

# A Computer the Way You Want It

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Most of the computers sold in retail stores are a compromise, designed to appeal to the widest number of potential purchasers. Depending on what you want to use it for, usually it is not what you need, as they are what are referred to as "middle of the road" systems.

There are several things that you should take into consideration.

If your primary use will be basically email and word processing, if you buy one of these "middle of the road" systems, you will be paying for a lot of "bells and whistles" you don't really need and will never use. You really don't need the "blinding speed" of the upper end processors as you will never be able to use it in the applications you use.

While a CD and Floppy Disk Drive are required to use today's technology, if the only thing you will use them for is loading programs when you first get the system or acquire new software, the high end devices are simply "overkill" and unnecessarily add to the cost of the system you buy.

If however, you use the computer for entertainment purposes, rather than getting a CD read only device, consider one that can read and write - in other words a CD Burner. That way, if you download something from the web, you can create your own CDs. You might also consider a second unit so that if you want to copy particular songs from several CDs you already have for your own use, you can. In this case I would recommend a DVD reader as the second unit as that can read both DVDs as well as CDs. You can also make copies of your software, and if you have downloaded programs from the web, you can archive them as well.

The motherboard you select is extremely important. Many of the newer ones have integrated sound cards, video cards, and networking cards. If they aren't, be sure you get one with enough expansion slots to accommodate everything you may need down the line if your needs increase. Be cautious when it comes to built in video cards for your monitor. The low end cards may not handle the demands of some graphic intensive programs you might use.

The actual processor you select is the most expensive part of the computer you choose. If your processing needs are minimal, such as email and/or word processing, you should consider the lower end - about a gigahertz in speed. It makes no sense to pay for something you don't need. On the flip side however, if you intend to do high end graphics, you will be disappointed if you select a

slower speed. If you are a game buff, definitely consider a 2+ gigahertz speed, as most games are graphic intensive.

Your hard drive is your next consideration. Be sure it is between 40 gigabytes and 60 gigabytes and runs at 7,200 RPM. These should provide adequate storage for most people. This is a case where bigger is not better. Larger drives are available but run at a slower speed, which degrades your access time. If you are doing work that is critical in nature, and you would have a difficult time recovering from a disk crash, consider two hard drives.

That way you can easily back up your data files and programs to a second drive. Simply change the wire, reinstall Windows and you're back in business very quickly. This does require some discipline on your part however, as you must periodically back up to the second drive.

The case you buy for your computer is also important. Unless space is an important consideration, forget the really small ones as they have very few expansion slots for future growth. A mid size tower is probably your best bet. Be sure the power supply is adequate to your needs. Most "middle of the road systems" offer 250 watt power supplies which may not be adequate - if you want expandability, consider 400 watts.

As far as which version of Windows to get, XP is fine for casual use. It is very friendly and suited to the novice user. If however, you have had Windows 95 or 98, you will most likely be disappointed with XP, and should consider Windows 2000 Professional. Windows 2000 is an extremely stable operating system. Be aware however, that some of the hardware and software you had on Windows 95 or 98 may not work properly on 2000.

So what is the best way to get your new computer? If you can read and follow directions, consider buying the components and building your own. The newer cases available are a lot friendlier than they were in the past. If this is a task you don't want to tackle, try to find someone who can build it for you. Be sure they are knowledgeable in all phases of the hardware and software, and will be available to answer questions you might have. While you will pay a little extra for this service, it could pay big dividends in the event of problems later on.

It is advisable however under any circumstances, to contact someone who has experience, as they could point you to cost saving equipment that you may not find yourself. They can also help you get a balanced system which better suits your needs and the applications you will be using.

Selecting the proper components is a delicate balance between cost and capabilities. If you consider your actual needs, you won't be paying for things you don't need, and you won't be disappointed with the performance you expected.

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