
Desktop Buying Guide ©

by

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The ABC's
to find the
right computer



Making Computer Shopping Easier and Simpler

Friends and neighbors often ask me for help in finding the best deal on a computer. Every Sunday they are overwhelmed with advertisements and simply don't know what is or isn't a good deal. When they go shopping salespeople will often attempt to talk them into buying more than they need and spending a lot more money. With this guide I will share my recommendations on what you need for a good, basic Desktop Computer. It is not intended to address the special needs of gamers, graphic designers or programmers but will do well for the average person or household.

How to Use This guide

This guide takes each major feature available in a Desktop Computer and provides you with a clear explanation of what it is and my recommendations of a good choice for each. To best use this guide, take any advertisement for a Desktop Computer and review the features available against the recommendations in this guide to determine whether it is a good deal or if they are trying to sell you more than you need. Depending on the deals available, you should be able to find a good laptop for as little as **\$400-\$500**.

Brand Name: Dell, Gateway, Toshiba, Compaq, HP, etc.

Generally brands have become more of a personal preference issue. The differences are more a cosmetic issues except for warranties. Some brands may offer more than a 1 year warranty.

Processor: brand isn't as important as speed and cache

- speed: 1.5GHz or higher, would not pay extra to have more than 1.73 GHz
- cache: 1MB or higher, would not pay extra to have more than 1MB

■ examples of available chips:

● AMD Athlon™ 64 X2 Dual-Core

- 3800+: 2.0GHz **speed/1mb cache**
- 4000+: 2.1GHz **speed/1mb cache**
- 4200+: 2.2GHz **speed/1mb cache**
- 4400+: 2.2GHz **speed/2mb cache**
- 4600+: 2.4GHz **speed/1mb cache**
- 5000+: 2.6GHz **speed/1mb cache**
- 5600+: 2.8GHz **speed/2mb cache**
- 6000+: 3.0GHz **speed/2mb cache**

● AMD Athlon™ 64

- 3200+, 2.0GHz **speed/512kb cache**
- 3200+, 2.2GHz **speed/1mb cache**
- 3800+, 2.4GHz **speed/512kb cache**

● Intel® Celeron® D

- 352: 3.2GHz **speed/512kb cache**
- 356: 3.33GHz **speed/512mb cache**
- 360: 3.46GHz **speed/512mb cache**

● Intel® Pentium® D

- 820: 2.8GHz **speed/2mb cache**
- 915: 2.8GHz **speed/4mb cache**
- 925: 3.0GHz **speed/4mb cache**
- 935: 3.2GHz **speed/4mb cache**

● Intel® Core™ 2 Duo

- E4200: 1.6GHz **speed/2mb cache**
- E4300: 1.8GHz **speed/2mb cache**
- E6300: 1.86GHz **speed/2mb cache**
- E6400: 2.13GHz **speed/2mb cache**
- E6420: 2.14GHz **speed/4mb cache**

● Intel® Pentium® 4

- 631: 3.0GHz **speed/2mb cache**
- 641: 3.2GHz **speed/2mb cache**

● Intel® Pentium® Dual-Core Processor

- E2140: 1.6GHz **speed/1mb cache**
- E2160: 1.8GHz **speed/1mb cache**

● Intel® Core™ 2 Quad Processor

- Q6600: 2.40GHz **speed/8mb cache**
- Q6700: 2.66GHz **speed/8mb cache**

Hard Drive: today even the smaller sized drives are big enough for most people

- minimum size: a 100GB has plenty of space. While 160GB drives are common now, I would not pay extra for a larger drive.

Memory: also called RAM, this is one feature where more does make a noticeable difference.

- minimum size: 1024MB (=1 GB). Would not pay extra for more than this unless doing high end gaming or analytical software with large computations or graphics.

CD and DVD drives: most computers offer the ability to burn/create CDs & DVDs. “Dual layer” is an extra feature that writes to both sides of a DVD. “LightScribe” means it can burn labels

on the CD/DVD. Drives that burn CDs & DVDs are often called “DVD+R dual layer/DVD+/-RW”.

- **minimum: get a drive that will burn CDs and play DVDs (CD-RW/DVD)**

Screen size: measured diagonally from corner to corner, costs go up significantly the larger the screen. Lower priced computers often include the “Flat Screen monitor” which means it is that large, clunky type monitor but with flat glass. These are still good quality pieces of equipment but if you want one of those ‘thin’ monitors, then you need to look for either a “Flat Panel” or “LCD” monitor. The difference between “Flat Screen” and “Flat Panel” will typically be just over \$100.

- “Flat Screen” minimum size: 17”

- “Flat Panel” or “LCD” minimum size: 15”

Media or Memory Card Reader: allows you to plug memory from cameras and PDAs into your computer. The computer will view it as another ‘drive’. This extra is most useful for digital camera owners. I would not pay extra for it otherwise.

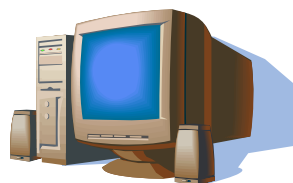
Networking: all Desktop computers come equipped now with Ethernet capabilities. This mean that you will be able to connect your computer to high speed internet access through a Cable, DSL or Broadband service. If you do not already have a wireless network in your home, do not let the salesman talk you into this. Setting up a wireless network is not for the average computer user.

- **Ethernet:** normally referred to as WLAN or Ethernet LAN or 10/100 Base-T. This should come in your computer at no extra cost.

Modem: 56KB dialup modems are standard functionality now and should be part of any computer you are looking at for no extra cost.

Floppy Drive: many computer manufacturers had stopped including a floppy drive. If the computer you are interested in does not come with this drive, you can buy an external drive for \$40 or less.

Extended Warranty: most computers will come with at least a 1 year warranty. Paying for an extended warranty is a matter of personal preference which I find to have limited value unless the computer is for a student or someone who will be taking the computer away from home. This is a ‘peace of mind’ item that each person should decide for themselves.



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