

New computer and associated equipment and services - some considerations

1 **What are you going to use the computer for?** **Light usage:** emails, internet browsing and buying; word processing; moderate amount of digital photographs. **Heavy usage** storing and viewing lots of videos; interactive games; downloading, storing and playing lots of music.

2 **Where will you use it?** If you will only use the machine in one place in your home and you have a bit of space then a **desktop** will suit you. These are marginally the cheapest option and the most user friendly. If you want to be able to use it in different locations in your home, or take it away, then a **laptop** is for you. If you want to use it when travelling on a train or aircraft, for instance, then the smaller and lighter in weight the better, so a **netbook** might be right for you. But bear in mind that in general terms the smaller the equipment is, the more trying it can become when using it for a period due to eyestrain and other physical demands it puts upon you. Have a look at this: <http://www.computeractive.co.uk/computeractive/features/2260888/pick-perfect-pc-4879754> You might also like to consider how quiet the machine is when running, too. They vary.

3 **New, second-hand, refurbished?** Of course, it is best to buy new if you can afford it if only because you have a longer warranty. But refurbished equipment can be good providing you have some warranty (3 or 6 months), you feel you can trust the dealer, and he is fairly local (unless you buy from a reputable internet shop). Second-hand from a private seller is the most risky for obvious reasons – like anything else electrical/mechanical you buy privately. For a refurbished computer why not try contacting Northampton Business School (University of Northampton), tel 01604 779003 or email enquiries@werepc.co.uk .

4 **Which operating system?** Nearly all new machines are installed with Windows 7 (the latest Microsoft software). Refurbished machines often have Windows XP. Windows XP is fine, but remember if Microsoft discontinue supporting the system, as they currently say, after April 2014, then in practical terms you would probably have to upgrade again in three years. Moreover, bear in mind that machines with a memory lower than 1GB would not support Windows 7. Two things about this: it may be that Microsoft (or someone else) may offer support for XP after the expiry date, and second, if you get a machine which is low priced but appears in good condition it may be worth buying that machine with the mental reservation that it may be out-of-date in just over three years.

5 **Wired or wireless?** For a desktop wired is satisfactory, but for laptops and smaller, wireless. With wired machines you don't have the problem of the occasional breakdown of the wireless connexion.

6 **What size of memory and hard drive?** If you are going to buy a new machine you may as well go for one with at least 2GB (gigabyte) of memory and 80GB of hard disk storage.

7 **What about your internet service provider? (ISP)** You really do need a broadband package. There are all kinds of deals around from different providers with combinations – broadband/landline telephone/mobile/television. You could consider the options offered by http://top10.com/broadband/compare/cheap_broadband/ but there are other price comparison sites – search in www.google.co.uk with the word **broadband** and you will get a dropdown menu to choose from. Whoever your ISP, you can still have other webmail accounts – for instance, if you are with Orange or BT, you can still have Yahoo or Hotmail webmail.

8 **Printers** Get one which is suitable for your needs. Printers are notorious for breaking down so it is worth buying an extended warranty. It is also worth considering buying one which takes four ink cartridges (red, blue, yellow, black), then when one colour runs out you only have to replace that colour. For light to medium usage you can get a printer for upwards £40. Consider also one that photocopies and scans (known as All-in-one printer). A bit bigger, marginally higher in price, but very useful. Wired or wireless? If your computer will always be near the printer when you want to print, go for wired.

9 **Printer ink cartridges** They are expensive. Printing an A4 letter costs around 5p or more. – the denser the ink, the more the copy costs. If you keep an eye on EBAY you can sometimes get genuine cartridges as one-offs from people who are selling because they have changed their printer. It is possible to buy **compatible** cartridges which are made by manufacturers other than that of the printer. They can be considerably cheaper than the genuine ones. Sometimes a printer warranty will not be honoured if compatible cartridges are used if the machine breaks down. I buy compatible cartridges after I have had the printer for a bit, but I try to assess the reputation of the supplier.

10 **Mouse** Buy one that is comfortable for you to easily hold and use.

11 **Wordprocessing WORD** The current version costs £100+. An older version can be purchased for around £50, maybe less. Alternatively, you can get a package for free from www.openoffice.org . If you want a simple but effective basic package to write letters etc then Windows XP and Windows 7 come with **Wordpad** already installed.

12 **Anti-virus software** A absolute must! Either free, or to buy at around £30+ per year.

Please note: The above observations are my own *limited personal opinion* at the current time (January 2011).