

Buying a PC

Cutting through the jargon





If you don't know your gigabytes from your megabytes, your RAMs from your megahertz requirements or your mother board from your modem, then buying a personal computer (PC) could be difficult.

This leaflet will help to guide you through the jargon and tangle of buying a PC, so that, faced with a range of hardware specifications, monitor configurations, software selections and price variations, you will be able to choose a PC that will suit your needs.

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Before you buy

It is worth doing some research before you go shopping. The following are good starting points:

- **Look in PC magazines** and on the internet for articles comparing the different models and prices.
- **Going on a course** may improve your understanding of computers and help you get a better deal when you buy a PC. There are lots of different courses you could try from introduction/beginner level to more advanced. UK online centres can help you get started on the internet. A database of all UK online centres is at www.dfes.gov.uk/ukonlinecentres and a helpline at 0800 77 1234.
- **Ask friends and family** about their experiences with PCs.

The checklist in this leaflet will help you gather information before you go shopping for a PC.

Where to buy

You have a number of ways in which you can buy your PC. Each has different advantages and disadvantages as we have set out below:

- **Buying from a manufacturer or supplier by distance** (such as telephone, internet or mail order). This is a good option if you know about the system you want. It can be cheaper because the sellers' overheads are low. Buying in this way will also entitle you to a seven day cooling off period after the goods are delivered so you get a chance to check them over and cancel if they are not what you want. You should get an order confirmation via email immediately when you buy online.



- **High Street shops/Superstores.** These range from large retail chains to small local independents. You may not be able to take the PC away immediately as many are built to order. However you can usually test the system before you buy. Independent stores often sell, or are able to order, a wide range of products.

Shop around between lots of sellers to find the best deal for what you want.



When buying your PC

Having done your research, decided on where or how you want to get your PC, here are some tips on buying it:

- **Think beforehand** about what you want your PC to do and decide your budget. Don't buy a more complex PC than you need, but at the same time think about what you might want it to do in the future. This will save you time and money in the long-term.
- Don't be afraid to **talk to sellers.** Explain what you want your computer to do and ask for their advice.
- If buying on **credit**, shop around because your seller may not offer the best deal.
- Sellers will sometimes sell computers in **bundles** that may include a PC, printer and scanner, perhaps a digital camera or various software. Ask the seller to take any items out of the bundle that you think you don't want or need, and adjust the price for you.
- **When ordering** make sure that you get and keep copies of all receipts, details of the order, confirmation, correspondence and order numbers of your PC purchase.

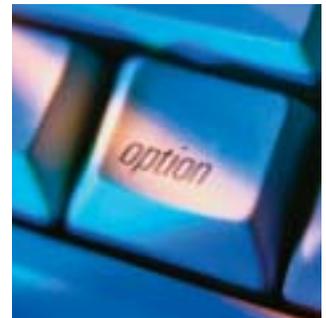
- When buying **online** check that the company has a UK contact address and telephone number in case you need to get in contact with them. You might want to check for privacy-vetted websites displaying trading standards logos, such as those of Which? Web Trader, Trusted Shops and TrustUK schemes.

Support and repair services

Computers are not always problem free. You should think about support options when, or even before, you buy. Find out exactly what is provided, how long it lasts and how much it costs.

Support services tend to consist of:

- **Telephone helplines.** Most sellers and manufacturers provide access to a telephone helpline that you can phone for help and advice. This can be a quick and easy solution, and is often the first place you are advised to go if you have a problem, but you may be charged. Charges can be up to £1.50 a minute, so try to have any relevant information ready before you call.



Before buying, try

out the helpline to see how easy it is to get through. If you have to wait a long time then you should think about buying from another seller – think about how you would feel if you waited as long to sort out a problem.

- **Online services.** Many sellers now provide areas on their websites that list common

problems and solutions and where you can ask for advice. Ask your seller if they provide such a service and how much it will cost you to access it.

- **Installation services** may be offered by the supplier. This may be useful if you haven't used a computer before.

Repair services

The type of repair service offered varies between sellers and manufacturers, so ask before you buy. Pick a seller that provides the best service for you. If your PC breaks down always check whether it is still covered by a warranty as explained below:

- **A manufacturer's warranty.** This will automatically come with the computer. They typically cover repair and/or replacement and may include protection against accidental damage or theft. Read the small print before purchasing your PC or warranty and find out what it covers and how long it lasts. Software is not always covered.

Remember, rights under warranty are in addition to your other consumer rights, and a warranty doesn't affect your legal right to reject a computer that was faulty when you bought it and get your money back. But don't delay your complaint for too long or you may be deemed to have accepted the machine.

Repair services are commonly organised in one of the following ways:

- **On-site repair service.** Where an engineer comes out to you to fix faults.



- **Return to base.** Where you have to send the computer back to a repair centre. You may have to pay the courier fees for transporting it to and from your home or office.

What about a printer?

Printers are an important piece of equipment to go with your PC. However, buying a printer may not be as straightforward as it seems - check out the information below:

- **Before you buy**, think about what you need the printer for – do you want to print in black and white only, or colour photographs? Will you be doing a lot of printing?
- **Don't assume** that a cheap printer is always a good bargain. It may use more ink and therefore be more expensive to run. The best printer for you will depend on more than the initial price.
- Ask the seller **how much the ink cartridges** cost **BEFORE** you buy your printer. They can be expensive - ink can cost more than twice the price of the printer over its lifetime.
- Ask the seller how many pages an ink cartridge will print and how much it will therefore cost **to print per page**, for both colour and black and white.
- Ask how many pages it will **print per minute** to check it is not too slow.



All these questions apply even if you buy the printer in a bundled package. Before going shopping think carefully about what you want from a printer, the checklist will help you.



Glossary of terms

CD-Rom

CD that stores data

CD-RW (Compact disc rewritable format)

A CD that can have information stored and be rewritten over.

Gigabytes (Gb)

Measures the storage capacity of the PC's hard disc.

Gigahertz (GHz)

A thousand megahertz - a measure of how fast the processor in your PC works.

Hard disc

This is a PC's internal long-term storage for software and work done.

Hardware

The physical components of your computer like the monitor and keyboard

Megabytes (Mb)

Measures the amount of memory (RAM) a PC can hold. The higher the Mb, the greater the storage capacity it has.

Megahertz (MHz)

Speed rating of the processor. The higher the MHz, the faster the processor.

Modem

Fitted internally in a PC (can also be an external box), can be connected to your telephone line to allow PC's to talk to each other. Commonly used for accessing the internet.

Motherboard

Circuit board that is connected to all the components in a PC to allow them to communicate with each other

Processor

The Central Processing Unit (CPU) is the heart of the PC. The processor determines how powerful the PC is. Pentium, AMD and Celeron are the names of the most common processors.

RAM (Memory)

Random Access Memory (RAM) is a PC's short-term memory. The larger the RAM the faster your PC will be.



Screen resolution

The number of pixels, (colour dots that make up an image on the screen) displayed on the screen. The more pixels, the higher the resolution and the sharper the picture.

Sound card

These let PCs create game sound effects and music and other sounds. Most PCs have a sound card as standard but more powerful ones can be bought.

Further information

For information on your rights before and after purchase look at the OFT website at www.oft.gov.uk/consumer. Or contact us at the Office of Fair Trading, call 0845 722 4499

Useful OFT publications

You may also find the following OFT publications useful:

- Shopping from home
- Shopping with confidence
- Extended warranties
- Hot shopping tips

All of these leaflets are free. Call 0870 60 60 321 to request copies.

Useful contacts

- Your local Trading Standards Department - contact details available in local telephone listings or Yellow Pages
- Citizens' Advice Bureaux, (contact details available in local telephone listings or Yellow Pages) or their website is www.nacab.org.uk
- Consumers Association, call 020 7830 6000 or website www.which.net
- Office of Fair Trading, call 0845 722 4499 or website www.oft.uk
- Ofcom, 50 Ludgate Hill, London, EC4M 7JJ, call 020 7634 8700 or website www.ofcom.gov.uk
- UK-Online, website www.ukonline.gov.uk
- ICSTIS (The Independent Committee for the Supervision of Telephone information Services) 4th Floor, Clove Building, 4 Maguire Street, London SE1 2NQ, call 020 7940 7474 or website www.icstis.org.uk
- Mail Order Protection Scheme Ltd (MOPS), 16 Tooks Court, London EC4A 1LB, Tel:020 7269 0520 or website www.mops.org.uk

Checklist

The following is a list of questions that you can ask yourself, with facts and figures that you can gather together, before going shopping for your PC.

Tear off this checklist, fill it in and take it with you.

What do you want your PC for?

- Games Internet Word-processing
Photo printing Business/office
School/college work Graphic presentations

Are you considering buying on credit?

Yes No

If **yes**, shop around because your seller may not offer the best deal.

Are you considering buying

Desktop PC Laptop Not yet sure

Think about what you will want your PC to do in the future. Do you want your PC to be easily upgradeable - i.e. do you want to be able to expand its memory or add to its functions?

Yes No Unsure

Are you interested in a bundled PC package i.e. with items like a printer already included?

Yes No Unsure

If yes, what items would you like to see bundled?

- Printer Scanner Digital camera
Games Software Others

Support

Do you want the computer to be installed by the seller?

Yes No Unsure

What type of support do you want?

Online Helplines Not sure

What sort of repair service would you prefer?

Return to base On-site repair service
Not sure

What do you want your support to cover?

- Hardware Software
Understanding the user guide
Basic trouble shooting Warranties

What length of warranty would you prefer?

1 year 2-3 years 4-5 years

Make sure you ask what the initial free warranty covers and how long it lasts with regards to the hardware and software.

Printers

What type of printing will you do?

- Black text printing Colour text printing
Colour photographs
Colour graphics/presentations

How regularly do you intend to use your printer?

Occasionally Once or twice a week
More often

Do you know how much ink cartridges for the printer(s) you have selected cost?

Yes No

If **no**, check the prices as they can be expensive. Check how many pages the cartridge will print and the cost per page.

How fast do you want it to print?

Very fast Moderately fast Not bothered
This is usually expressed as number of sheets printed per minute.

Internet

Do you want to enter into an Internet Service Provider agreement as part of your initial purchase? This will give you access to email and the internet.

Yes No Unsure

It is worth while checking out some prices before going shopping.

If yes, how regular a user of the internet are you likely to be?

A few hours every day
A few hours every month A few hours a week
Look at the different packages available for the amount you tend to use the internet.

- Consumer tips
- Consumer know-how
- Consumer credit

This information is available in other formats and other languages on request. Please ring 0870 60 60 321 for details.

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