

attention right away. The monitor is also very bright at 500 cd/m² and offers a 1000:1 contrast. The widescreen display supports a WUXGA resolution of 1,920 x 1,200. On the input side of things, the monitor supports component, composite, DVI-D, D-Sub, and S-Video, which means you can connect other entertainment devices, such as your gaming console. It also offers an HDMI interface and supports up to 1080p HD. Although the FP241W has an MRRP of \$1,099, we've seen as low as \$799 at reputable online retailers, which makes it competitive with Dell's 24-inch UltraSharp 2407WFP.

Second Runner-Up: ViewSonic N2060w
(\$459; www.viewsonic.com)

ViewSonic's N2060w makes a great dorm room monitor that doubles as your TV, thanks to a built-in NTSC TV tuner. The widescreen LCD TV offers 20 inches of high-definition TV viewing screen area and has a decent 700:1 contrast ratio. Although the monitor can't match our other picks' resolutions (the N2060w tops out at 1,366 x 768), it's quite bright at 450 nits and boasts an 8ms grey-to-grey response time. The TV includes cable, composite, component, D-Sub, and S-Video inputs and supports 480i, 480p, 720p, and 1080i. The two 3W speakers provide audio in a pinch, and the monitor

also has a 3.5mm audio in/out jack. At \$459, the N2060w LCD TV makes for a pretty good deal.

Networking Devices

We wish we could say that most of today's newest wireless network equipment won't cause you the headaches that previous gear induced. Wireless manufacturers are pushing 802.11n gear (802.11n is still in draft form, as the IEEE won't ratify the standard until as late as 2008), with promises of great bandwidth and ranges that far outreach the existing big cheese, 802.11g. As it stands, we can't say that draft 802.11n is all it's cracked up to be: After reviewing several draft-n routers recently ("The Draft-n Debate," November 2006 *CPU*, page 16), we didn't find any that really wowed us. That's not to say that the 802.11n won't be a solid choice down the road, but this year, we've found other noteworthy equipment.

Winner: Bigfoot Networks Killer NIC
(\$279.99; www.killernic.com)

We're proof that high-end PC gear can't completely make up for poor aim and minimal talent, but there's no question that said gear and your Internet connection do make a difference. Lag slows the action on your screen compared to what's really happening in the game's virtual world, creating

a disadvantage for your character. If you've ever experienced really bad lag, you know the frustration of being shot down by other characters who are far faster than you.

Your computer's components in general (and graphics card in particular) shoulder much of the responsibility for your system's gaming performance, but your network connection also plays an important role. Dial-up connections can't keep pace with many of today's online games and create comical situations in first-person shooters. Broadband Internet connections give you a fighting chance, but you'll still be envying the single-digit pings of players who have faster connections to the game server. Bigfoot Networks helps even those odds with its Killer NIC, which is a network interface card that prioritizes gaming data to lower your lag.

Bigfoot's Killer NIC NPU (Network Processing Unit) cuts the card out of the standard path data follows during the game to smooth graphics. The card skips the Windows network stack, which lets it move data more quickly during gaming. It also takes over some work from the CPU. As a result, the card improves frame rates and lowers pings.

Of course, you may find yourself in situations where you want to raise your ping to put yourself on an even playing field with your friends. To that end, the card offers a Ping Throttle feature, which lets you add about 20ms to your ping via the Killer NIC.

Killer NIC is flashy, thanks to a stylized, aluminum "K" heatsink (which has nickel plating that adds bling), but the components are much more serious: a 400MHz processor and 64MB DDR memory. The PCI card also boasts a Gigabit Ethernet port, giving it the flexibility to any network you're likely to encounter.

First Runner-Up: D-Link DSM-520
MediaLounge Wireless HD Media Player
(\$249.99 www.dlink.com)

If you're looking for a way to stream media files on your living room TV and speakers without investing in a new media center PC, D-Link's MediaLounge may be the way to go. The media player connects to your 802.11g network and streams the



Bigfoot Networks Killer NIC