



Buying IT

1. The "typical" PC

Most office based PC systems are used for word processing, e-mails and spreadsheet work. To perform these tasks a simple "bottom of the range" would suffice (in car terms – the "L" model).

The current bottom of the range (typical) PC (available from PC World, Dell, Amazon, Misco, Compaq, etc) is around £500 (excluding VAT and delivery) including a monitor. There are many suppliers, daily and short term deals; shop around, but you can spend a significant amount of time shaving a few pounds off a system, delivery times can also vary.

PCs that are used for graphical work require more power than a typical PC, the exact specification for any system that is required to do a specific job should be discussed with the supplier before ordering.

Most monitors sold now are the flat panel variety; these come in inch measurements, typically at the lower end of the range 19 inch is the norm although some suppliers will "throw in" larger models (22 inch).

Most typical PC systems DO NOT come with Microsoft Office, this needs to be purchased separately, visit www.ctxchange.com to buy Microsoft Office products for under £20.

New PCs do not have a floppy disc drive as standard.

Delivery is normally an additional cost, be aware that most prices on the Internet are quoted *excluding* VAT.

Remember if you order the PC system yourself you will have to set it up yourself or perhaps pay someone to do it for you. Technical support for this is typically charged at between £20 and £60 per hour. Full installation could take in excess of two hours.

If you have existing equipment that you want to connect to a new PC make sure that the new PC comes equipped with the correct places (ports) and number of ports to accommodate the devices. Check that the new PC's operating system will support the old devices and any software that you intend to put on it. Many manufacturers will have new drivers and software upgrades available to allow migration to a newer PC. In the case of the software check the licence agreement carefully before using it on a new PC.

2. Laptops

New Health and Safety legislation has raised the need to consider the weight and the battery life of the laptop. Lighter weight and longer battery life increase costs. Consider a good quality carry case with a shoulder strap and handle.

A laptop should not be purchased simply to save desktop space, there are specialised mini-cased desktop PCs that may be cheaper. Even if it is to be used in two locations consider buying two PCs and examine how data is transferred between them, this may also be cheaper.

If a laptop is to be used at a desk semi permanently you will need to buy a stand or a stand alone monitor, keyboard and mouse in addition to arranging access to a printer and the Internet.

Make sure that the laptop has the correct type and number of connectors you require (USB, PCMCIA, etc).

Laptops have other additional issues such as insurances, data security and extra-office use to consider.

3. Warranties

Consider a warranty carefully, these are where most of the suppliers make the most profit. We would advise a minimum (normally one year, but beware it can be shorter) warranty and then arrange a reputable local technical support company to assist in the maintenance of your PC.

4. Microsoft XP, Vista or Windows 7?

These products are the Operating System for the PC, they govern how the computer works and how the screen looks.

We now recommend using Windows 7 Professional on your PC , this is the equivalent to Vista Business and XP Pro. Interestingly the recommended system requirements are lower than for Vista but we recommend a generous amount of RAM (4 GB) to accommodate an anti-virus solution. The XP emulator (XP Mode) requires 1 GB RAM

Windows 7 seems to interact well with Office 2007 and other common applications but check with specialist suppliers (e.g. Sage, Intuit (QuickBooks), etc.) for bespoke products.

On the Dell website select the “Small Business” option to purchase the equipment, this will allow you to purchase Windows 7 Pro. Take care not to buy either the Starter or Home edition as it may limit networking options.

There are, of course, alternatives to Microsoft products, many are free.



5. Other bits and Pieces (Peripherals)

Most devices use a system called USB (Universal Serial Bus) to connect to your PC. Make sure that you have plenty of USB sockets in your PC to add all the devices you need, these could include;

- Mouse
- Keyboard
- Memory stick
- Printer

If you really like your gadgets you could also have a scanner, webcam, Skype phone and/or a card reader. In this case your PC may need up to 8 USB connections.

6. Anti-virus

You will require Anti-virus software, even if the PC will not be connected to the Internet. Computer viruses can be transferred by any means of data contact (Disc, CD, memory stick, etc.). Make sure that you purchase a full version (free versions are not licensed for use by the Voluntary Sector).

Anti-Spyware systems are now normally integrated into anti-virus solutions and as a result are resource intensive, take up the processor power and memory (RAM) of the PC. Consider how much RAM the Anti-virus software company recommends (not the minimum requirement) before you buy, otherwise your anti-virus solution could slow your PC significantly.

7. A suggested "Spec"

Things change rapidly but currently for around £500 (ex VAT and delivery) you should get

- 2.8 GHz Dual Core processor
- 320 GB Hard Drive (GB Giga Byte)
- 4 GB RAM (memory)
- DVD Re-writer
- 20 inch flat panel monitor (most are widescreen)
- Microsoft Windows 7 Professional

(Specifications reflect typical values - last updated Nov 09)