

# PCs With Talent

New machines stand in for the DVD player, the stereo and more

**MULTIMEDIA** | Daniel Sterling rarely uses his computer for computing.

Sterling depends on his Hewlett-Packard Co. Media Center Edition PC to record television shows, manage music playlists and organize digital photos. Hooked to a 53-inch projection TV, Sterling's PC effectively replaced his VCR, CD player and slide projector.

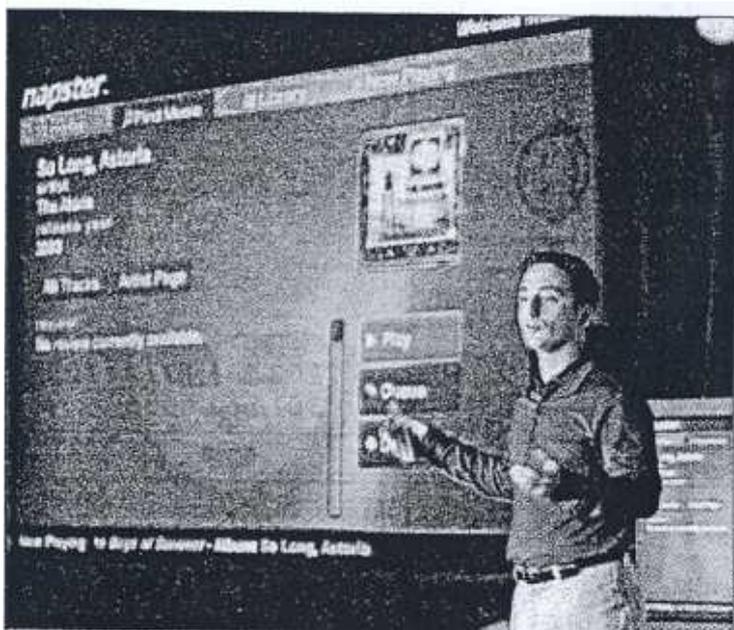
"I don't use the computer functions at all," said Sterling, a 32-year-old Web designer. "I just want to use the remote control and click through my music."

Sterling's habits are part of a trend computer makers hope to exploit with PCs that look and act more like living room entertainment devices than office tools. Less than a year after Microsoft Corp. and a handful of computer makers rolled out the first Media Center PCs, computers that blur the line with traditional consumer electronics are poised for wider distribution as Microsoft updates the software and more PC manufacturers see a market for all-in-one devices.

Last week, Microsoft introduced the second generation of its Media Center operating system, a specialized version of Windows that makes it easier to watch and record TV and play music through a PC. And by the end of the year, PC giant Dell Inc. is expected to start selling PCs that run the Media Center software.

As the PC industry continues to slog through a sales slump, manufacturers are eager to entice customers with new reasons to upgrade. Falling component prices make PCs with DVD burners and TV tuners less expensive. And the popularity of digital entertainment has made people more willing to play music and movies on their PCs.

Only a few hundred thousand media-based PCs have been sold in the last year. But some analysts predict that entertainment-oriented computers could become the dominant format for consumer PCs within two years, particularly if prices drop below \$1,000.



IS THAT NAPSTER? It is indeed — now assimilated into Microsoft Media Center.

## MULTIPLY YOUR MEDIA

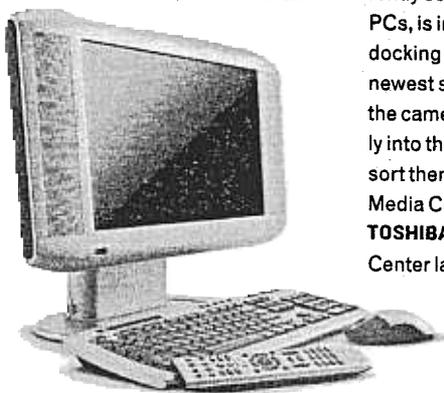
With Dell in the game by the end of the year, Media Center PCs could start making serious inroads into America's living rooms. A look at what some other computer makers have planned:

**GATEWAY** thinks it's solved the cord conundrum with an all-in-one media computer that looks more like a television than a PC. The company's 610 Media Center, which will be available later this month, has a 17-inch

wide-aspect screen for DVD viewing, built-in stereo speakers, a wireless keyboard and a remote. The guts of the computer are hidden behind the screen.

**HEWLETT-PACKARD**, which currently sells the most Media Center PCs, is integrating a digital camera docking station into the top of its newest system. Users can attach the camera to load photos directly into the computer, then edit and sort them. HP is also releasing a Media Center notebook.

**TOSHIBA**, which sells two Media Center laptops, is introducing at least one more, counting on people who want to take their media on the road. (L.A. TIMES)



Microsoft's new software incorporates an FM tuner and the ability to zoom in on the screen of a television broadcast. It can be accessed via remote control, making the experience more like watching TV than using a computer. The Media Center PC can function as the center of a home entertainment system, playing DVDs, CDs and digital music through a TV or stereo.

Plugging a PC into an entertainment system is easy. Tougher to overcome has been the perception of "a computer with all those wires not being a living room product," said Gartner Research analyst Michael Silver. Not a problem: Gateway is planning a living-room friendly PC that hides its innards behind its monitor.

TERRIL YUE JONES (L.A. TIMES)