

tools of the trade

World's Lightest PC

Following Sony's decision to get out of the PDA market in the West, here's the Sony Vaio U71—a second-generation “hand-top.” Also called an “always-carry notebook,” the 6.6 × 4.3 × 1-inch



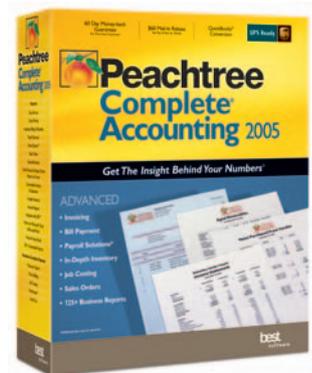
Sony Vaio U71

pen-based PC weighs a mere 1.2 pounds. The screen is a bright 800 × 600 SVGA TFT touch-screen that can be read easily, indoors or out, and there are quick-launch button controls on either side of the screen. There's a scrolling control with enter function, a rotate screen button, and a tool-bar button with one-

touch access to mute, volume, and brightness. You can also use the touch-screen with a stick-stylus or smaller fin-like stylus. And the U71 is really a PC with a Pentium M 1.1GHz Dothan processor, 512MB of RAM, a 30GB hard drive, and Sound Blaster compatible audio. It runs Windows XP. Integrated input/output slots include a CF Card slot, Memory Stick, 802.11 b/g wireless LAN, USB 2.0, stereo headset, VGA out, and keyboard. The keyboard is full size, and you use it when the handtop is in its docking platform. The standard battery yields 2.5 hours, and there's an extended-life one available also. Use your search engine to find the best price from local importers. For more images and information, go to <http://www.dynamism.com/u71/main.shtml>.

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Trying to keep up with the Windows XP Service Packs starting to get to you? Well, the tech writer who did the *Windows Annoyance* series for O'Reilly books and two co-authors have created a comprehensive reference guide for Microsoft's most sophisticated operating system. The book is called *Windows XP in a Nutshell: A Desktop Quick Reference*. The nutshell is actually pretty big because there are 663 pages packed into its neatly thumb-indexed interior.

The Computer Social Climbs at Christie's

Michael Castelluccio, Editor

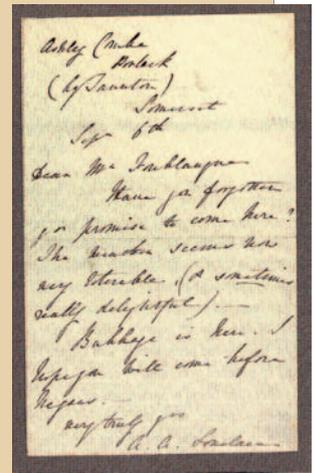
■ DO YOU STILL HAVE THAT OLD ATARI or Apple Newton in a junk box in the cellar or garage? Forget about putting it out again with this summer's yard sale offerings. It just might have archeological value.

Don't believe it? Well, on Wednesday, February 23, the prestigious auction house Christie's held its Origins of Cyberspace auction in New York. About 1,000 items in 255 lots were offered, first as a single lot with a reserve price of \$1.2 million. The reserve wasn't met, so the scramble opened with Lot 1—a 16th Century book on slavery that included an illustration of a very early Roman table abacus or reckoning table—estimated value: \$1,200–\$1,800. The auction ended with lot 255—a grab bag of nearly 300 items once owned by computer pioneer

J.P. Eckert, including his employee ID badge from Sperry Rand's UNIVAC division (1950s). With the last crack of the gavel, 133 of the lots had sold for \$714,060. The Eckert memorabilia brought \$19,200.

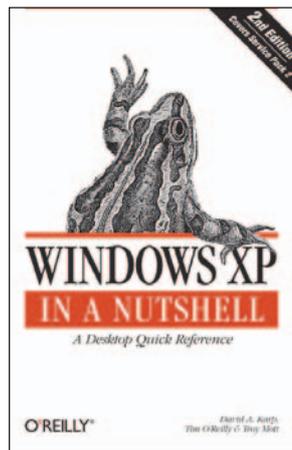
Some Things Old, Some New

The problem facing Christie's when it was first offered the collection by Jeremy Norman was how to estimate values. The items with obvious historical pedigrees should have been easy, but even these were there for



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The basics for using XP are all there with information on virtually every command and utility available, but so are more sophisticated topics, including documentation on system configuration covering the Control Panel, Registry Editor, MS Management Console, and the new Windows

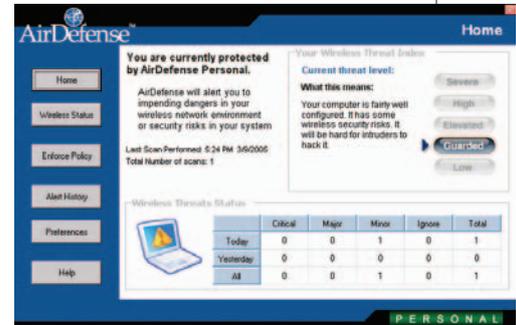


Windows XP in a Nutshell

Security Center. Want to know the best way to set up a wireless home or SOHO network or how to get Bluetooth devices working in your system? The detailed instructions include the gotchas and warnings you need to heed when setting things up. This is a desk reference that covers both Windows XP Home Edition and XP Professional. You can look over the table of contents and read a sample chapter at www.oreilly.com.

Most computer users have learned about phishing through recent stories about stolen identities, but now there's a wireless version called "the evil twin attack" that creates a similar kind of fraudulent

request. Using a laptop or PDA in a hot spot, you might receive a wireless signal from someone nearby who is spoofing (passing himself off as) the provider in the coffee house. His signal overpowers the local service, and, once connected, he requests information to allow you to sign on—personal information that can include ID, passwords, and credit-card information. One company that provides protection against this type of threat is AirDefense of Alpharetta, Ga. The company's enterprise version of its AirDefense system monitors all mobile hardware connected back to



AirDefense Wireless Security

the home server, and every alert sensed on the laptops is logged in at the central office. Since January, the company has offered a free version of its AirDefense Personal monitoring software that senses, assesses, and alerts laptop users of evil twin attacks. The Personal version is available as a free download at www.airdefense.net/products/adpersonal/.

continued from p. 55

their computer historical value. Almost all of it was new territory for the appraisers.

So what would you think the single-page letter pictured on the previous page is worth? It's just a few lines from Ada Lovelace to a friend, asking him to come for a visit. The appraisers thought \$2,000–\$3,000. Ada Lovelace was the daughter of English poet Lord Byron, but she was also the first computer programmer. A mathematician, she wrote the instruction sets for Charles Babbage's Analytical Engine, a calculating machine. The letter ended at \$20,400. There were a number of Babbage items, including the 12-page pamphlet, *On the Application of Machinery to the Purpose of Calculating and Printing Mathematical Tables*. Estimated to sell for \$10,000–\$15,000, it actually brought \$38,000.

From a more recent era, the instruction set outlined in a booklet from the Government Printing Office, titled *COBOL: Initial Specifications for a Common Business-Oriented Language*, came in \$100 under an appraised value of \$2,500. It was printed in 1960. Remember COBOL? Have any of those old binders from when it was a leading-edge language?

But two other business documents created more of a stir on the auction floor. An eight-page typewritten business plan by J.P. Eckert and John Mauchly, dated 1946, bore the simple title "Outline of Plans for Development of Electronic Computers." The badly yellowed pages were offered with a carbon typescript under Christie's characterization: The Founding Document of the Electronic Computer Industry. Apparently collectors also saw this as the cyber equivalent of a Magna Carta because the bidding ended at a surprising



**Two auction items—
Combined bids = \$6,720.**

\$72,000. The appraisers were very close on this one, with an estimated value of \$50,000–\$70,000.

Another business document came from the marketing division of Electronic Control Co. in Philadelphia. It was "the first sales brochure ever published for an electronic digital computer." Mauchly and Eckert wrote the 12-page document to explain how the UNIVAC had evolved from the earlier ENIAC and EDVAC (illustrated above). Yes, that is a vacuum tube on the cover, and it was the component responsible for the 0 and 1 switching logic in these very large and hot-running machines. Once given away free, the brochure was claimed by its latest reader for \$4,560.

Not everything was paper, pamphlets, and bound books during the auction. There were also occasional flashes of Antiques Roadshow "Do you have any idea what this is worth?" curiosity. A box containing something called the Brainiac Electric Brain Kit (see above) was sold for \$2,160. This Brainiac was sent to Edmund Berkeley, the man who designed and sold it through his magazine *Computers and Automation*. There was a French version also designed to teach computing principles. Called Jr 01 Ordinateur, it's a



children's game from French computer maker Bull. The 01 was appraised at \$600, but, possibly because it was missing parts, it didn't sell.

Another interesting geek gewgaw offered was an early version (1843) of the first circular slide rule made in America—something called a Palmer's Computing Scale. In the Christie's catalog there's an explanation for the limited success of the device: "largely because of poor marketing and the American public's fear that use of the device 'would tend to weaken the mind, by causing it to rely upon mere mechanism to make its numbered computations.'" Kind of an ironic note occurring as it does in the middle of a catalog of computer memorabilia. Despite the warning, one soul present at the auction decided the ancient slide rule was worth \$1,440.

Although most of the items at this first auction were paper and historical, consider how our hardware is being replaced at a rapidly increasing rate. As the lifespan for gear shortens to months rather than years, it probably won't be too long before auction houses like Christie's are holding all-hardware events. Still have that first PDA you bought? You might want to hang onto it a little longer. ■