What You Need To Know When Buying A Personal Computer

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What You Need To Know When Buying A Personal Computer

BUYING A PERSONAL COMPUTER - General Information:
Familiarize yourself with some of the computer language
and terminology then shop at several different computer
stores and test some of the hundreds of different models
being offered. Most of the computers and programs are
simple to operate and you can perform many valuable tasks
as well as play games.

Keep in mind that the cost of the system you purchase will
usually include only the basic "software" needed and you
will probably have to purchase more later in order to do
everything you want your computer to do for you. Most
software is not cheap...

The basic system consists of the Central Processing Unit,
a Keyboard, Screen (Monitor) and Printer. A "mouse" is
used on some brands and a cassette recorder can also be
used, mostly for games and short programs. A flexible
disk (floppy disk) similar to a small phonograph record;
or a hard disk, together with an instructional manual,
contain the programs that tell the person... and the
computer, what to do.

A component that changes electric signals into audio
tones, called a "Modem" is used to link your unit with
others over the telephone.

Across the country are located large computer systems
which store a great amount of information on various
subjects. You can hook the computer into one or more of
these systems with a "Data-Base Management" program, and
by paying a monthly user fee.

The smallest unit of information for the computer is the
"Bit". 8 Bits make a "Byte". "Memory" takes two
forms...RAM which means Random Access Memory, is a
temporary memory picked up when you enter information into
the keyboard or from a disk...ROM means Read Only Memory
is measured in "K's" with 1,024 Bytes-1K.

The software program will display a "Menu" on the screen.
You choose what you want the computer to do and press the
proper keys specified in the menu in order to perform the
task.

One of the greatest uses of the computer is "word
processing", which is merely "glorified" typing, using the
keyboard with the copy appearing on the screen as you

type. You can correct or change your copy in just about
any way imaginable and perform many other time saving
functions before the copy is "sent to the printer" or to a
disk to be stored for future processing or printing.

Before you make a decision on the purchase be sure you
have a good idea of what computer applications you want.
Are you going to use it extensively for word processing?
For Accounting? Budgeting, Education, Entertainment, or
perhaps a mailorder newsletter which requires fancy
pictures and a good deal of art work, etc.

Pick up the brochures and booklets explaining the various
computers and the software programs so you can review and
study the various functions and make comparisons of ease
of operation, price refund policy, etc.

When you shop for a computer system ask to operate the
various computers yourself so that you will get the feel
of each different brand.

Find out about the warranty and service, the availability
of added hardware and software.

Does the dealer offer instructions with the purchase? Get
the total cost for the unit and the software which will be
required to perform the applications you want.

Purchase only the minimum software you need to get started
and learn each program as you proceed. You will have a
much better knowledge of just what additional software you
will need after you have had the computer for a short time
and have become more familiar with what it will do for
you. However, since you will have substantial funds
invested it will pay to purchase all the software
necessary for your various needs so that you will get full
value from your investment, but be certain you are not
getting substitute programs or partial duplications of
ones you already have.

What do you need a computer for?
You can now purchase a computer that will run thousands of
different programs. You can do just about anything; from
games and entertainment to instruction, mathematics,
engineering, managing any kind of data, to desk top
publishing, business inventories and accounting. Those
old timers in the accounting profession and in business
management now look back over the many years of working
without a computer and wonder how it was possible to
accomplish what they did without a computer. Printers can
now purchase a desktop publishing system for $10,0000
sufficient for many typesetting jobs that previously cost

$60,000 just a couple of years ago. The computer-laser system is much faster thus saving on labor costs and by using plain paper at less than 1› a sheet instead of photo paper at 30› to 60›, they can cut operating costs extensively.

What kind of computer do you need?
First look at the ease of use. Is it "user friendly"? Is the instruction manual easy to follow? Is there adequate software available for it? Does it give you a large enough screen to fit any work you will require? Can you "import" other compatible programs, images, etc., and merge with existing work? Does it give detailed realistic and high resolution results? How about color? Will you need color now or in the future? Is it easily expandable so that more memory or circuit boards, etc., can be added as your need grows? What type of printers will the computer handle?

Can you get questions answered and help when you need it. What about repairs, guarantees and service contracts? How much memory comes with the basic computer and is it going to be sufficient to handle all your projects? Considering the type of software being produced today you should purchase a system with no less than 256K and preferably much more. Also get a computer with at least two disk drives that will handle 2 sided, double density disks. The keyboard can be an integral part of the computer or detached. Detached is generally preferable because it gives you more flexibility. Pick a computer that uses a keyboard you feel comfortable with. Most computers now are built with standard keys. Be sure it is easy to control the "cursor", graphic keys, escape, repeat, break, reset and return keys.

As to the display window (monitor) you will need, if you are going to be doing a great deal of word processing (typing) a monochrome with green color is much easier on the eyes than black and white. If you are going to be doing color work or graphics you will need color monitor.

Printer:
A printer is like a typewriter without keys. It prints out the information that is in the memory of the computer. The main kinds of printers are the "Dot Matrix", "The Letter Quality", and the various ink jet and laser printers. The dot matrix forms letters with tiny wires that punch a pattern of dots on the ribbon for each letter. Some are low print quality, but others look nearly letter quality. Letter quality printers produce typewriter quality print and are referred to as impact printers.

Certain brands of electronic typewriters can be interfaced (connected) with the computer and used as a printer. If you plan on going this route be sure to give it a good test before you buy. Many interfaced typewriters print slowly and also there is the possibility that the warranty on the typewriter may be voided. There are several different ways the paper is fed through the printer. Check to be certain the method used is adequate for your purpose. Also make sure the printer will accept the width and length of paper you require. It will take at least 80 characters for 8 1/2" paper and you will need 132 column printer for accounting or spreadsheets. Check the speed to determine how fast the printer works as there is a large variation between various types and brands of printers.

The Laser printer is a great addition to the family of printers. Most good quality laser printers cost much more than Dot Matrix or Letter-Quality printers, but for many purposes they are well worth the difference. They have a great advantage when working with graphics, design, typesetting or desktop publishing. Perhaps a mailorder newsletter which requires fancy pictures and a good deal of art work etc.

Modem:
You can use your computer to connect to hundreds of different sources of information through the use of a modem. This is an accessory that connects the computer to the telephone line. How fast you are able to send information over the phone is determined by the Baud rate. You should probably have a modem with 1200 baud that will work with the majority of others. Check with your dealer to be sure it is adequate for your system. You will need communication software programs in order to send and receive stored information.

Along with the line of communications, you can get a speech synthesizer or voice recognition add-on that converts your spoken words into writing or visa versa. To create computer game controllers, graphics and pictures you can get such things as light pens, plotters, mouses, etc. Other more expensive devices allow you to import photos, text, etc., directly into the computer for hard-copy printout. You can add circuit boards to your computer which will activate electrical devices; turn them on or off, dial your phone, or make mechanical monsters do what you command.

Software needed:
Software is simply instructions that tell the compute what to do. It comes in the form of cassette tapes, diskettes

or hard disks. Applications software will do exactly what you want to do; such as play a game, maintain a mailing list or teach mathematics, etc. Operating systems are programs that manage all the things that are going on inside your computer. Each different brand of computer has its own unique operating system so the software for some will not work on others. (Incompatibility) Different versions of the same software programs are made for each different type of system. However there are several operating systems that are "standard" compatibles and work on many different brands thus making thousands of programs available for most computers. Be sure you buy a computer with an operating system that can handle a great number of the programs available. Determine what you want the computer to do for you; games, accounting, name lists, desktop publishing, etc., then find out what software programs are available for that particular brand.

You can get software for about any kind of game, for Music composition, picture creation and transfers; for all kinds of educational programs, Budgeting, home management, mathematical analysis and engineering. business software includes word processing (which merely means an easy and much better way to type than with a typewriter), spreadsheets for financial analysis and planning, accounting, mailing lists, and just about anything else. For example, using the computer for all accounting activities for a firm is a terrific time and money saver. You can write the checks, enter receipts, accounts payable, accounts receivable, control inventories, prepare payrolls, and make the journal entries. All of these entries are automatically posted to the general ledger, eliminating hand posting altogether, and the trial balance, balance sheet, income statement, quarterly payroll reports, W-2 forms, income tax returns and other financial records are all ready to print out.

Before you settle on what software to purchase you should check out how easy it is to use. Are the instructions and screen help menus easy to understand? How fast does the program run and does it do everything you need? Does the software publisher furnish support and updates, with a number to call in the event of problems? Is the warranty adequate? Can you return the software if it doesn't perform as represented? Is it protected so that it is difficult or impossible to make a backup copy?

You can get software in the form of cassette tapes, cartridges, diskettes or hard disks. However cassette tapes and cartridges have several disadvantages including the fact that much of the best software is not available on cassettes. Preferably, settle for no less than

programs on two sided-double density floppy diskettes.
They are easy to use, store a great deal of information,
reasonably priced and you can find anything on the disk
almost instantly.

Programming:
Would you like to write your own software program? Well,
they try to tell you that it is easy. Don't you believe
it. It takes a great deal of study and hundreds of hours
at the computer to learn to the extent you can create any
worthwhile programs. Even though it is a challenge and
may be an enjoyable pastime there are so many programs
available today that unless you are an expert programmer
there is little chance you can come up with one that is
marketable.

Basic is the most used computer language and is probably
the one most valuable for you to learn, but since there
are several versions a program that runs on one computer
may not run on another brand. Pascal and Assembler are
languages which are used mostly by expert programmers.
Scientists and engineers can use a language called Fortran
for best results. Several other languages are used for
computer and video games.

Taking care of your computer system:
It is good policy to keep your computer and printing
equipment covered with anti-static dust free covers when
not in use. Keep your screen and other equipment clean
and free of dust. Use a head cleaning kit to clean your
disk drive in accordance with manufacturers
recommendations. Place your computer so that air
circulates freely around it. Use three wire plug ins with
a ground and get a surge protector to protect your
computer from sudden voltage changes. Use a felt tip pen
for diskette labels and don't touch the magnetic surface.
Keep your diskettes stored away from sunlight or heat and
if you spill coffee or drink on a disk, forget it!

Read the small print of your warranty so you will know
exactly what to expect in the event of problems. Keep the
original boxes and packing materials so that you can
safely ship your equipment back for repairs or adjustment.