

Get the Computer, Monitor, and Peripherals You Want

You can get the computer you want, for less than you'd expect, if you follow some simple guidelines.

Are you in the market for a new computer, or are you wondering if the computer you have is getting old? Would you like to get rid of your bulky monitor, and switch to one of the flat-panel models? Are you interested in better sound, or gaming capabilities? Here are a few tips to help decide what, and when, to buy.

Avoid the smaller, less-known computer companies. Their computers, monitors, and other equipment are more likely to be built cheaply, and to break down when you can least afford it. Dell, IBM, Gateway, and Hewlett-Packard are good bets.

Look for warranty information. Remember that most computer warranties, even the extended ones, won't cover what is determined to be user-related failures. That is, if the company believes you caused the problem through neglect or mistreatment of the equipment, they won't pay. Extended warranties often aren't worth what they add to the cost of the computer, except in the case of laptops, which are much more easily damaged than in-place computers, and thus can need repair within the lifetime of the warranty.

Think carefully about your needs before choosing a laptop computer. Remember that the technology required to shrink a computer to portable size means that when you buy a laptop you are, for the most part, getting a less powerful computer, in terms of memory and storage capacity, for the money you spend, than if you bought a full-sized model. If you really need the portability, go for it. If not, strongly consider a full-sized computer.

Flat-panel monitors are light, take up much less room than a traditional CRT monitor, and are becoming less expensive almost every day. (Many 17-inch models can be found now for less than \$200.) As with any other piece of equipment for your computer, shop around before you buy, and check for consumer ratings.

Sound has become more and more important as the computer age matures. All computers come with internal speakers and sound cards, but if you want decent sound, you'll probably want external speakers, and something more than the bottom-of-the-line card that comes with most computers.

Many people today want their computer to be able to play the newest video games. This requires, besides the right computer and monitor, a video card that can support these games. Warning: if you want the top of the line in gaming computers, be prepared to spend several times what you would for a less-vigorous system. In some cases, this can exceed \$4000.

The one indispensable peripheral is a printer. Ink-jet printers are inexpensive (many models under \$100), but for higher quality consider a laser printer. These, however, can cost as much as \$500.

Many people, though, will want more peripherals, such as scanners, FAX machines, copiers, or a machine that can do all of these tasks in one box: the all-in-one printer. Many all-in-one models are available for about the same price as a stand-alone printer. Also becoming more popular are digital cameras, and small peripherals that play music, such as MP3 and iBox players.

When deciding what to buy, check if the company you're considering offers a package, in which you can buy the computer, monitor, printer, and other items at one time, for one price. This can save quite a lot of money.

If you follow these simple tips and guidelines, you will be much more likely to end up with the computer, monitor, and peripherals you really need and want.

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About the Author

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