**Shopping for a Personal Computer**

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re you confused by all the advertisements for personal computers? You can buy PCs from hundreds of companies, retail or through the Internet. The PC has, in effect, become a commodity where the consumer is able to select each component. We suggest you approach the purchase of a PC just as you would the purchase of any big-ticket item, with research and planning. Be sure you know your hardware requirements before you walk into a computer store, or else you may spend too much money or buy the wrong system. Stick to your requirements and don’t be swayed to purchase a different item if the vendor is out of stock. You’ve waited this long to buy a computer, so waiting for another week or two won’t matter.

#### Don’t forget the software

Any PC you buy will come with an Operating System. Many will come with a version of Microsoft Windows. You must also purchase the application software you intend to run. Many first-time buyers are surprised that they have to pay extra for software, so be sure to allow for this in your budget. Ideally, Microsoft Office 2010 will be bundled with your machine, but if not, look to purchase it through your university bookstore as it offers a substantial educational discount. You can also find good prices when shopping online.

#### Let your fingers do the walking

Some computer oriented websites contain advertisements from several different vendors, and you can compare prices from many sources. Other websites allow you to select and price a custom configuration that will meet your specific needs.

#### Don’t skimp on memory

The more memory a system has the better its overall performance. Microsoft Office 2010 is powerful, but it requires adequate resources to run efficiently. The minimum you should consider in today’s environment is 1 GB, but two gigabytes will give you even better performance. You should also be sure that your system is able to accommodate additional memory easily and cheaply.

#### Buy more disk space than you think you need

We purchased our first hard disk as an upgrade to the original PC in 1984. It was a “whopping” 10MB, and our biggest concern was that we would never fill it all. The storage requirements of application programs have increased significantly. Microsoft Office 2010, for example, requires 1.5GB for a complete installation. A 200GB drive is the minimum you should consider in today’s environment, but many computers will come with a 500 to 800 gb drive, which is plenty.

#### Use a credit card

You can double the warranty of any system (up to one additional year) by using a major credit card provided it offers a “buyer’s protection” policy. (Check with your credit card company to see whether it has this feature.) The extended warranty is free and it goes into effect automatically when you charge your computer. The use of a credit card also gives you additional leverage if you are dissatisfied with an item. Use caution when using a credit card for an online purchase; make sure the website provides a secure connection and encrypts your personal information.

#### Expect Prices to Drop

The system you buy today will invariably cost less tomorrow, and further, tomorrow’s machine will run circles around today’s most powerful system. The IBM/XT, for example, sold for approximately $5,000 and was configured with an 8088 microprocessor, a 10MB hard disk, 128KB of RAM, and monochrome monitor, but it was the best system you could buy in 1983. The point of this example is that you enjoy the machine you buy today without concern for future technology. Indeed, if you wait until prices come down, you will never buy anything, because there will always be something better.

Shop  
Online