

## ***Discussion - Buying a Computer***

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Over the last few months I have been asked about buying all sorts of technological items. In the last few weeks I have been asked, by a friend, about buying a computer. I have already written one article for her which she has not bothered to read, and this is the second one for her.

I expect that this is another article which she will not read but still expect me to answer again. There are a number of areas which you need to take into consideration when looking to buy a new computer. These are some of them.

### ***Why Do I Want a New Computer?***

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The first step when looking to buy anything is to ask the question: “Why do I want this ...?”.

If you cannot answer this question quickly, easily and concisely then there is a good chance that you will be unsatisfied with your purchase very quickly. This is because there is a well-known result of a purchase called *buyer's remorse*. This is what happens when you make any large purchase, and is quite normal. If you can answer the question: “Why do I want this ...?” in response to buyer's remorse then you will be on the way to having a happy relationship with your new purchase.

So, my advice is to ask, and answer, the question: “Why do I want this ...?”.

### ***Conclusion***

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To save most people from reading any further I have written the conclusion to answer the major question which you should ask before making any large purchase. This is because most people cannot be bothered to read very much and seem to expect me to have a magical answer which will tell them everything that they need to know in three little words.

Here are those three little words:

*For most people the cheapest computer will do what they want.*

### ***Desktop, All-In-One or Laptop?***

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Perhaps the first decision which you to make is: do I buy a laptop, a desktop or an all-in-one.

#### ***Desktop***

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A desktop computer is the obvious choice if you intend to upgrade your computer in the future. Most people do not upgrade their computer so the main reason for buying a desktop computer is to save money and get the best bang for your buck.

#### ***For:***

- Cheaper
- Easier to upgrade

#### ***Against:***

- Takes up more room
- Wires can get tangled at the back

Obviously, if portability is the most important thing, either because you want to be able to move it around your house or because you travel, you will chose an all-in-one or a laptop. If the space available is small then a laptop or all-in-one computer will also be more suitable than a desktop.

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### *All-In-One*

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This type of computer is a hybrid between a desktop and a laptop. It consists of a screen which is mounted on your desk and a mouse and keyboard which are usually connected wirelessly. This is an excellent choice if you do not need the portability of a laptop computer and the wires tangling the pieces of your desktop computer together frighten you to death.

Behind the screen is an area which contains all the internal parts of every computer. This area is smaller than the same area in a desktop computer so the computer just has a power cord (and perhaps an internet connection) to tether it to your desk. This makes an all-in-one computer an excellent choice for those who live in limited space but don't need the portability of a laptop computer.

**For:**

- Smaller
- More portable
- Easy to put away

**Against:**

- Hard to update hardware
- Fiddly to find USB and other ports if you need to add and remove attachments

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### *Laptop*

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A laptop is an excellent choice if portability is important to you.

**For:**

- Smaller
- More portable
- Easy to put away

**Against:**

- More expensive for the power
- Batteries do not last long, especially given the way that most people use them
- More fragile
- Fewer USB and other ports
- Hard to update hardware
- You may need to add a mouse and keyboard: many of my clients have complained about the trackpad and keyboard of their laptop

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### **Processor?**

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There are many times that I compare computers and cars. This is because, for those who find that computers are a foreign language, cars are something which most people can relate to.

Cars have engines; computers have processors. Car engines come with four cylinders, six cylinders or eight cylinders. As most people will understand, the more cylinders that a car engine has the more powerful the car.

The same thing applies to a computer: the CPU (Central Processing Unit) comes in three types: i3, i5 and i7.

An i3 CPU has enough power for most people for most of the time so is the cheapest. An i5 CPU has more power and is the most powerful CPU needed by all but those for whom vast power is essential. An i7 CPU is needed only if you are doing massive amounts of photo editing, sound editing or movie editing. If you buy a more powerful CPU than you need you will just be wasting money. I recommend an i3, or perhaps an i5, for most people.

## ***RAM Size?***

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RAM (Random Access Memory) is that part of a computer which is used as working memory. If you can see something on your computer's screen then it is being held in your computer's RAM. The quickest way to slow a computer down is to reduce the amount of RAM, so it must be obvious that the quickest way to speed a computer up is to add RAM.

Like all things to do with computers, this is only true to a certain extent. If you only browse the internet (this, of course, also includes websites like Facebook, Twitter and eBay), and send and receive emails, then your computer will be more than adequate with 2 GB of RAM. If you do a lot of photo editing or movie editing then more RAM will speed your computer up.

There is still a limit, of course. This limit, for most people, will be a maximum of 8 GB of RAM: any more will be just a waste of money.

If you are in doubt about how much RAM you actually need then check the program(s) that you will be using. If they state that more RAM is needed then please believe them.

For most people, the amount of RAM that is needed is 2 GB or 4 GB: any more is just a waste of money.

## ***Screen Size?***

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Again, screen size is a subjective choice so I will have little to say about this. What I will say is that you should check out several screens in a store so that you can see which one suits you.

A lot of the choice depends on your eyesight. In my work I have met people who have needed the icons on their desktop made larger so that they can see them easily, and the default text size set larger for the same reason. Too small a screen, for these people, is a major nightmare.

Too large a screen, on the other hand, means that you have to move your head so much that, after a while, you only use a small part of the screen. Buy the right screen size for you.

## ***Disc Size and Type?***

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A hard disc is a necessary part of a computer. It is the place where Windows, your programs and all your data are stored.

### ***Disc Size***

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Too many people worry that they will not have enough disc space, so look for all sorts of ways to remove all sorts of files from their hard disc.

For most people, the size of their hard disc is utterly irrelevant. There is so much storage space in a modern computer that they will never get to the stage where they have to remove data. Even so, given the ease with which a second, or larger, disc can be installed into many computers, there is nothing to worry about.

### ***Disc Type***

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Discs come in two types: mechanical and electronic. Compared to mechanical discs, electronic discs are:

- Faster
- Smaller storage size (gigabytes)
- More expensive per gigabyte
- More resistant to damage by dropping

If you really, truly need the speed of an electronic disc then perhaps a hybrid system which uses an electronic disc for Windows and your programs and a mechanical disc for all your data will be the best way.

## ***Printer?***

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Printers come in two types: inkjet and laser. Inkjet printers are more expensive to run than laser printers but they are best for photographs. Laser printers are cheaper to run because their cartridges are larger so the cost per page is cheaper.

Laser printers are not recommended for paper or other media which are heat sensitive. This means that if you want to print optical discs (CDs and DVDs), sticky labels or window-face envelopes you would be advised to use an inkjet printer.

If you only print text the undisputed king is a laser printer. The writers I know who use inkjet printers regret the cost of cartridges: especially when they consider the low purchase cost of a small laser printer and its replacement cartridges which will often print over 1,000 pages of text!

## ***Further Information***

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Nothing this week.