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Writing this editorial leaves me with feelings of both sadness and excitement. Sadness, because after being the editor of TechSmart Magazine for five years, I'm now moving away to work on a new publication Smart Publishing is launching - hence the excitement! I am leaving *TechSmart* in the very capable hands of Mike Joubert, one of our founding members, who will head up the editorial team. Welcome back Mike, and congrats!

In this issue we report back to you on some of the most innovative technologies showcased at the CES show in Vegas, Thomas (our online editor), tells us about some of LG's brand new products unveiled to him on a trip to China earlier this year, and we look at some extremely funky gadgets for guys and goodies for girls.

We reviewed some fantastic products for your home (and business), like the brand new MacBook Pro, a Thermaltake HTPC and two brilliant LAN over powerline products. Keep well, until we meet again... [ED]

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Letter of the Month

Dear TechSmart,

'4 BIZARRE

Long time back when I was just a young matric student, the world of computing became visible to me for the first time. I was blinded and could see neither hardware nor software at the time. It was like living in the dark ages; not knowing that there existed a universe, let alone earth. However, once I discovered that computers and computing devices do exist; that was the start of my best friend's headaches. I knew that he owned a computer and hence I retrieved a large amount of information from him, sucking his poor brain dry in the process. But my hunger for computing knowledge would not be satisfied. I bought my first desktop computer three years later and my first laptop a year after the desktop – the desktop was purchased as a result of many TechSmart publications. (Research I conducted earlier was from TechSmart publications but TechSmart wasn't even in magazine format yet - it was a large poster sized page folded numerous times!) As the days pass by, my earlier techdumbness dies one day at a time.

I'm now a mechanical engineer and cannot imagine my life without a computer! Hence, thank you TechSmart for educating the nation, especially me, at no cost whatsoever.

PS: Have you guys tested Windows Beta 7 yet? What are your opinions? There are mixed feelings on the web, as to when Windows 7 will be released. Any info on its exact release date will be much appreciated.

Sheraton Singh

Hi Sheraton. Thanks for your letter and congrats on winning GTA IV for PC courtesy of Megarom Interactive. Read the answer to the next letter for more info on Windows 7. [ED]

Hello TechSmart.

I bought a laptop about a year ago and it came with Windows Vista Home. I got along with Windows XP just fine, but Vista is very frustrating. At work I heard that there is a new Windows available as a free upgrade. Do you know anything about it?

Carlos Wilson (Sandton)

Hi Carlos. You must be talking about the new Windows 7 Beta. It is currently available free to download up until 10 February, but it is not something we would recommend for the casual user. This copy is not yours to keep forever though, seeing that your download will expire on 1 August 2009. Check out our article on p30. [MJ]

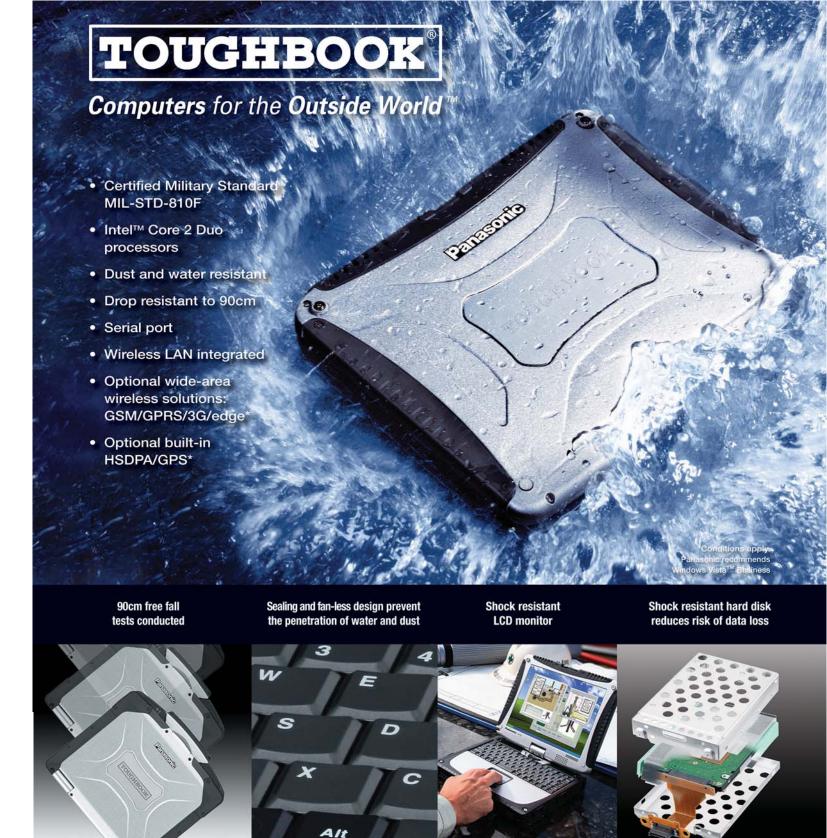
Hello Suzanne,

I read your magazine regularly but I am a long way away from being "TechSmart" yet. I use Outlook Express and the other day I tried to open one of my .dbx files out of interest. Big mistake!! I was asked what program I wanted to open this file with. I could not see Outlook Express and I foolishly clicked on Word. I could not undo this and of course all my .dbx files are opening in Word and garbled. My Outlook Express is working OK but I just want to undo what I did. Is there anyone in your expert team who could help me?

Grace

Hi Grace. This is not a huge problem at all. Windows has just associated the .dbx files (the files that store email data) with Word. You can right click on any .dbx file and click on "Open With". If Outlook doesn't appear on the list, you can then click on "Browse", which takes you to Program Files. Then open the Outlook Program Folder and click on msimn.exe (Microsoft Internet Mail and News – *Outlook* Express's old name). The .dbx files will now be associated with *Outlook Express*. Make sure to check "Always use the selected program to open this kind of file". [AG]

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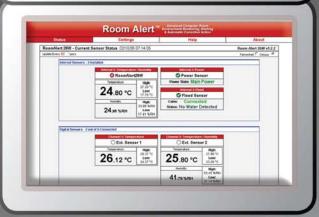
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Smart Celeb

Sureshnie Rider, who can be heard on 5FM on weekdays from 22:00 to 01:00, as well as on Sasha's show weekdays from 09:00 to 12:00 as the newsreader, is driven by passion and is determined to make every second count.



Would you say that you're TechSmart or, well, TechStupid?

I'm a little bit of both actually, because technology is evolving so rapidly, it sometimes takes me a while to get familiar with all the new items. I'm not too bad actually, I work at 5FM with some of the world's most advanced radio studio equipment, and it's really given me the confidence to take on new technologies without fear.

What up coming projects do you have to look forward to in 2009?

I'm working on two TV show ideas that are pretty awesome and I currently host a radio show on the SAA international radio channel. I'm trying to get going on my bicycle that was my bday gift from last year, but because I fell off a stationery bike, balance is my big issue. I'm also working on an exciting project to present for the Gautrain. So I'm a bit of a busy bunny this year!

Sushi! Is there more to the nickname than the fact that it's derived from your own name?

You know I owe Ian F and Sasha Martinengo for that name. It just became a cool derivative from my full name. I also ate sushi for the first time on air, after Koula dared me to. I guess I might be like those cool fashion sandwiches, I'm calm and complex with a lot of colour in my life.

What was the last big tech purchase you made?

I think the Apple Macbook and the iTouch. Other than that the Xbox 360 Elite.

Considering it is 2009, is a Valentine's e-card good enough to earn a guy some brownie points? Or is the cardboard equivalent still worth more in your opinion?

I'm a bit old fashioned and I do like the cards, but I know it gets thrown away. I'm huge into scrapbooking so I'd rather go for an awesome photo card. You know there are so many more creative tech savvy ways of impressing a guy. With the brilliant Adobe Photoshop, you could really compile a serious hot photo album, or even better, make a music video of your favourite memories to impress him. [Also check out our Web Time Wasters on how to make a photo video clip -ED].

How is 2009 going to be a better year than 2008 for you?

kicked off the new year. I did some aura cleansing before I kicked off the new year. I've written down my goal and intention sheet, and I feel so energised in making it happen. I feel more positive and more driven, and I plan to make it 2000 and Mine:)

For the full interview with Sushi go to www.techsmart.co.za.

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Tech News

Tech News Special: CES

The annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES), held by the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA) gives manufacturers of the tech stuff we so crave a chance to show off their wares to the public for the very first time.

This massive event sees manufacturers, developers, and suppliers of consumer technology hardware, content technology delivery systems and related products and services from over 140 countries converge on the gambling capital of the world, Vegas. TechSmart brings you the best of the show.



Show Stealer

Dalm always seems to get ahead of the technology curve only to end up lagging so far behind that they either end up almost going bust or start a product line from scratch. Well they chose the latter this time round, unveiling the Palm Pre. The Pre was the big surprise at CES this year. With everyone on the look out for an iPhone killer, it seems Palm, the most unlikely contender, has done it. It looks very similar to the

iPhone and has (stolen) many of its features. But Palm is hardly a knock-off shop. They have given the Pre a slide-out QWERTY keyboard and a host of brilliant features that make even the most hardcore iPhone users quake in their boots.

Bright Ideas

Gesture Controlled TVs

The remote control has given relief to countless millions by avoiding the laborious task of having to get up to change the channel. But it seems that we have become so lazy that if the remote



isn't literally an inch or two away, we don't bother to change the channel at all. Thankfully both Toshiba and Hitachi have shown prototype hand-gesture controlled TVs at CES this year. A small infrared camera watches the viewers hand movements and translates those into commands. So waving your hands could turn it on and a circular movement could change the channel.

Sonv Cybershot G3

he new Sony Cybershot G3 is now Wi-Fi-enabled and features a web browser. The 10.1 megapixel camera with 4GB of onboard storage lets users, near a Wi-Fi connection, upload their videos and images straight to applications like Picassa, YouTube and Shutterfly. The G3 is available right now in the US for about \$500.

Sony Flexible OLED

↑ flexible colour OLED (organic light-Hemitting diode) screen for ultra-portable devices was shown by Sony. The ultra-thin, 2.5" screen is produced on a 0.2mm thin sheet of plastic and can be bent (gently).

The prototype shown by Sony has a resolution of 160 x 120 pixels and only weighs 1.5q. But it's not likely to appear in products for at least the next few years.

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Sci News

Just a silly love song

★ ccording to a study in a **A**February issue of *Science*, love-struck mosquitoes (Aedes aegypti) have to hit the right notes if they, well, want to get lucky. Scientists placed the little suckers in a contained area, recorded their flight sounds as they flew past each other and then measured their physiological responses when



Titbits

they heard the mating calls of potential partners. By adjusting the resonance of their thoracic box they launch into a passionate single-pitch duet of around 1200Hz shortly before mating. This pitch is a perfect multiple of the two insects' wing-beat frequencies, tuned at about 400Hz and 600Hz for females and males respectively. The scientists hope to use this finding to develop a strategy for interfering with mosquitoes' mating cycle, and so help control population growth of the pesky little bugs. And you thought corny love songs were for the birds.

Helping hands

An extra pair of hands always comes in handy, especially when you're working with delicate stuff. Enter the "microgrippers". Scientists report in a recent issue of the Journal of the American Chemical Society, that they have developed tiny chemically powered delivery tools that can move things around on platforms as



small as microchips. It looks almost like a six-fingered metallic hand, which, when open, is about as big as a grain of sand. A bit of acetic acid dropped on the gold-plated nickel "palm" causes the "fingers" to close, while adding some hydrogen peroxide lets them relax. In a demonstration the team manipulated the tools to pick up small glass beads and tubes, which were then moved elsewhere using a magnet. Since they don't need any external power source or wiring, the tools can be really handy for working in small, convoluted spaces. No excuse for having butterfingers in the lab anymore.

Big stars

enturies after Galileo first looked up to the skies, the stars still baffle us. Now a group of astronomers say in Science Express that they may have the answer to a longstanding mystery. Scientists always thought that star mass is limited to about 20 times that of our own sun; yet bigger stars are often seen. Stars grow by



attracting gas and dust around them. The bigger it grows the more light it produces, which in turn creates an outward radiation force. Beyond a critical mass, the outward force outweighs the inward attraction force, and so effectively blows away the star's building materials. Using a 3D computer model the researchers showed that a system of disks and channels exist around the star. This diverts the radiation force somewhat from the surrounding building materials to create a radiation shield. As the star rotates, unbalanced gravitational pull lets particles clump together, and eventually the clumps all stick to the star core. [LP]

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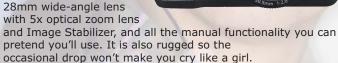
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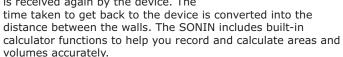
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February 2009

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Gadgets & Goodies

Goodles for Girls

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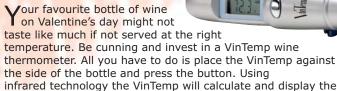
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Gadgets & Goodies

la product insight: Success at CES 2009

The annual Consumer Electronics Show held in Las **Vegas. USA is arguably the premiere electronics show** on the planet. We were understandably rather disappointed when we were unable to attend this year. **Worry not however: we were still able to get the scoop** on some of 2009's most exciting consumer technologies, albeit on the other side of the planet.

Tn January we were invited to join LG Electronics on their $oldsymbol{\perp}$ Middle East and Africa Marketing Conference held in Macau, China. Macau is fittingly described as the Vegas of the east and has its very own intoxicating strip, the Cotai Strip.

While enjoying the thrills and spills of the Cotai Strip we were most taken by the sights and sounds of LG's new 2009 product range. With an emphasis on "Advanced Technology, Beautifully Hidden" LG's range of new products seek to meet the needs of the discerning consumer. And considering that LG received no less than 14 CES 2009 Innovations Awards, including the coveted CES 2009 "Best of Innovations" honours in the wireless handset and home appliances categories; the scene was set for our



High Definition Television

Tn the HDTV space LG look set to be ahead of the game over Lathe coming year. Many of its new premium sets feature Full HD 1080p via Uncompressed Wireless Transmission from a media box, TruMotion 240Hz frequency, LED backlighting with



Contrast Ratio. The star of the show was most certainly LG's LH95 which is also incidentally the world's thinnest LED LCD TV at 24.8mm. Any one of

these product innovations

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Gadgets & Goodies



could be considered a major consumer draw card; all four in concert spell a serious technological advantage.

We can expect to see many of these new sets as early as

Smartphones

Tn the mobile space LG look set to raise the ante with the quality of their handsets over the next year. LG handsets have historically been criticised for poor build quality and/or a lack of functionality.

The LG Dare seeks to set the record straight with its 3" touch screen, impressive new concept User Interface with full drag-anddrop functionality, 3.2 megapixel camera and HTML Web browsing features. In fact, the Dare was honoured with the CES 2009 Best of Innovations Award for cellular

LG also have a few Android phones (Adam and Eve), the world's first Windows Mobile 7 handset and the LG Monaco with a

built-in Pico projector on the cards for release later this year.

Network Attached Storage

Another of LG's impressive products due to be released in 2009, is NAS or Network Attached Storage. Although network attached storage is not a new concept, LG's NAS is the first to be released with a Blu-ray Rewriter, This will allow users to back up large amounts of data to Blu-ray discs. The device also has the option to mount up to four hard drives, each with a maximum capacity of 1TB.

While fears, and the realities, of a global recession confront us all it is promising that companies such as LG are still investing heavily in R&D. Their new range of products certainly suggest as much, with some remarkable new consumer technologies and innovations coming from their labs. Other products to keep in mind are their soon to be released Venus home theatre system following on from the

successes of the Champagne range, as well as their new high end notebooks including the LG P510 which will be released with an Intel Core 2 Duo T9800 processor.

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The dv5 (dv5z) is the latest 15" notebook to come out of the HP production line and it is right up there getting stuck in with the competition. The dv5 features an AMD dual-core processor, some very exciting graphics and a plethora of reasons to make you want one.

 $\mathbf{I}_{\mathsf{easy}}^{\mathsf{t's}}$ to see why you might want one of these, just an awful lot by having a glimpse at to sneeze at

here.

On the design side of things HP has gone for a very much improved silver finish and an almost black lacquerlike feel to the lid. The chassis build-quality is very

good, as well it should be, this is the type of notebook for users with a lot of computing (or gaming) to do. It seems that notebook screens are set to keep getting better and better. Every time we see one of

these screens we have to remark that: "This is probably the best screen they've come out with so far." The 15.4" diagonal WSXGA+ highdefinition HP BrightView widescreen display (1680 x 1050) is truly superb and a pleasure to work with, in all lighting conditions.

The dv5 also sports the

requisite amount of ports and inputs that you'd expect from a consumer notebook, with the addition of some you probably won't find on your run-of-the-mill notebook. There are: 3 USB 2.0 ports, 1 eSATA port/USB port ExpressCard/54 slot, 1 HDMI 1.3 connector, 5-in-1 multicard reader, microphone in, 2 headphone/audio out ports, 1 Expansion Port 3 Docking Station Connector, 1 LAN port and 1 VGA out. Get it for **R10 785** (incl VAT) from www.hpshop.co.za.

HP offers a range of AMD and Intel processors with the dv5 models. Intel models are available from Computer Corporation on 08616-08616.

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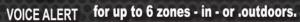
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Annie MacBook Pro

When Hype is Right

about to launch a brand new MacBook Pro, featuring an all-new unibody aluminium construction and tapered sides, similar to those of the MacBook Air. We here at the TechSmart office can, however, smell the hype a mile away, so our skeptic-radar went on full alert.

But when the fabled 15" version of the MacBook Pro finally arrived, we could do nothing other than say: "Sorry that we ever doubted you, Apple". People raved about the old one and we just expected a few incremental improvements, but the Apple design team have done a sweeping number of brilliant improvements on the Pro.

The entire housing is machined from a solid billet of aluminium, allowing for a stiffer, more durable construction. The new design is also very good looking, probably the best looking notebook we have seen to

date (we admit, begrudgingly). A small point on the construction that is actually rather annoying; the edges where your wrists rest when typing are all sharp corners so after typing for a while your arms start to feel like they've been hit with a steel ruler a few too many times.

The Pro comes in two standard configurations, but we tested the 2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo version and the performance is excellent. And apparently performance will be even better when Apple eventually release their new



version of OS X, as the MacBook Pro hardware has actually been optimised to run with software that has yet to hit the market.

Probably the stand-out feature of the new Pro is the glass trackpad, which makes doing even basic scrolling, paging and zooming tasks a real pleasure. The trackpad uses the same type of multi-touch gestures that you find on the iPhone. We thought this was probably

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more a gimmick than anything else, but we were very wrong. Other manufacturers will definitely be scrambling to get something like this in their machines ASAP. The only question you do have to ask vourself is: "Do I really see myself spending at least R24 000 on a notebook?" Well, do you?

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PC Hardware



NComputing X550 Desktop Virtualisation Kit How to turn 1 into 6

or something so useful it sure has a complex name. So what exactly does NComputing's X550 kit do? Well the most important thing is that the X550 kit can turn one PC into six (up to 11 if you use two PCI-cards). How? Well when you purchase the X550 kit vou receive a five-port PCI-card and five XD2 access devices. The PCI-card goes into your existing PC. The PC must constist of at least a 2.4GHz processor and 1024MB of RAM. This is important because this PC will provide all the processing power (and storage) to the

Once that is done you can connect the access devices to your main PC. Each access device in turn connects to a

PC screen, kevboard and mouse (all sold separately). All you still need to do before others can start working is to set-up each of the user accounts with the included vSpace software. And there you have it - one PC turned into six. The X550 Desktop Virtualisation Kit is perfect for small businesses, schools and Internet cafes, and it is also an energy saver with each access device running at 1 watt per user.

Get it for R6828 (incl VAT) per set. Phone NC Solutions on 011-465-7952 for more info.

PC Hardware

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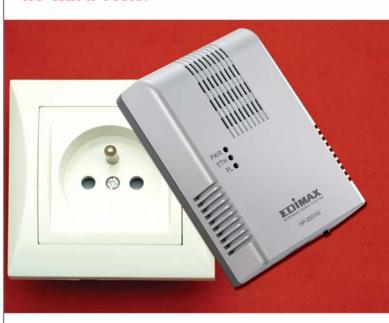
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Multimedia

Thermaltake DH 101 Home Theatre PC **Simplifying your life**

Thermaltake's DH 101 iHome Theatre PC combines many or all components of a home theatre setup into one box. It is basically a mix between a PC, a digital video recorder and and a digital media player. So it's designed to make your life a whole lot easier and your lounge a lot less cluttered.



The DH 101 that we tested came with Windows Vista Ultimate, although Vista Premium and Linux systems are also available. Inside you'll find a 2GHz Intel Pentium Dual Core CPU E2180, 1GB RAM and a 250GB hard drive (which is plenty of space to store all of your pictures, movies and songs). It is HD compatible and comes standard with an HDMI connection. Add to this pretty simple operation seeing that it's really just like using a normal PC. The only really time consuming part is setting up all the wires.

Onboard you'll find a CD/DVD RW drive, so not only can you watch CDs and DVDs (rendering your current DVD player unnecessary), but you can also burn both DVDs and CDs. You can also plug your 5.1 surround sound system directly into the DH 101. The fact that it can also record your favourite TV programs is one of the major benefits of the system. All you have to do is set the channel, date and time the recording should take place. It also has two USB ports into which you can plug your removable storage devices.

The DH 101 comes with the option of *iMEDIAN* software. *iMEDIAN* is a media centre which manages all multimedia files and devices in your PC. With *iMEDIAN* you can use an iMON VFD remote control (included with DH 101) which will allow you to manage all the controls and settings from your couch. Alternatively you can use the *HyperMedia Centre* or the Windows *Media Centre* software to organise all your multimedia files. Unfortunately with these programmes, you won't be able to use the remote for this.

Not only is the DH 101 ultra functional, it's also very stylish and will add a real touch of class to any lounge. It has piano mirror coating with an aluminium front panel design.

The very useful Media LAB LCD display rounds it off incredibly well.

Could home entertainment get any easier? We don't think so and that's why the Thermaltake DH 101 comes highly recommended.

You can contact Maraboe Information Technology Services on 083-709-9913/ 086-632-6303 or alternately you can send an email to jean@maraboeit.co.za to find out more about their range of Media PCs.

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package purchased (R1990) you receive two Ethernet adapters. Say for example you want to connect the PC in your study to a printer situated in another room: What you need to do is plug one Ethernet adapter into the wall socket closest to your printer and connect it to the printer via the included Ethernet cable. The other adapter goes to the socket closest to your PC, also connecting it to your PC via Ethernet cable. And that is it. A LAN with no hassle or fuss. The same applies if you want to link VoIP phones, security cameras or a PC to a router.

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will start downloading. Download speed of course depends on the type of Internet connection you have, but on the GTS network you are looking at about 30 minutes per movie. Movies can either be rented or purchased outright, with rented movies only remaining in your media player for a set amount of time once you've pressed

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Sony Ericsson G705 Expect a lot for less

or a phone that is not a smartphone Sony Ericsson's (SE) G705 slider sure packs a lot of punch. Apart from the usual functionality it includes two features that you will not find in many mid-range phones - Wi-Fi and aGPS.

Unlike regular GPS units, aGPS makes use also of GPRS technology for a location fix. The Wayfinder Navigator software is great in assisting you with turn-by-turn navigation, but the downside is that you only receive a trial version onboard (€69 for 12 months or €8.99 for one month after that for South Africans). It feels a bit like extortion to pay to use the functionality of your phone

We feel that manufacturers that offer onboard GPS or aGPS should provide free navigation software and local maps. Otherwise we would highly recommend buying a separate GPS unit.

SE managed to cram a lot of functionality into the G705 without it growing too complex. We believe that the G705 will set the standard to which all mid-range



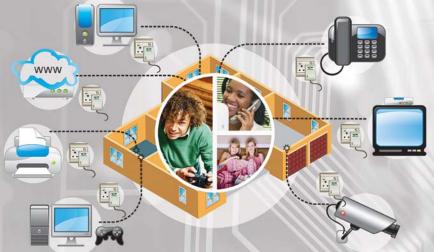


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HOW TO: Make Your Very Own Backlit USB Keyboard



USB (Universal Serial Bus) is truly a marvellous thing. What makes the USB standard so clever is that it combines both the communication channel for a device as well as the power that it needs to run. So in effect any USB port is both a port (like a serial port or parallel port) and a power socket. That is why a USB mouse doesn't need batteries. It gets power directly from the port.

✓ nowing what I know about USB I decided to build my own backlit USB keyboard. Backlighting is great for low light conditions, and

What you need:

- A keyboard
- A USB cable or old USB device you can take the cable from
- LEDs (Get about 50 x 3mm ones if you can, rated at about 1.7 V)
- · Some resistors (depending on the voltage of your LEDs)

 $N^{
m ow\ I}$ could just have bought a USB keyboard (which you could do), but I found an old PS/2 connector type keyboard and an old USB mug-warmer that would make the perfect USB experiment.

The first thing you need to do is to carefully strip out the USB cable from whatever device it came from. Make sure to note which wires in the main cable housing are for power and which are for data.

Now strip down the keyboard. This usually means turning it upside down and removing about 12 screws. Now carefully remove the back panel from the keyboard, ensuring not to spill the contents all over the floor. You will probably find that your keyboard, like mine, has a rubber mat with little bubbles that the keys depress when you press them. These bubbles then press down on a sensitive printed circuit board that executes the commands you enter. Now carefully press out all the keys, so that you are left with just the shell of the keyboard.

The next thing to do is to carefully mark out where you are going to place all your LEDS. Plan your layout so that you can tape all the wires down neatly in between the key spaces (unlike mine, which is a mess of wires). Once you have decided the proper spacing, drill 3mm holes through the shell. Now glue your LEDS in place using super-glue. I made a configuration of two LEDS in parallel with a resistor inbetween each, in order to use the 5V source from the USB port. I soldered all the pairs together and then hooked them all up in series so that each pair would now use the same 5V source. I also had to hook up the communication wires from the old PS/2 connector to those of the USB connector.

I tested it out and it worked first time. I then concluded that it was a miracle as nothing like this has ever worked first time. All that was left was to carefully tape down all the wires from the LEDS and carefully put it all back together again. [AG]











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Beware the charge of the electric cars



looks like the green wheels are ready to roll in 2009.

oca-Cola recently announced that they will add 185 more hybrid delivery trucks to their current 140-odd strong hybrid

fleet to deliver the "Brrrr" across North America this year. The trucks are equipped with a motor/generator and a set of lithium-ion batteries to power the vehicle when travelling up to 60km/h. This reportedly reduces fuel consumption and associated carbon emissions by up to 30%, compared to conventional trucks.

For those, especially in big European and American cities, who have switched to electric cars, parking and charging



seems to be a bit of a problem. In a (moneymaking?) effort to ease the pain and promote easy switch-over, the national car park provider in the UK launched a campaign to auction 50 charging bays in London last month. The highest bidder will be awarded use of a charging

It's a new year and it bay close to home or office for a year. We're not to sure if ar extra 50 available parking bays will really get you to switch over, but it could just make your neighbours, uhm, green with envy in trend-crazy London. Every little bit helps.

If you thought electric cars all look like Postman Pat's with a top speed of just more than 30km/h, think again. Mercedes Benz unveiled its BlueZERO electric concept car at the Detroit Motor Show in January. It looks really spiffy and can put out an average 100kW and about 180Nm. You can choose between three green models: battery-powered, battery/internal combustion engine hybrid, or hydrogen fueled, with the hybrid option allowing up to 600 guilt-free kilometres. The company hopes to have some in production by 2010. [LP]





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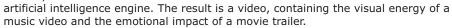
why animoto

www.animoto.com

Animoto.com is a web application that creates MTV-style videos with the click of a button.

You just choose a song and a bunch of your own images. Animoto then automatically generates a unique video for them. No two videos are ever

Many of the post-production techniques that the founders used while working as producers for MTV and Comedy Central, are used in Animoto's



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www.internetshout.com

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with complete voice-based communication.

Just like a standard forum, you can create new threads (conversations) and post to existing conversations or "Shouts", but you can record your post directly on the website and listen to other Shouts / Posts instantly with CD-quality streaming

www.gadgetblog.co.uk

Yes it's the 143rd best gadget website in the world, allegedly. Gadget Blog's creator says: "Gadget Blog is the result of me being addicted to weird and wonderful things since I was knee high to a grasshopper. Suffice to say, I was the kid you sat next to at school who desperately wanted his Sea Monkeys to ride bicycles and live in sea castles when they grew up."

Although it's unlikely you'll



ever see sea monkeys riding bicycles on this guy's blog, you will see all the latest stuff gadget-wise, presented in a fun and irreverent fashion.

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Create your own Personal Start Pages

Written by Lance Terner, 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.

What exactly are personal, or personalised start pages? Personalised start pages are a rapidly growing, and somewhat competitive web phenomenon. The advent of Web 2.0 brought with it a lot of promise in terms of web "interactiveness" (if that's even a real word), and personal start pages are now starting to lead this charge. So what are they really? For the most part they're homepages where you can put a lot of your most often used web information, gadgets and widgets all in one place. Things such as your email, news feeds you're interested in, your favourite radio station, notes, weather, Facebook info, the list goes on. The point being though that you have all of this stuff of yours gathered in one place, on one website, instead of spread across a dozen. The nice part is that being web-based you get the same experience of your information from any browser. The biggest difference between this and old-style portals (think Yahoo! or Hotmail from a while ago) is that you can personalise your start page to a much greater degree. You have many more options in terms of what you can put on your start page, it is far more interactive and it is almost certainly much more useful with the gadgets and widgets you can add in. On top of all of this functionality, superb quality Ajax development is making more of these sites very similar to a desktop-type experience.

In today's much cluttered online world, the need for a decent start page is undeniable. For me the ability to personalise and customise my own space saves me plenty of time and hassle almost every day. These Ajax-based start pages, with their drag-and-drop interfaces, are very easy to use, intuitive, customisable web pages, allowing you to keep up with the latest news and add interactive content. With just a few clicks you can add new news feeds, mail inboxes and widgets, and then still drag your content around the page until you like how it looks. In some ways start pages are the successors to the old-style portals, but they have yet to break into the real mainstream. However the promotion of big players like iGoogle and the presence of MyYahoo are helping get the concept more popular. Let's check out some of the nicer ones out there. You might find one that really works for you:

• Netvibes - www.netvibes.com

Netvibes is a definite leader in this area. Usability has clearly been a big factor in its design and the interface is well thought out, and clean.

Pageflakes – www.pageflakes.com

These guys also have a great site. Getting set up is really easy, with just three steps, and yet it is highly customisable.

Favoor – www.favoor.com

This site is easily the visual pick of the bunch. I think the start page is beautifully designed. Its not so straightforward to setup, but once that's done, it's a great product. Protopage - www.protopage.com

The interface on this site is really neat. It's perhaps not as practical as some of the others, but the drag-and-drop interface and sticky notes (think Post-its) are great.

MyYahoo & iGoogle - http://my.yahoo.com,

www.google.com/ig

Yahoo and Google are the "big players" in this area. For both these sites the interfaces are pretty plain, both are supersimple to use, work well, and get the job done.

If you have any questions or queries drop me a mail, lance@brandedinternet.co.za.

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Double for nothing

Every so often a problem is so vexing it becomes necessary to take extreme corrective action. Whether your PC is suffering from missing dll errors, rampant viruses or just a nonresponsive disposition you will probably have to format it at some point in your relationship.

If you're anything like us you've probably "misplaced" the machine's motherboard CD, and are therefore in a bit of a jam.

To solve this problem we turn to one of our readers, Raymond Robinson, and his more than useful list of "Must Have" freeware. One of the listed applications was Double Driver, a Windows utility, which allows you to identify all the drivers installed on your system and better still to backup, restore, save and print the details of those drivers.

The app also boasts an extremely user friendly interface allowing you to

organise your drivers by version, name, date, publisher etc.

Backing up your drivers is an incredibly simple process once they've been identified, you simply select the desired drivers and click the Backup button on the main toolbar and then select your desired destination and it's done. Restoring the drivers is as simple; making this one of the most useful apps we've come across.

Get it from www.boozet.org

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Microsoft Windows 7 Beta

Like Vista should have



he general opinion on Microsoft's Windows Vista operating system is that it's a bit like a vacuum cleaner, meaning it sucks. So what to do to get back some of that good old lovin'? Release a new version in record time. Windows 7 has been available for public beta download since January, and feedback on it is very positive.

This new version seems to perform much faster than Vista and is also less hardware intensive. One of the main

It is jazzed up thanks to nice big icons and contains both your

already running applications, and programs that are available to launch. If you own a Mac you pretty much know what we're talking about here. Overall the feeling is that Windows 7 is exactly what Windows Vista should have been.

Windows 7 is available to download until 10 February. But if you think you're in for a free upgrade think again, your downloaded version will expire on 1 August 2009.

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PC Games

Mirror's Edge I can fly, oh sh...

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

Living life on the fringes of a totalitarian society you, Faith, are a **Runner. Delivering sensitive packages via** the network of rooftons that define your gleaming sterile city, you are skilled in the art of displacement: Pakour.

Action

The game's plot is fairly obvious as your cop sister has been framed for the murder of a high ranking official and you are the only one who can help her. Fight or flight? You use all your skill as a traceuses, to evade your pursuers and uncover the information that will set your sister free.

Mirror's Edge can most readily be described as an action platformer as you perform numerous jumps, grabs and slides in combination, often requiring trial-and-error patience, to overcome various urban obstacles. The game is however unique in the perspective it offers, as you play in first person. The PC version is superior to console versions

for two reasons; it is always easier to play a first person game with a mouse and the graphics are far superior provided you have PhysX support. The implementation of PhysX in Mirror's Edge is excellent with far more realistic character interaction with the surrounding environment. Effects such as Faith, shattering glass or causing a flag to flutter as she breezes past

The game's best features are its beat-your-record races and level speed runs, with both modes featuring online leaderboards, ensuring hours of intense competition. This is more than can be said for its extremely short campaign mode, offering perhaps six hours of play.



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