is a revolutionary handheld device that uses advanced GPS technology with point and click convenience to identify thousands of stars, planets, constellations and more.



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R5999

iPod Nano Shake it like a Polaroid Picture

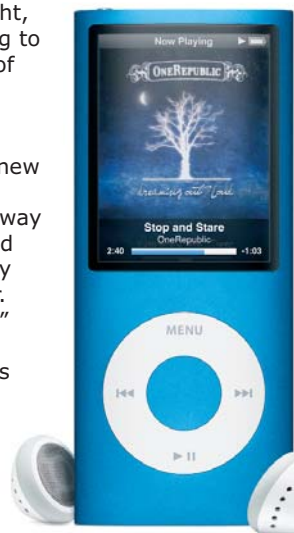
We hope you didn't get an older version iPod Nano for Christmas, because, if you did you're really going to kick yourself (unless you're just not that passionate about the subject). There's a new one out and Apple is asking you to shake it.

That's right, always trying to stay ahead of the game, Apple has included a melange of new features to tempt you away from the iPod you currently hold so dear. The "Genius" option finds similar songs and groups them into playlists for you. This is a

novel feature, but not entirely "Genius" if you ask us. Another thing that some at the TechSmart office have called "lame" is the shake and shuffle feature. If you shake it, it shuffles songs. Not overly "WOW" to be honest.

The one thing Apple has got right is the accelerometer built into the new iPod; so when you tilt it sideways the screen goes to landscape. This is very good if you want to watch movies on it; and you can as it has 8GB of storage (the screen is a bit small, but if you don't mind going blind after a few years of staring at it, then it's just

fine). RRP: From **R1899** (incl VAT).



Logitech Z-500 Wireless Speaker A very Sound Investment



Logitech promotes this speaker as something you want in order to grant you the sound you crave so badly, after having listened to the pathetic wincers from your notebook speakers. But the Z-500 (where do they get these names?) is more than that. It would work very well as a speaker for any of your sound-playing devices.

The sound from the device is more than fair, although actually a bit on the bassy side, one may have expected too much treble from small

speakers, but there you have it. But the real advantage of this speaker is the connectivity. You can connect your MP4 player/ notebook in a number of ways: via Bluetooth, WiFi or using the supplied mini-jack cable.

The Z-500 is completely cordless and one battery charge will last you up to 12 hours; seriously, we had it running for that long.

RRP: **R2199** (incl VAT). Enquire at Computer Corporation on 08616-08616 from January 2009.

TomTom GO 920 Give TOM a smile



The GO 920 is TomTom's premium device of the moment, and as such comes with every feature imaginable. The best bit about the device is that it comes preloaded with maps for Southern Africa, Europe, the US and Canada.

The device features a 4.3-inch widescreen touch display and is very neat weighing only 220g. It looks very smart too with its subtle grey colouring and obvious build quality complementing any car interior.

Three of the more exciting

technologies the device boasts are its Enhanced Positioning Technology, voice address input and Map Share. EPT is a technology which allows the device to determine your position even when you can't receive a satellite signal. Voice address input is the ability to say aloud the city, suburb, street and number of the location you wish to navigate to and the device does the rest. While Map Share allows users to make map corrections and share those map corrections online.

In addition the device comes standard with 4GB internal memory, a remote control, hands-free Bluetooth connection, a built-in FM transmitter, a desk dock and a full complement of peripheral accessories. This wealth of features makes the GO 920 a highly desirable device, but you do pay for it at **R5499** (incl VAT).

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Garmin nüvi 215W Still 215, but wider screen

The Garmin nüvi 215W is a simple, safe and affordable GPS solution with Bluetooth hands-free phone calling. This simple, safety-minded GPS navigator leads the way with turn-by-turn directions to help you find the best route and stay safe on the road. Give the drive your full attention through the integrated speaker and microphone. The 215W includes thousands of Points of Interest (POIs) and Southern Africa Street maps.

The nüvi 215 comes preloaded with Garmap Southern Africa Streetmaps mapping. All you do is touch the colour screen, key in your destination and the nüvi takes you there with turn-by-turn spoken directions.

www.techsmart.co.za

In addition, the nüvi 215 accepts custom points of interest such as speed traps, with proximity alerts to warn you of upcoming POIs as you approach.

The "Where Am I?" function gives you details about your position on demand. You just tap the car icon for your exact latitude and longitude coordinates, nearest address, and directions to nearby hospitals, police and petrol stations. Get it for **R3399** (incl VAT) from Techshop on 012-661-0869 or www.techshop.co.za.



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Garmin Mobile XT version 5 Caught in the Middle

Garmin have been doing the GPS thing for a while now and the consensus is that they are pretty good at it. They provide reliable maps, accurate positioning systems and a truck load of additional features.

The trouble is that a GPS device generally costs a small Saudi Sheik's oil fortune. Above and beyond this, your new phone is probably equipped with a decent GPS receiver, but not so decent software and maps and is consequently under utilised. This is quite the conundrum!

Well, we just tried out Garmin Mobile XT version 5 and it would appear that the puzzle is solved. Mobile XT is a reliable bit of Garmin software, with all the necessary maps and

online features you require, that ships on a 1GB microSD card and is compatible with most Windows Mobile and Symbian S60 phones.

When the SD card is inserted into your phone the app will install automatically. Its user interface is incredibly user-friendly and it has additional features such as position relevant photo sharing and a panic button (for some Samsung and Nokia devices) which will notify select contacts of your distress and position. All told it is a fantastic concept that is well executed and affordable at **R990**.



LG KS360 Now get your SMS fix

LG says that this is a phone for the SMS junkies out there, who really need to get a fix quick. Ok, that's not actually what they say, but this is very much a phone aimed at the texters out there.

It has a full QWERTY keypad that slides out horizontally, so you can type away to your friends. The keypad is user-friendly and, overall, this is a rather pleasant looking phone. On the features front, it's a pretty standard arrangement of a 2 megapixel camera, GPRS and EDGE, Bluetooth 2.0, MP3 player and FM radio. The LG KS360 also has an accelerometer, so it can tell which way up you're holding it.

Strangely though, this phone feels a bit

half-baked to us. It has a touch screen, but can only be used for dialling. Yes, you can enter text to get to your contacts, but not to send a message, or for any other functionality. Why LG? Why? If you give it a touch screen, why is it only for dialling?



Nokia 3600 Slide Middle of the road

The Nokia 3600 Slide isn't likely to generate much buzz. Your friends aren't likely to bring up its neat form-factor or abundance of features in conversation anytime soon. Doing the table drop won't get you the kind of cred an iPhone or HTC Diamond would either.

This is primarily due to the fact that the 3600 Slide is designed for the ever-uninspired mid-range.

Consumers looking for a mid-range slider are notoriously difficult; they want a device with a 3.2 megapixel camera, a music player, 16 million colour QVGA display, Bluetooth, FM-stereo, maps and a



user-friendly interface. The catch is that they are unwilling to pay for it, and good on them. The Nokia 3600 Slide with its S40 interface has all this and is affordable at the same time. It also has an excellent noise cancellation feature, which we really appreciated, effectively cancelling out background noise for uninterrupted calls. Our only complaints are that it doesn't

have 3G or a GPS receiver (which you can buy a wireless adaptor to solve) which renders the *Nokia Maps* feature pointless; but then again you can just call us mid-range device consumers.

Nokia 5320 XpressMusic Did you hear that

The Nokia 5320 XpressMusic is not a slide phone or worse, a flip-phone; what we are dealing with here is a device that really doesn't come with a huge amount of pointless hype or features, like some of the more recent Nokia models.

The 5320 XpressMusic has the same basic keypad layout as most of the bar-shaped Nokia models, except for the main-menu button, which is now placed directly below the left operation button. Whose idea was that? Every time you type a message or use the contacts list you have to be ultra-careful not to push the main

menu key, which you inevitably do.

On the bright side, the 5320 is packed with features and has a great music player. We must give credit to Nokia (and others) for dispensing with propriety earphone connectors and opting, instead, for the standard mini-jack variety. For a music phone we would have liked to see more than the usual 1GB micro-SD card. The new iPod Nano has 8GB of storage, 1GB just will not do.

The 5320 also features a dedicated N-Gage key for gaming and the keyboard is laid-out to help you with gameplay, that you can play on the 2.0" TFT display.



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The best bandwidth for 2009

Written by Lance Turner, a 12-year Internet industry veteran and Chief Executive of Branded Internet – listed as one of SA's Top 50 ICTe Companies 2005/6 + 2006/7.



I freely admit to being a total geek, and if asked what I want for a New Year's pressie I'll probably tell you I want more bandwidth. During the year I get many varied questions from *TechSmart* readers, and some of the most common ones I still get is for me to explain basic broadband concepts, mostly around the question of what is ADSL bandwidth? Or what are the differences between types of bandwidth, and what does each type mean? With so many different ISPs in the market it can sometimes be a bit tricky comparing apples with apples when often, what you think are apples are actually oranges, or sometimes worse, rotten apples. The most important thing to understand about broadband, specifically ADSL, is what your data cap is. With a broadband service you pay per megabyte of information you send and receive, and your data cap is the amount of data throughput you're paying for, normally measured in gigabytes. That being said there are two kinds of Internet traffic. Local traffic, which is traffic to and from South African sites, and international traffic which is to non-local sites. Why this is important to understand is because some ADSL packages will include an amount of free additional local traffic. This free additional local traffic is known as a soft cap, and its great, because once you hit your soft cap you can still receive your emails and browse to local sites, like your bank or *TechSmart.co.za*. So what you need to be sure of when choosing your ADSL option is to truly compare like with like. Very often people are not told about the difference between a hard cap and a soft cap, or that a soft cap is available, and that with a hard cap you're cut off and get no more email or browsing the rest of the month. Soft cap accounts will normally cost a few Rand more, but you cannot beat these for value for money. Before settling on your type of ADSL you should definitely check out your options. For (tech)smart consumers there are excellent ADSL deals to be had with really good value. Here are my picks for the best use for your bandwidth for the start of 2009.

- **nethACKZ** – <http://www.nethackz.com>
The Internet offers so much to do and so little time to do it in. This site is a place you can go to for down-to-earth tips and tricks on making your life online more productive.
- **Armor Games** – <http://www.armorgames.com>
This site can suck you in for hours. It features loads of free browser based games with everything from adventure to arcade to strategy. Lots of fun to be had here.
- **Evernote** – <http://www.evernote.com>
I surf the web a lot and I'm always finding useful pieces of information all over the show. The problem is its difficult to keep track of what I saw, and where. Evernote is a tool designed to help with that, and it works really well. Definitely worth trying.
- **NerdTests** – <http://www.nerdtests.com>
This site has a lot of fun, DIY personality tests on it. Everything from genuine personality tests right through to the less serious "Am I a geek?" tests.
- **Get Safe Online** – <http://www.getsafeonline.org>
One of the best personal online safety sites I've seen. A must read for almost everyone.

Have a good, safe year, and of course, lots of fun online. As always, if you need advice on what would be the best broadband for you, I'll gladly help, so please be in touch. Send your comments to lance@brandedinternet.co.za.

January 2009 Web Time Wasters

www.comicbrush.com



Comicbrush lets you mix stock artwork from their collection of comic backgrounds, characters and props with photos of your friends, neighbourhood or school. You can add speech bubbles, text, your own artwork and more, before publishing your comic to the web on social networking sites like Flickr, Facebook and MySpace.

If you're a comic creator, Comicbrush lets you create an interactive version of your comic; all you do is supply the characters and artwork for others to create their own version of your comic.

www.plurk.com



Noun. plurk (plüer-kh) – A really snazzy site that allows you to showcase the events that make up your life in deliciously digestible chunks.

Verb. plurk (plüer-kh) – To chronicle the events of your always on, action-packed, storybook, semi-charmed kinda life.

Plurk is an easy way to chronicle and share the things you do, the way you feel, and all the other things in between that make up your life, with the people close to you. Yes, it's another social networking site, similar to Twitter, but this site has a really fresh, great-looking interface that makes updating your day to day adventures a pleasure.

www.moviesorm.co.uk

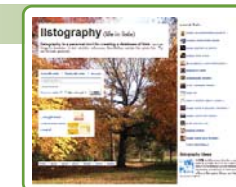


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www.listography.com

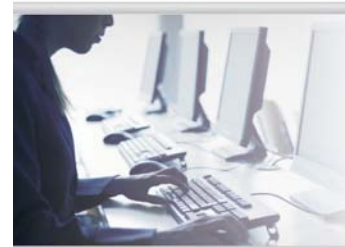


Listography provides users (listographers) an easy-to-use tool for creative list writing and sharing.

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Ubuntu 8.10 Intrepid Ibex Finally With Wireless



Ubuntu has been around for a few years now and is fast becoming the foremost Linux distribution out there. If you're not familiar with Ubuntu, it was started by none other than our very own Mark Shuttleworth, with the money he got from selling Thawte to Verisign in 1999.

Well actually he runs a company called Canonical that runs support for Ubuntu, especially the server editions. Canonical also sponsors all the development of the open source Ubuntu.

Unlike Microsoft's Windows, Ubuntu is updated once every six months, and every time there's an update you get an alliterative name to go with it. The latest release is 8.10, codenamed Intrepid Ibex. Ibex is not a million miles apart from its predecessor, Hardy Heron, but then again Ubuntu is a matured product now and with any well established software, the improvements will be small, but this is a good thing as there isn't an awful lot wrong with the software.

Usually installing Linux is a tricky task for a beginner, but Ubuntu is a very simple piece of software to install. You can either download it from the Ubuntu website, or order a free CD from them. You then just insert the CD and choose an installation option. You can even run it live from the CD to try it out.

One of the problems with Ubuntu distributions, even a year ago, was that they had limited support for wireless devices, like wireless USB connectors and 3G modems. This was a real



problem, as the people using Ubuntu often wanted to access the Internet wirelessly and the only way to do that would be to have advanced knowledge in using the Linux text editor. But thankfully Intrepid Ibex fully supports wireless, including 3G.

If you haven't used Ubuntu yet, go to www.ubuntu.com, download it and you'll probably be hooked.

www.techsmart.co.za

Magix Xtreme PhotoStory on CD & DVD 7 Deluxe Worth a Thousand Words

This is the seventh generation version of the Magix classic slideshow maker. Yes, the name might be a bit long and have a few too many Xs in it, but be not fooled, it's not only hype; there is some real substance to this story (pun intended).

It's really the improvements in functionality that makes PhotoStory 7 better than it's predecessor. The new PhotoStory comes with a brand new user interface that makes it easier to access all the features you'll need to create effects, animations and camera movement. New functions, like the ability to create panoramas using multiple photos from the media pool, make using PhotoStory 7 easier and more intuitive.

Once you're finished with your slideshow, burning it to CD or DVD can be done directly from the program, and without any complex steps inbetween. PhotoStory 7 is

also compatible with some of the latest technologies, including Blu-ray.

Get it for **R1160** (incl VAT) from www.edusphere.co.za or call them on 011-450-4578.



Bento 2 Mac and Ben together again

For all the Mac fan-boys out there that have been using Filemaker's popular personal database manager, Bento, here's some good news: Bento 2 has just come out. So let's have a quick look to see if it's worth the move to the new version.

Bento integrates some basic functions that users will use often, like email in Mail, contacts in Address Book, a to-do list, some word processing and maybe a spreadsheet. But the real benefit of Bento 2 is as a personal database. With Bento you can access your Address Book, for instance, without opening it, but you can also add fields that would not normally be available. So you could, for instance, have



an attendance list for a party and then link that to your Address Book.

Some of the obvious improvements to Bento 2 are the way it handles data import and export, the way you can customise forms "on-the-fly" and the ability to share your libraries with other Bento users.

The first version of the software was interesting, but this version is actually quite practical and useful. **R800** (incl VAT) from www.phoenixsoftware.com.

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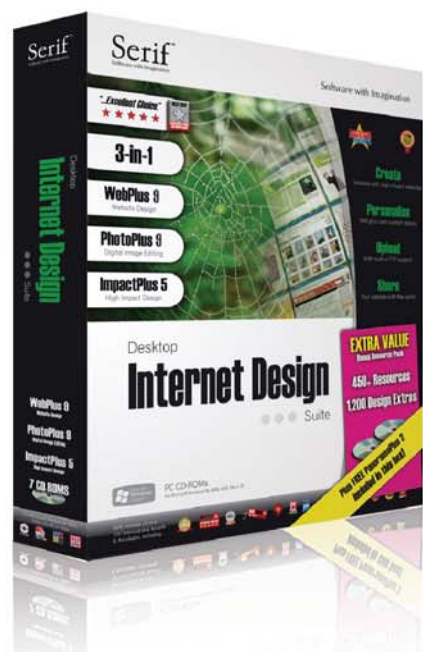
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Little Big Planet All that you can imagine is virtual

Developer: Media Molecule
Publisher: SCEE
Distributor: SterKinekor Entertainment

There are many words one could use to describe Little Big Planet, but we feel the word "personality" is the most descriptive of the lot. LBP is Sony's first exclusive title release since Metal Gear Solid 4, so encouraging people to buy consoles is LBP's main objective.



Customisation is what the entire game is about. Throughout the game you are encouraged to customise the infectiously cute 'Sackboy'; your generic avatar and the game's main protagonist. You achieve greater degrees of customisation by traversing eight immensely detailed worlds and building up a stock of objects, stickers, points and creation tools along the way.

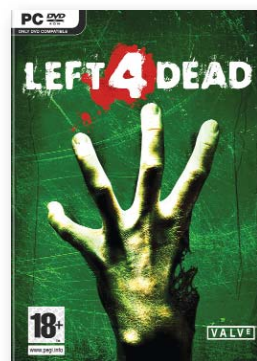
LBP plays like a platform game in which you can jump and grab objects, but that's it. Sackboy doesn't get any faster or stronger with every level completed; he simply takes on whatever appearance you would like him to. You even control his facial expressions, his arm movements and general posture via the d-pad, right analogue stick and six-axis controls respectively. This may leave the impression that the game is dull, but it isn't. The game is a testament to purposeful design; it appears incredibly simple and yet great depth can be found in each corner of each world.

The game's level creator tools and multiplayer modes are its greatest assets. The level creator is an astounding set of fairly complex tools which theoretically allow you to create anything you have seen in the story mode, and much more besides, and then share it online. This is rather time consuming, however, which means you'll have to save it for the holidays if you've got a day job.

More so than any other game this year LBP embodies creativity and imagination. This is not just some niche title, but rather a game that can be enjoyed by anyone who seeks a interactive creative experience in their own living room.

FPS

PC Games



Left 4 Dead Dawn of the dead can kiss my ...

Developer: Turtle Rock Studios
Publisher: Valve
Distributor: EA Games www.ea.co.za

Four survivors, a limited range of weapons and health packs and a seemingly infinite host of flesh-starved undead; the plot of every zombie movie ever created and now the plot of Left 4 Dead.

While the game's storyline is paper thin its game play is anything but. You find yourself covering four levels with five spooky maps each, making your way from one safehouse to another in an effort to replenish you ammo, health and nerves. Each map serves up a decent level of suspense, action and surprises. Thank heavens for weapon mounted flash lights!

Left 4 Dead's multiplayer modes are its defining feature as you co-op with up to three players online to carve your way through zombies, puke spewing Boomers, Hunters, Smokers and Witches. You can even take the part of an elite band of the undead in the game's Versus mode to defeat the survivors.

Left for Dead will leave you feeling like a kid again with more than a few frights lurking around dark corners. Its lack of cinematic sequences and rotund extras is also refreshing as you get sucked into the game almost immediately.

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Need for Speed: Undercover Cops and Robbers, it never gets old!

Developer: EA Games
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Distributor: EA Games www.ea.co.za

In *Need for Speed: Undercover* you play... that's right... you guessed it... a reluctant hero turned undercover cop. You and the sexy agent Chase Linh (Maggie Q) are tasked with bringing an illegal gang of street racers, who have somehow become mixed up in an international vehicle smuggling syndicate, to justice.

Complete with polished cinematic cut scenes, OTT cop chases and open world gameplay, *Undercover* moves away from the widely scoffed *ProStreet* formula back to the better received *Most Wanted* model. With 50+ cars and more than 80 miles of road available in the game's fictional Tri-City Bay area, there is a ton of content on offer, with the bonus of your next race always being easily accessible with a simple press of your d-pad.

Gameplay is fantastic at times, especially when playing Highway Battles, catching an opponent and then maintaining a lead, or Cops and Robbers online, which offer 4-on-4 action. The game does however experience a slow frame rate, reportedly far worse on the PS3 platform, at times which can make it frustrating to play.



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Shaun White Snowboarding It's not Tricky!

Publisher & Developer: Ubisoft
Distributor: Megarom Interactive
011-361-4800 | www.megarom.co.za

Apparently Shaun White is looking for the next great snowboarder and, naturally, you think that you could be the one. In order to prove it you'll have to collect coins, your reward being a number of "focus powers", and complete a number of challenges which take away those self-same "focus powers".



The game is built on the *Assassin's Creed* engine which is immediately obvious from looking at the game's four spectacular open-world mountains, with their varying terrain and picture perfect powder. The game really carries the feeling of being in a ski resort across well with its depiction of log cabins, woods, icy patches and rocky outcrops.

The game does however fall well short of being the best Snowboarding title ever created with a fairly unintuitive thumbstick and trigger control set-up and absolutely hopeless maps and radar for an open world game. Chasing after coins spread across mountain slopes as a result feels a bit like a platforming grind session rather than a relaxed trick fest. The game's marker system, which allows you to instantly warp back to any spot you've marked, is a serious stress reliever though, when searching for coins.

SWS's multiplayer features are its redeeming quality as there are no silly lobbies to contend with and the easy access to multiplayer features on the d-pad make it a well thought-out and well executed feature offering hours of fun with up to 16 friends online.

All in all the game feels as if it suffers from a crisis of identity. It first introduces you to a realistic simulator type boarding game and then allows you to build-up some super abilities in an arcade (bust-all-the-tricks and jibs (grinds) you can) type game. In trying to accommodate both, it fails to achieve either.



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