

[BACK TO TOP](#)

Broadband, backup, price, peripherals and plenty more

[Laptop or desktop?](#)

Kimman Wong

In our last column, we began a series on what to look for when purchasing a new PC. We considered a number of issues including processor speed and brand of processor, memory, storage, operating system and video card. In case you missed Part 1, we'll review last week's suggestions before we go on to Part 2.

- >> Processor Speed and brand of processor: Get at least a 2 gigahertz processor. Intel and AMD are equally satisfactory.
- >> Memory: You'll need at least 256 megs, 512 is better.
- >> Storage: You'll want at least 40 gigabytes, 60 or 80 is better.
- >> Operating system: Windows XP. (Leave Linux alone).
- >> Video system: A card with at least 32 megs of memory.

Now, on to more suggestions that will complete our survey:

Broadband capability

You'll definitely want to get an "NIC" network card built into the system. This usually comes standard and will allow you the option of getting a broadband Internet connection.

The main advantage of broadband over dialup is that you'll be able take advantage of so many more applications. That includes video, music, gaming, video conferencing and the like.

Essentially broadband -- whether it's DSL or cable -- opens a whole new world of applications that you'll want to leverage for business and pleasure.

Speaker system

If you're into music, get high quality speakers and a subwoofer. You also might want a better sound card like a Creative Labs Sound Blaster Live.

Monitor

More and more flat screen monitors come standard with new systems. Prices have dropped dramatically since they were introduced and I'd suggest you look at a 17-inch screen, especially if you spend long hours in front of your PC.

If you're buying your monitor separately from the CPU, check out stores with large selections such as CompUSA to spec out what you like. Major manufacturers such as Sony, Viewsonic, NEC and others have 17-inch models that begin at \$500 or less.

Flat screens save space and allow you make more efficient use of your desk.

Backup system

Almost all new machines come standard with a built-in CD-RW drive, which works fine for most people. A CD-RW will allow you to record your own CDs and is nice for playing music, too. If you do a lot of home video, you may want a DVD recording drive. If you need to back up an entire drive, a tape drive is an option, or better yet, a separate portable drive from a company such as Maxtor that produces easy-to-use "One Touch" system.

Another option, with a broadband connection, is to have backups done online and stored at another location.

Peripherals

You'll want a box that provides USB 2.0 capability. If you work a lot with video, you'll need another interface port called FireWire or "IEEE 1394."

Mail order vs. Local

One question I'm often asked is whether to buy mail order or from a local shop. I prefer to buy local. If you want to feel "safe," choose a familiar brand such as IBM, Dell, HP, etc. We have many retailers to choose from, but CompUSA has the best selection.

Or, consider a reputable Hawaii company that assembles its own PCs. Prices on locally built machines are competitive and a Hawaii business is going to have an incentive to take care of its customers.

In any case, support from local vendors is much more convenient than a mail order company. (Note that some national brands have local reps who service their machines, but often if you purchase a national brand, you'll have to send it to the mainland for repair.)

Warranties

If you run a home business or you're a hobbyist, the standard warranty (which consists of one year on the system plus three years on the major parts) should suffice.

An extended warranty is a good idea only if you intend to passing the computer on when you buy the next one. The reasoning is that the average life of a computer is less than three years and most of the parts will be covered.

Price

Figure on spending between \$800 to \$1,000 for your new machine, depending on how it's configured. Some manufacturers provide rebates on the computer or peripherals, which can also lessen your burden.

Shop around, ask friends where they've purchased their computers and keep this article in your pocket as a reference.

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[BACK TO TOP](#)

Laptop or desktop, that is the question

As the holidays approach, many of you are thinking of purchasing a laptop. The first thing you'll need to do is carefully consider your computing needs. What kinds of applications will you be running? Will you be traveling a lot? What's your budget like?

Each technology has its advantages and disadvantages. Here are some of them:

Laptop pros

>> They are portable and you can take them anywhere. If you to travel quite a bit to the neighbor islands or the mainland, a laptop comes in handy.

>> If you're a student and will live in a cramped dorm room or just tight on space, a laptop is a must. Students can also use laptops to take notes in class.

>> The laptop can be shared more easily among family members

Laptop cons

>> Prices are dropping, but laptops are still going to be more expensive than comparable desktops.

>> Due to their being moved around more often, laptops are more prone to need repair

>> Laptops, unfortunately, are much easier to steal.

>> Unless you have a jumbo model (and they can be quite pricey) a laptop will have a much smaller video display.

Desktop pros

>> You get more for your money (i.e. faster processor, more storage).

>> If you need to add a peripheral, such as a faster CD burner or a hot video card, it's much easier to upgrade a desktop.

>> You can get more audio and video options with a desktop

Desktop cons

>> They are not portable.

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[BACK TO TOP](#)

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