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A Guide to Choosing the Best Desktop Computer System

How do you choose a proper desktop computer system that will meet your computing needs?

There are many factors you'll need to look at before forking your hard-earned cash. Things like CPU, memory, hard disk space, sound cards are essential factors to consider when selecting the system.

This article will run through each of these factors to help you avoid the many pitfalls that one may stumble across when purchasing a PC.



Some desktop PCs available in the market

Intended Usage

What do you intend to use the computer for? This is one of the key considerations when purchasing that desktop system. The main goal here is to get a system that will suit your computing needs. If you're using the computer for professional or business purposes, you'll want to factor stability and service support into your purchase decision. On the other hand, if you intend to use the system at home, you may want a more well-rounded PC that can handle multimedia applications, web surfing easily.

Budget

You'll certainly need to consider your budget buying that PC. Low-end budget systems will save you a lot of money and are suitable for most home users. High-end systems with the latest Athlon 64 or Intel Pentium 4 processors will cost more and will be more suitable for those who want to play the latest 3D games or do heavy video or graphics editing.

System Features

OK, here's where it gets complicated. A typical desktop PC has got so many components, it's hard to decide which system is good or bad. We're talking about a whole plethora of components from memory, video cards, sound cards, optical drives and so on.

Here's a stab at the most essential components in the PC and what you should look out for:

CPUs

The CPU is the brain of your system - so it's a key consideration when buying that PC. The older chips like Intel Celeron and Intel Pentium 3 chips are now starting to become obsolete. If you want your system to last for some time, go for newer processors like the Intel Pentium 4 and AMD Athlon 64.

Memory

System memory is also very important - you can never have enough of it. Typically, look for at least 512 MB of memory in the desktop you want to buy. Anything less while pose a problem for business or graphics applications.

Motherboards

If you're buying the system off the shelf from vendors like HP, Dell or eMachines, the motherboard brand will usually not be an issue. In fact, most PC manufacturers don't publish the type of motherboard used in their desktops. The motherboard brand is of greater importance if you are building your own PC.

Hard Drives

My advice to you here is - get as much hard disk space as you can afford. A typical hard disk by today's standards would be about 80 GB at least. If you do a lot of downloading off the Internet, or edit videos or have a huge collection of MP3s, you'd be better off with at least a 160 GB hard disk.

Optical Drives

A CD-ROM drive is now a standard feature in all computers. Make sure you're getting at least a 40X CD-ROM read speed. An additional consideration these days would be whether you want read-write capability - many computers now come with CD-RW drives. DVD-ROM drives are also being bundled in desktops. Even better, some come with DVD-RW drives which will save you the cost of buying a separate DVD writer later on.

Monitors

I guess the key consideration here is whether you want a CRT or LCD display. My opinion is to go for at least a 17 inch monitor if you want a CRT display, and at least a 15 inch monitor for LCD displays. Good brand names here are: NEC, Samsung and ViewSonic.

Graphics

Computer systems come with either integrated video on the motherboard, or a physical video card. If you play a lot of games, especially 3D games like Half-Life 2, you will not want to rely on integrated video. Make sure the system has a physical video card with at least AGP 8X and 256 MB of video memory.

Sound

Again, it is common for computers to come with integrated sound on the motherboard these days. However, if you're a computer audio buff, go for a separate third-party sound card like the Creative Audigy Sound Card.

Ports

USB ports are almost standard features in desktop computer systems today. In fact, you'll want to check that the system comes with support for the latest USB 2.0 specification. Even better if it comes with FireWire ports (which are essential for video capture and editing).

Operating System

The majority of computer systems these days ship with Windows XP Home Edition, which is suitable for home users. Business users should look for Windows XP Professional or Windows 2000 Professional to be bundled in the package.

Technical Support

After-sale support and warranty periods are a prime consideration especially you have no experience in troubleshooting computers. Most basic warranty periods last for a year or two and are sufficient for the average user. Don't go for an extended warranty period without reading the fine print. Most of the time, it's not necessary to have overly long warranty periods as the reasonable lifetime of your computer will be about 4 to 5 years at most.

Conclusion

In summary, buying a good desktop PC is a matter of doing your research and homework by considering each of the factors above. If possible, go to the manufacturer's website to source for more in-depth material (read the fine print too). Good luck!

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