

Your Personal Computer Guide

By Walton Chin

Preface: Welcome to the computer guide where you will find new and interesting information regarding computers and things around computers. In the issue's to come in the near future I will try to keep you inform on various new developments and tips on using various software programs. In this issue I will presented to you a simply guide in plan English on buying your first computer.

Things to Consider Before Buying a Computer

In the initial stages of determining what sort of computer you need to get, at some point you need to ask yourself, what am I going to be using the computer for? Whether you intend to write papers for class, surf the World Wide Web, or just play computer games, you need to have an idea of what the minimum requirements the computer needs to have. If all you intend to do is just write letters using a DOS based word processing program, with a 386 or 486 processor system with a couple megabytes of memory is more than adequate. If you want to use a Windows version of some word processing program, then your requirements go up a bit, particularly on the amount of RAM memory and hard disk space. If you want to be able to surf the Web and play some of the multimedia on-line virtual reality games, then you need a higher-end system, with more memory, more disk space, and a modem or network card to connect to the Internet.

Once you determine what you need the computer for, the next question that you need to ask yourself is how much money I can afford to spend. If you are looking for a Pentium 4 based system, expect to pay around \$1700.00 to \$2000.00 for a good quality system including basic software and a regular monitor.

Buy as much PC as you can afford. Don't cut corners on the main system unit (monitor, processor, memory, disk space, etc.). If you are short on cash, hold off on the printer or a software application or two that you really don't need right away. Remember, this system is going to last you at least 2 or 3 years or more and you don't want to start running out of disk space or memory in the first week that you have it because you trimmed down the amount of memory or got a smaller hard drive so that you could afford to buy 18 different versions of a screen saver program!

Remember, you get what you pay for. If the price is cheap, most likely the components are cheap. For example, a good brand name 40 GB (Gigabyte) hard drive currently sells for \$80 to \$100. If a salesman talks you into their in-house brand for \$20, make sure you have them throw in an extra set of rubber bands! Or a good quality 17 inch color SVGA monitor will typically go for somewhere in the range of \$300 to \$600. If the local computer store is selling a high-end model SVGA monitor for only \$150, check to see if there is a crank on the side! Finally, give yourself some room to work. Shoot for a dollar amount but be willing to spend a couple hundred more to get exactly what you want and something that you'll be happy with. If you say I want the best computer graphics workstation made, but I don't want to spend more than \$200, I say go buy yourself a 64-pack of Crayolas with some colored paper, because that's all you can afford. Be realistic!

What is the Main Purpose of the Computer

If you have made the decision to buy a computer, there must be a reason or need that you have to get one, other than I have \$1200 burning a hole in my pocket and I need to get rid of it! A good reason for buying a computer would be something like writing papers for a class or keeping track of your finances or business. A bad reason for buying a computer would be something like your best friend has one or everyone else you know has one, because you're probably never going to use it and you end up with a \$1200 paper weight.

Some Helpful Tips To Buying A Computer

- Buy smart: If you don't know a lot about computers, buy a computer similar to what your friends or family have. It will most likely be

them who teach you to use it, or the people you'll be swapping information with.

- Don't waste your money: The average computer is expected to last 3 to 4 years until it should be replaced. Computers are very expensive and in most cases, no matter what you buy, there is always something bigger and better out there. Try not to waste money on big, expensive, top of the line products when you really have no need for them. For example, do not buy a \$500 3d video card if you plan on using your computer as a word processor

Tips:

Decide whether you really need a computer, then whether you fit into the category of typical home user or professional/enthusiast and set an upper limit of what you can afford to spend.

Start talking to friends, family, and business contacts or visit a few computer user groups to figure out whether you want a PC or a product by Apple. Ask them what they got, where they got it, and whether they feel good about it now. If you have a specific task to do with the computer, find out what software program(s) you'll need to do it. If the program(s) you need will only run on an Apple, the question has been answered for you.

Regardless of the type of computer the software needs, find out what else it needs in terms of memory and storage space.

Salespeople are experts on prices. Some of them are even knowledgeable about the technology, although after you've read this supplement, you may know more than many of them do. Few of them really care about what you want to do with you computer.

Once you've done enough homework to feel confident that you're not going to get ripped off, narrow your selections down to two or three options, then go back and get very specific about components, technical support options, and warranties, keeping in mind that the lowest price isn't always the best deal and that verbal assurances are meaningless unless they're also written on the sales agreement.

If you feel uncomfortable about the deal you're being offered for any reason, trust your instincts. Make a decision and purchase your new computer when you need it; waiting for new technology or lower prices is a never-ending game.

Once you've purchased your new system, stop shopping. But if for any reason you feel it isn't working properly, exercise your warranty. A new computer should work perfectly with all the software that came with it.

Enjoy the heck out of your new system, keeping well-meaning friends and family from "improving" it until you get used to what you have. Then plan to repeat this madness in anywhere from two to four years once your needs and expectations outstrip what you bought this time.

In the next issue I will be discuss with you some software programs that you can put into your new system.

If you have any computer questions, comments and concerns you can e-mail them to me at wchin@primus.ca I am a Microsoft Certified Office User Specialist.

Happy Computing