

mailbox



This month, a backlash against our top columnist, comments on Internet libel laws, more on the lure of Linux, and a dose of cunning MP3 lateral thinking...

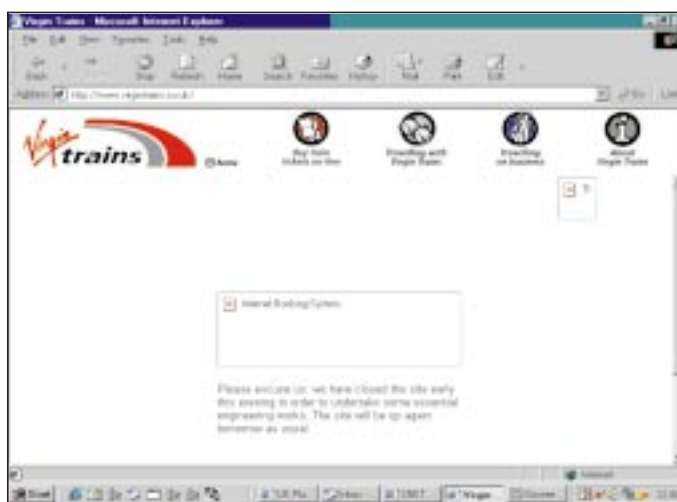
1GHz is not enough

Dave Pearman's rant against 1GHz chips – and the technological progress they represent – made my blood boil. Not only is he biting the hand that feeds him, he is patently and obviously wrong. Years ago, when Dave was reviewing the first DOS-based computers, no one envisaged 3D games, CAD, the Web or even simple spreadsheets. People were stunned by the power of machines with 1KB of memory; I remember being boggled by the launch of the 16KB add-on module for the ZX81 – how was anyone ever going to fill it? Dave is being similarly short-sighted when he says no one really needs a 1GHz processor.

Around the corner – *always* around the corner – are applications that will take computing to the next level. Voice recognition is an obvious candidate but there are many more developments that are simply waiting for computers to become powerful enough. Dave reckons no one needs 1GHz processors; I agree – they aren't nearly powerful enough to run tomorrow's software.

Matthew Kelly

An interesting and certainly valid point of view, but not one that is shared by most *PC Plus* readers.



Virgin Trains continues its fine tradition of unrivalled customer service, as reader Andy Harrold discovered below-right...

Out of the dozens of e-mails we received about Dave's column, yours was the only one to disagree with his conclusion.

MP3 on CD

Despite impressive compression ratios, MP3 files still rapidly consume hard disk space. With over 300 CDs in my collection, my solution is to copy the MP3 files from hard disk to CD-ROM. Media players such as Winamp and MusicMatch Jukebox use these as easily as files on the hard disk. While I still do not have instant access to the entire collection, the limitation hardly

matters when each CD-ROM stores over 10 hours of music, using moderate 128kbps compression to preserve reasonable quality. I have stored a complete set of 30 compilation albums – 720 tracks in all – on just three CD-ROMs with room to spare. Now, does anybody know how to convert ordinary CD players to use MP3?

Alan Pearmain

A display of cunning lateral thinking which some consumer electronics companies are catching on to, fast. Keep your eyes peeled for a new generation of audio CD players and DVD players that will play your MP3 CDs with ease. And if you want to listen to your music on the move, check out our comprehensive reviews of the latest portable MP3 players, starting on page 62.

Café society

Upon my return from Malaysia, complete with sunburn and jet lag, I read an article on remote

access and CS2000. Having an 'address' that can collect from other addresses, I was able to collect my e-mails via my zdnetwork account. The surprising thing was the amount of net café sites. Even a small town had two in sight from where we parked the car. A larger town had four in walking distance. On the two occasions I checked my mail in the tiny town and larger town I was charged one Malaysian Ringgit – equal to 17p for about 15 minutes of Web access.

At a penny a minute this seems to be a very affordable solution. This means that so many Malaysians can have easy and economical Internet access. The country's Vision 2020 mission is to be a completely computer literate country competing with the world's best in IT by that time. All in all, a go-ahead country.

Clive Shearsby

Virgin on the ridiculous

I was planning to do some travel by rail and decided to check out its Web site for information and booking rather than phoning them up and being on hold for ages. Imagine my disbelief when I was confronted by this Web page (see picture above) on its site when checking for train times. Perhaps there were the wrong kind of leaves on the (phone) line?

Andy Harrold

Web woes

What happened to your excellent Web site? The old one was very good, it was easy to navigate around and find all the good stuff. Why fix something that works well?

Thor Hansen

Dave Pearman's rant against 1GHz chips – and the technological progress they represent – **made my blood boil**

READER WEB SITES

Recommended sites from *PC Plus* readers

We asked you to tell us about Web sites, and the e-mails poured in. We're printing the best each month, so make sure you keep them coming!

Reader: Frank Abela, Malta

What the site offers: "On my Web site, I have a spreadsheet with full details of the *PC Plus* CDs – from May 1997 to March 2000. At two CDs an issue, it's an invaluable tool if you're a regular reader!"

We think: Should have thought of it ourselves...

Visit: www.geocities.com/heartland/ridge/3666

Reader: Carmen

What the site offers: "This site contains a game to measure your Web-searching skills. Not only will you sharpen your searching abilities, but you will also be able to compete with other people from around the world."

We think: Nice idea, not sure how well it will work in practice

Visit: <http://webpursuit.cjb.net>

Reader: Michael Houston

What the site offers: "In the June issue of *PC Plus* there was a letter about resetting the BIOS to allow access if it has been password protected and the password was lost or forgotten. This is a simple method but this excellent site has programs which will crack both AMI and Award BIOS passwords."

We think: Excellent recommendation!

Visit: www.neworder.box.sk

Reader: Bill Wheeldin

What the site offers: "I'm a subscriber and have written software in Visual Basic with the help of your tutorials. My latest creation is a program to help in the creation of duty rotas – a 30 day evaluation version is available from my site."

We think: Hope you get a few more hits now.

Visit: www.onedimension.com

Microsoft has held on so tightly to its code that a youngster wanting to learn programming is almost **forced to turn to Linux**

Our mission was not so much to fix the site, as to improve it. To be honest, we're very happy with the result: it's simpler, cleaner and more accessible. If anyone out there hasn't been to the site recently, why not check out www.pcplus.co.uk and let us know what you think?

Survival of the fittest

Just as Clive Sinclair found that his customers were teenagers and retired people, so the Linux community seems to be teenagers and oldies for whom Unix is like 'coming home'.

Amstrad unleashed a generation of Z80 coders in the 1980s who went on to program for the Japanese games machines rather than DOS. Microsoft has held on so tightly to its code that a youngster wanting to learn programming is almost forced to turn to Linux. There he or she will meet a like-minded community and may, in ten years time, be programming for something entirely different.

The Microsoft approach won't disappear; like the IBM AS400, at least one key Microsoft product will survive but it will be within a more diverse computing culture. One of the lessons of ecology is that monocultures lack the diversity essential for survival. Linux and the iMac, both in their different ways, supply the essential diversity.

John Hudson

We agree, up to a point. In the 1980s, children were almost forced into programming because there was nothing else to do with their computers. (Aye, we made our own entertainment – Ed) Games and applications were extremely primitive. Today's high street is stocked with high-powered PCs and games consoles, all of which are far more immediately gratifying to children. We suspect that the next generation's choice of languages and platforms will be dictated by the schools and universities they attend.



Although we can't help you assimilate your users (yet), we at the DESkey collective can make sure they pay for your software. Contact our sales team today, discuss your requirements and order a *Free Developer Kit*. Either that or we'll pop round with the nanoprobes.

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Software Protection that works



Want to assimilate your users?

I'm glad that your magazine is giving a **share of the OS spotlight** to Linux and that you can convince more people to 'give it a go'

Expensive errors

In your June edition the comparison between Linux and NT suggests Unix administrators are more expensive than those of Windows-based systems. It must be remembered that many Unix systems are large business-critical systems that require highly skilled administration, not only from the view of operating system knowledge but, more importantly, knowledge of data centre procedures and methodology – statistics suggest most down time is caused by human error. Accidentally rebooting an NT workgroup server may be acceptable but a mistake on a large system is not.

My experience of working in the IT industry suggest that NT administrators with the depth of experience to run large mission critical NT systems are just as rare and just as expensive as their Unix counterparts. There are cheap NT administrators out there who have installed NT on their home PC – no doubt Linux will bring people of the same skill level into the Unix marketplace. You get what you pay for!

Andy Moss

Libel laws

Everyone knows libel is a very serious matter. I would take great pains to retaliate if it was done to me. And, after being accused of fraud, have done! (See the Benefits Agency link on my Web site, www.skilful.com.) But consider this: with Usenet, people like Maxwell would stand no chance today. The pension fund would be safe. Free speech is more important – if someone libels you, then sue him or her.

Like you, I think ISPs should not be made accountable – BT and Royal Mail are not responsible for content. Analogy: if I sent you a filthy libellous

postcard from my office out tray, everybody in my office could read it. Anybody in Royal Mail from pick up, to delivery postman could. Anybody in your post room could, also all your office looking at the in tray. It is stupid that the conveyor of the message should be prosecuted. This is a case of shooting the messenger.

Garry Anderson

We don't quite see how "Maxwell would stand no chance today" but we take your point. However, suing someone for libel is a costly and time consuming business – and even if you win, you're not guaranteed to be awarded costs. As you say, the answer is not to blame the ISP – if a bloke in Basingstoke libels you on-line, why should your ISP shoulder the blame? What we need is a change in our archaic libel laws, so that they protect the average man in the street, not just the rich and famous.

Give it a go

I bought last month's issue of *PC Plus*, and at first kicked myself for having just bought Red Hat Linux when I saw Mandrake on the cover. I was having a few difficulties with Red Hat 6.1 and when you mentioned that Mandrake found a SoundBlaster Live! card... well I couldn't help myself but try. Absolutely fantastic. I'm even more converted to Linux now!

I'm glad that your magazine is giving a share of the OS spotlight to Linux and that you can convince more people to 'give it a go', since I think too many people conform with Microsoft and, though I think Windows is excellent for new computer users, I don't think it is as good an OS as it should be. Keep up the good work, and well done on quality Linux information.

Colin Asquith

TAXAN MONITOR WINNER

Write a *PC Plus* Star Letter and win yourself this superb Taxan 17-inch monitor, worth £280!



star letter

Perfect world

With operating systems always improving and evolving, will we ever reach the utopia?

With reference to Richard Holden's letter in the June 2000 issue: I also regard myself as sane but I am not looking for a good alternative to Windows. What I am looking for, is a stable, transparent operating system. How much time is spent 'tweaking' operating systems? Whether it is Windows, Linux, Mac, BeOS and so on, surely most people would rather get on with the tasks at hand than checking this, configuring that and defragging everything.

Surely a truly competitive OS war would drive down costs, but would it give us what we want? A stable, self-configuring, self-maintaining system that stays out of the way. I know I would rather put my PC to the uses I bought it for.

Gary Casey

We couldn't agree more. Operating systems are always improving and evolving, but we may never reach the utopia you describe. Software is written by humans and humans are, unfortunately, all too fallible. At the very least, the wait for the perfect OS – without a single error in all its millions of lines of code – is going to be a long one.

FEEDBACK

Write to *PC Plus*!

Let us know what you think of the magazine

What do you like (or dislike) about the magazine? What would you like to see? And what do you think about the products and companies in the PC industry? Whatever the answer, we want to know.

● Please write in. Short, concise letters or e-mails are much more likely to be used, as life's too short to extract the important bits from a massive submission. We'll be giving a Star Letter prize away in future issues, so get those letters coming in.

● E-mail is the best way to send your comments. For *Mailbox* send them to: pcplus.editor@futurenet.co.uk or fax them to: 01225 732295.

● Alternatively, print your letter and send to: Mailbox, PC Plus, Future Publishing, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

● Every letter will be read by the editor, and the most interesting (not the most complimentary!) letters will be printed and answered on these pages. We reserve the right to edit letters to fit, and the opinions expressed on these pages are those of *PC Plus* readers, and do not necessarily represent those of the editorial team. Letters and e-mails are assumed to be for publication unless stated otherwise, and published versions of letters become copyright Future Publishing.

● We regret that we can't always answer letters personally, but questions of general interest may also be covered in *Help Screen*.