

04/14/09 - Quick guide for buying a computer

Computer technology changes rapidly. Because there aren't clear cut ways to gauge performance, it can be difficult to know exactly what you're buying, and whether or not it's a good deal. Even when buying a computer at your local computer superstore or at Dell.com there are things you'll want to know to be sure you're getting the best value you can.

Let me start by describing the main components of a computer by comparing them to your kitchen. The CPU or processor is essentially the brain of the computer and does the "thinking" involved with everything you do on your computer. You could compare the speed of the processor to the speed of a cook in preparing a meal. One way to err, is to think that you can make accurate comparisons based on the Gigahertz (GHz) of a processor. Regrettably, the GHz of a processor is not a reliable 'real world' indicator of performance. We'll talk about this more later on.

Your hard drive is like your kitchen cupboards. If you run out of space to put things, you have to stop getting more dishes and tools for your kitchen, unless you can add more cabinets. However, even though a kitchen's pots and pans don't grow, the number of files on your computer will continually grow as you use your computer. If you enjoy music or photos, it's better to err on the side of getting a drive that allows you some room for growth.

Your memory is like the counter top space in your kitchen. Have you ever tried making a meal without enough counter space? If you don't have enough memory, the computer ends up moving data around a lot, and slows things down significantly. If you're planning on using your computer for more than simple web browsing and document editing, you'll probably want to upgrade from the standard amount memory if you can. Upgrading the memory is usually one of the least expensive and most effective ways to increase performance on an older computer.

When you evaluate a computer, one of the primary things to look at is the processor. You can compare a processor's performance to others at websites like cpubenchmark.net, but there are a number of other things to consider as well, such as: the amount of hard drive space and memory. If you're a computer gamer or if you work with a lot of media, the sound card, speakers, video card and screen will also be major considerations, but if you're mainly just browsing the web and editing documents cutting back costs in these areas will save you money.

Next time you're looking for parts for your computer, like a wireless router, LCD monitor, USB flash drive, or some extra memory, I'd recommend NewEgg.com. They're well known for low prices, great service, and speedy delivery. They allow you to sort products by popularity and rating, and reading a few reviews can be a really helpful in making your decision if you're not exactly sure what you want and need.