

This weeks article is Buying a PC part 2.

Here is a general guide with some advice on what to look for.

Desktop or Notebook - the type of PC you need will depend on how powerful you need your machine to be and whether you want to be able to do work on the move.

Desktop PCs are usually more powerful than notebook/laptop PCs for the same price, but the latter have the advantage of being portable and taking up much less space.

Monitor - it is important to check this is. Although a monitor is an essential part of a desktop PC system, some packages may not include one.

TFT (Flat Panel) monitors are common nowadays because of how thin they are compared to the old bulky CRT monitors. When buying a monitor you want the highest resolution, which will give a more detailed and sharper picture. A resolution of 1280x1024 should be fine for most users. Response time is also important - the lower the number, the better.

Keyboard & Mouse - all desktop PCs should include these and there is often little difference between the various models. One thing to note is that some have more than just the left and right buttons on the Mouse - they often also include a Wheel in the center which can be a useful addition. Nowadays you can also get wireless keyboards and mice. If you want to use a mouse with your notebook PC you may need to buy it separately, as many notebooks use a touch pad system instead of a mouse.

Tower - the shell of the desktop PC contains all the components which make your system work including the processor, memory and Hard Disk. You should check how many USB ports are included, as you will need one for each peripheral you connect such as scanners and printers.

Processor - the heart of your PC, this is the engine that powers your computer and processes all the instructions it is given, therefore you want it to be as fast as possible. The higher the processor speed (in Ghz) the faster your PC should be. Dual-core technology now offers even greater speed. Examples are Intel Pentium or Celeron, and AMD Athlon or Sempron.

RAM - the temporary memory the computer uses to do its calculations. The more RAM you have, the faster and more efficient your programs will run. Look for at least 512 MB or 1 GB of RAM.

Hard Drive - where all your programs and data are stored. As usual, more is better. At least 100GB or more will be needed to store lots of music, games or

movie files. Hard disk space is relatively cheap, and there are also external drives available that you can plug in to add more memory.

Graphics Card - handles video and display calculations. A more powerful card means better quality video graphics and smooth-running games. The most popular cards are the NVidia GeForce and ATI Radeon series. Another thing to note is that the graphics card also has its own RAM memory, and again the more the better.

Sound Card - most PCs should include decent enough sound for playing music or video, but you can opt for better quality sound cards such as the Creative Audigy series which will improve sound quality and performance in movies and demanding games.

Speakers - 2 normal desktop speakers should be fine for most users, but games players may want to invest in larger setups such as 5.1 (5 small Satellite speakers and 1 large Sub-Woofer to handle the bass sounds).

CD/DVD-ROM Drive - plays CDs/DVDs including data discs, music CDs and film DVDs. The higher the speed, the faster files will be loaded from disc though it will depend on the maximum speed permitted by the disc itself. '16x', for example, means it can transfer data from the disc at 16 times the normal playing speed.

CD/DVD R/RW Writer/Burner Drive - as with CD/DVD-ROM Drives but also able to write or 'burn' discs as well as read them. This way you can create your own data, music or video discs, especially useful for backing up large amounts of data. There are two main categories of writeable discs : Recordable discs such as CD-R or DVD-R or DVD+R are discs that can only be written once and Re-Writable discs such as CD-RW or DVD-RW or DVD+RW can be written over many times.

Hometown Computer Services hope you have enjoyed this weeks computer article. Please call/email anytime if you have questions. Our store has closed. We will handle any computer and web related services from my home.