

Making A List And Checking It Twice

A check list approach to buying a computer system

by Dr. Dot

So, you have decided to make the big plunge and buy a computer. Naturally, your decision was made after reading hundreds of articles (like this one), talking to many experts, discussing the options with all your friends and, in the final analysis, you have decided that you can no longer live without a computer. Now for the \$64,000 question: "What do I buy?"

Buying a computer is a little like buying a car — there is an enormous selection to choose from. There is a computer for everyone's checkbook, ranging anywhere from \$200 to over \$10,000. The purpose of this article is to provide you with a check list of questions which must be asked during the process of purchasing a computer system. I want to emphasize that you are not buying just a computer, but a computer system which includes software, a monitor, a printer, and a variety of disk drives, at minimum.

After looking at the check list below, you will agree that a lot goes into choosing the right computer system. In order to keep everything in perspective, you must remember for what purpose the computer is being purchased. In other words, how do you plan to use the computer? The answers to all the questions on the check list will depend both on how you intend to use the computer and on what software you will need to perform the necessary tasks.

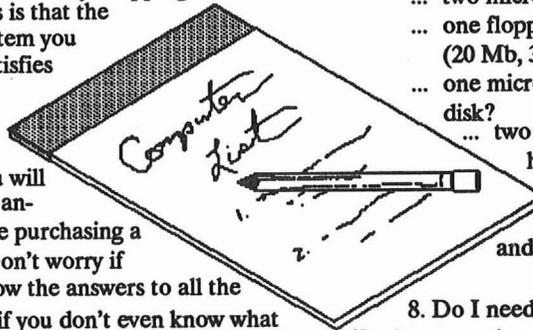
Probably the most important aspect of purchasing a computer system is determining how much technical support you can provide, how much support you will need from others, and how much you are willing to spend for that support.

The second most important thing to remember is never to purchase a system on the word of the salesperson. Make sure you "test drive" the exact system (computer, peripheral hardware, and software) that you plan to purchase. Remember, you would not test drive a Corvette if what you were buying was a Chevy Nova. Computer salesmen have been known to let you try out one system and tell you that the one you are planning to purchase is, for the most part, the same. Don't believe it! A Corvette is not the same thing as a Nova.

Once you buy your computer system, do not worry if a new model comes on the

market or if you see a similar system that sells for less. The technology is changing so rapidly that new computers are continually being introduced to the market and prices seem to be continually dropping. All that really matters is that the computer system you purchased satisfies your needs.

Below are the questions you will want to have answered before purchasing a computer. Don't worry if you don't know the answers to all the questions or if you don't even know what the question is asking! The answers are only a phone call away. Just call us at the Technology Transfer Center by dialing 1-800-423-0060 and we will be glad to shed a little light on the subject.



Questions For Computer Buyers

1. Where am I going to buy the computer system?
 - ... the local store?
 - ... a large national company?
 - ... mail order?
2. What kind of service do I want, or need, from the company?
 - ... phone support?
 - ... installation?
 - ... technicians willing to make service calls
3. What kind of warranty do they offer:
 - ... how long?
 - ... how much does it cost?
 - ... where is the work done?
 - ... how fast can they do the work?
 - ... what items does it cover?
4. How knowledgeable is the person that is selling me the computer system? (did he/she previously sell used cars?!)
5. What type of computer do I need?
 - ... IBM?
 - ... IBM clone?
 - ... Macintosh?
 - ... Apple II?
6. What central processor (CPU) do I need?
 - ... 8088, 8086, 80286, or 80386?
 - ... what is the clock speed (4 mhz 8mhz 10mhz 12mhz 16mhz etc.)?
7. How many disk drives and of what type?
 - ... two floppy drives, (5 1/4 inch)?
 - ... two micro disk drives (3 1/2 inch)?
 - ... one floppy drive and one hard disk (20 Mb, 30 Mb, etc.)?
 - ... one micro drive and one hard disk?
 - ... two floppy drives and one hard disk?
 - ... one floppy drive, one micro drive, and one hard disk
8. Do I need a numeric co-processor? (for heavy mathematical calculations: spreadsheets, accounting software packages)
9. What type of monitor?
 - ... monochrome (green, amber, white on black)?
 - ... color?
 - ... size (12", 13", 15", 19")?
10. What type of graphics do I need?
 - ... CGA (color graphics adapter - med. resolution)?
 - ... EGA (enhanced graphics adapter - high resolution)?
 - ... Hercules (high resolution primarily monochrome)?
 - ... VGA (Video Graphics Array - high resolution on new IBM PS/2 computers and some clones)?
11. Do I want a mouse as an input device (for software that uses it)?
12. How many external ports do I need?
 - ... serial ports (modems, communications, tablets, mouse)?
 - ... parallel ports (how many for printers)?
13. What type of printer do I need?
 - ... dot matrix (fast, inexpensive, near letter quality, graphics)?
 - ... letter quality (type writer results, slower, more money, no graphics)?
 - ... laser (expensive, high quality text and graphics)?
14. What kind(s) and what length of cables do I need to connect everything?

The rest of the questions on this list assume that you will be purchasing an MS-DOS computer system (MS-DOS is a common Disk Operating System used with IBM or IBM compatible computers).

