



Product news

Gadgets containing more functions and getting smaller

Multimedia Mystic fails test

We asked three Which? members to try Rimax's new combined MP4 player and telephone for a week and asked them – is it any good?

The popularity of camera phones has shown the attraction of products that combine several technologies in one small package. The Mystic is one such device – a portable audio/video player that doubles up as a Voip, or internet, telephone.

As a media player the Mystic features a 1.5-inch screen for showing videos as well as playing back most commonly used audio files. It also has an FM radio, a Jpeg picture viewer and the capacity to record from voice or radio. Connect it to your computer via a USB and it converts into a Voip handset, allowing cheap, or even free, calls.

Our trial started badly when one of our users reported that her Mystic was faulty. We sent her a replacement but more was to come. All our users found their models difficult to set up, with the instructions described as very basic and lacking the detail to make good sense.

And powering up was also a problem, with the chargers provided described as useless and the process a 'nightmare'.

Once they had power, the users had some good news to report. Transferring music to the Mystic was easy, as was using the radio. Yet problems persisted. Our triallists found the controls too small, the headphones very uncomfortable and the

sound very crackly. Sadly, the Mystic's Voip performance was disappointing, too. While one of our three users had some success, neither of the others was able to operate it.

'None of the functions appear to work, my computer refused to recognise it and I cannot charge the batteries,' one concluded. **VERDICT** This marriage of Voip service with MP4 technology has some way to go before it can be deemed a success. The Mystic appears to be afflicted with a wide range of problems and none of our users would buy one. And their findings were supported by independent research that we commissioned.

The Mystic is available online – prices from £64.99.

All our users found their models difficult to set up



Innovative Mystic did not find favour



The Zune prepares for battle

First look

The Apple iPod reigns supreme among MP3s – but the MS Zune is on its way

Microsoft's new 30GB Zune has a three-inch screen and plays songs and videos, which owners can download to their PCs via the Zune Marketplace – a website similar to iTunes. To download tracks you'll need to buy Microsoft 'points'. This works in a similar way to a mobile phone pay-as-you-go top-up system.

The Zune also has several innovations. Potentially the best is its ability to let nearby users share songs and photos they have downloaded wirelessly, although time restrictions take much of the fun out of it.

We found the Zune's controls easy to use and the large display is a bonus. But it's bulky and feels unrefined, particularly when compared with the latest beautifully sleek iPods. Users of other major download sites will be disappointed because it won't play songs using the protected Windows Media Audio format unless they have been downloaded from the Zune marketplace.

At the moment the Zune has no UK release date and we advise against importing one. It's incompatible with UK Windows XP and works only if you install a North American version, which could cause problems.

VERDICT There's much to like about the Zune, including its simple controls and large display. However, we can't see it matching the appeal of the new and improved Best Buy iPod anytime soon (see 'Just out', opposite).

Wake up, little snoozy, wake up

GADGETEER

The Flying Alarm Clock is on a mission to get you out of bed and keep you there. When it's time to wake up the alarm clock launches a propeller that speeds around your room with a mosquito-like buzz.

The noise is irritating enough to force you out of bed to hunt for the device to return it to the base station.

Don't think that you can get away with just stabbing the snooze button, either, because once your dozing

time is up it will force you out of bed by taking flight again – and, as with all great gadgets, this one's won a design award for innovation and flair.

Available for £20 from www.boysstuff.co.uk.



Flying alarm – Rip Van Winkle would hate it

26.4 million

music downloads were sold last year in the UK

BRITISH PHONOGRAPHIC INDUSTRY

£1.22 billion

the value of the games software market in 2005

MINTEL

6%

of all internet users are downloading illegally

BRITISH PHONOGRAPHIC INDUSTRY

The battle of the consoles warms up

Nintendo aims to extend happy gaming market

GAMES

Nintendo has been without a leading games console for some time, but the launch of its Wii (pronounced 'wee') ought to change that. In stark contrast to its competitors (the Microsoft Xbox 360 and forthcoming PS3) the Wii isn't all about super-fast processors and flashy graphics – instead it's about trying to make the gaming experience enjoyable and fun for a wider audience. It costs £179.99, including five games.

You can play wirelessly: the Wii controller (Wiimote) is wireless and powered by two AA batteries. Cleverly, it reacts to move-ment, meaning you can control your games character (dubbed Mii) in a very intuitive way. For instance, playing a tennis game involves moving the controller as you would a tennis racquet – likewise for the golf and bowling games which are also included.



Wii brings physical activity to the games console

You'll need to attach the remote sensor (supplied) to your television for this, though.

Graphics on the released games are more about cartoonish fun than ultimate realism, which just adds to the overall 'friendly' experience. Kids will soon engage with the wacky game titles on offer, though they are around £40 each.

VERDICT We found it's more fun if you have a partner to play with, and some games are surprisingly physical. But you'll need to buy an extra controller (£44.99) for maximum two-player fun.

Euro delay for the PS3

European gamers will have to wait until March for the new £335 PS3 from Sony which is already in Japan and the US. A global shortage of diodes meant the UK missed out. Register at www.game.co.uk/ps3



Is it worth it? Yes

Barclaycard has the most credit card customers in the UK with many of its cardholders paying at least 14.9 per cent interest.

However, there are many cards with much lower standard rates and offering 0 per cent on transferred balances or purchases.

For example, M&S's &More card charges 3.9 per cent for as long as it takes you to repay a debt you bring from another credit card – and doesn't demand a transfer fee.

VERDICT

Repaying £2,000 over two years with the M&S &More card would cost £222 less than with Barclaycard. See 'Best ways to borrow' (p29) and 'Money monitor' (p40) for more on how best to make the most of your finances



Barclaycard

14.9% = £304 interest



Marks & Spencer &More

3.9% FOR LIFE OF TRANSFER = £82 interest

Saving = £222

Just out

Bosch washer £470

The Logixx 8 washing machine has much to recommend it if Bosch is to be believed. Its textured surface drum system washes more gently and more effectively. And the super-quick program produces 2kg of clean clothes in just 15 minutes. Full results in June. Available online now. See also p44.



iPod £164/£220 (30/80GB)

The new Apple iPod is once again worthy of Best Buy status. It has a much improved battery life: the 80GB version produces 21 hours of continuous music per charge – four more than the previous version. The 30GB manages only a one-hour improvement at 16 hours, though.



MS Vista from £185

Microsoft's new operating system Vista claims to have better security and usability, more media options and new graphics. It's available in five versions from the end of the month. More in March's *Computing Which?* and at microsoft.com/uk/windowsvista



Mio C250 sat-nav £170

Mio cashes in on the demand for sat-navs by launching this well-equipped budget model. The C250's features include a 3.5-inch touchscreen, full UK map coverage, details of major European roads, information on speed camera locations (plus updates for a year) and free traffic alerts. Available online.

