



A guide to...

CHOOSING A COMPUTER SUPPLIER.

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The purchase of a computer system can be a stressful, confusing affair even for those who have knowledge of modern technology.

As a rule, most packaged system hardware on offer represent reasonable value for money. However, it is important to look beyond the advertised specification and the amount of 'bells and whistles' claimed to be included in the package.

More often than not there can be considerable hidden inconveniences & costs.

In many situations, the financing of a computer system is a considerable outlay of hard earned savings and with a restricted budget it may not necessarily be the best option to purchase from a supplier that tries to pack the most system hardware into a deal.

It is generally better to purchase the basics of a quality, independently upgradeable system with a *flexible* support policy and with software compatible with the customers' applications.

What follows are some points worth consideration prior to purchase. These are categorised under the following sub-headings.

- First Impressions
- Installation
- Independence
- The Internet ('World Wide Web')
- Ink Jet Printing
- After Sales Support
- After The Warranty Has Expired
- Overall

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

- Did the salesperson ask me *what I required computer to do*?
- Was he or she able to offer different configurations for different applications?
- Were the relative merits of the constituent components explained clearly?
- Was it explained in a 'jargon free' manner compatible with my level of understanding?
- Did the discussion or demonstration take place in an environment free from the pressure of waiting customers? Additionally, how long did I have to wait?
- Was it possible to make an appointment at my convenience?
- Did I feel comfortable and *unpressured* during the sales pitch?

INSTALLATION.

- Was home delivery and installation offered?
- Was any set-up and 'getting started' tuition offered?
- Is there any extra cost involved?

INDEPENDENCE.

- Are all the set-up & driver programs for the applications and hardware supplied on CD-ROM or floppy disk?
- Is the operating system supplied separately on a CD-ROM so that it is re-installable if either another appointed supplier or I should upgrade my system?
- Are the set-up disks for components such as the graphics card, modem, sound card supplied to allow me to reconfigure my system? Do not confuse these above with system restore disks as these will generally only restore the system to the factory supplied configuration.
- Are the applications supplied of practical use and how much extra software will I have to purchase for my immediate requirements?

THE INTERNET ('WORLD WIDE WEB').

- Will I be tied into a supplier Internet Service Provider (ISP) agreement? If so, what is the tariff and does it suit my projected Internet usage?
- Can any assistance be offered to set up my e-mail account and will the chosen provider support multiple e-mail accounts?
- Would the supplier assist me in setting up an Internet account with an Internet Service Provider (ISP) of my choice?
- Were the merits of virus protection discussed?
- Is advice only available at premium telephone rates?

INK JET PRINTING.

- Does the printer have independent cartridges for black and colour?
- Are the printer cartridges easily obtainable and at reasonable cost?
- Is the printer suitable for my application and the people who are likely to use it? Children especially like to doodle and experiment with painting and drawing packages – the printing of colour-wash backgrounds and photographs uses a lot of ink. **Excellent results are achievable with some economy printers that accept low cost compatible cartridges.**

AFTER SALES SUPPORT.

- Was the after sales backup service policy fully explained? Additionally, are support telephone calls only available at premium rates?
- Is the supplier interested in providing me with upgrade advice?
- Ask about future upgrades and how long they would take. Do they have a realistic system upgrade and repair policy? Additionally, would the computer have to be returned to their base and if so, would it be at my expense?
- What is the supplier's policy if I wanted to upgrade a component part to one with an improved performance? For example, a faster processor, graphics card or a larger capacity hard disk drive? Can the supplier offer this service for me and at what cost?
- Can I make a timed appointment or will I have to wait at home or take time off work for an engineer to visit me?

AFTER THE WARRANTY HAS EXPIRED.

- How much will call-out repairs cost me after the warranty has expired?

As an example: Ask what the current cost of a call out to replace an out of warranty faulty hard drive (inclusive of call out charge, labour, parts and VAT) would be.

OVERALL

- Ask about system specification. A low cost all encompassing packaged system boasting a 'top of the range' fast, high specification processor is probably full of compromises. (A high performance racing car is unable to perform to its potential if used with components of inferior specification.)
- A quality plain-fronted casing has better long-term aesthetics than many of the 'trendier' multi-tone or metallised plastic fascias.
- Do you have a friend, relative or colleague who has purchased a package deal from a supplier or similar outlet? If so, ask them about their experiences. Ideally it should be someone who had limited knowledge of computing at the time of purchase. Would they purchase another packaged system from the same outlet? In the majority of cases, once the user has gained familiarity with new technology, he or she quickly realises some of the support limitations and hidden costs.
- Beware of any extended warranty offered! The worth is of questionable value because out of warranty repairs are generally much less expensive and inconvenient when undertaken by an independent service agent.
- It should also be considered by what value the system is likely to have depreciated even one year after purchase. Low cost packaged systems with limited upgrade options depreciate very quickly - especially ones not originally supplied with a full set of driver and application set-up disks.
- Does the supplier specialise in computers and similar wares or is the offer a 'once only never to be seen again' deal on a supermarket shelf?
- Consider what level of interest is likely by the supplier after the transaction. Does the salesperson work solely on commission and only appear interested in getting the next sale?
- Are support telephone calls only available at premium rates?
- How likely is it you will be able to speak to the same person twice regarding the same enquiry or problem?

Above all

ARE THEY WORTHY OF MY ORDER?