

## ***The Bulletin***

### **Technical Tips**

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#### **The \$600 Computer: Bargain or Hype?**

'Tis the shopping season and it's difficult to pass up the computer "bargains" available of late. However, before you pay your hard earned money for an often sorely needed, critical piece of equipment, be sure you understand what you're paying for and ensure it matches your requirements.

The primary item to confirm is the software included with the computer. Often the \$600 computer only includes the equipment. Unfortunately, a computer without software is like a car without gas. It doesn't work. As a result, you also need to at least purchase basics such as an operating system, Office and anti-virus software. They cost approximately \$550. If you purchase the equipment and software from the manufacturer at the same time, the software installation is a couple hundred dollars less than if you pay to have it installed later, and you may get a break on the cost of the software.

When confirming the software included, it is also important to understand the networking capabilities of the operating system and the applications in your version of Office. Less expensive computers typically come with operating systems that don't work with a server and won't allow remote access. If you need either of these capabilities, you will at least end up paying for an upgrade to your operating system, which costs \$200, and either spending hours or paying another \$200 to perform the upgrade itself. You may also want to create an Access database or PowerPoint presentation only to discover you can't. These applications cost approximately \$200 and \$100 respectively.

Another key item to confirm when purchasing a computer is the warranty. The difference between a 1 year next day and 3 year same day warranty is about \$250. I highly recommend the 3 year warranty because most businesses can't go a day without a computer and \$250 is inexpensive insurance given that most parts cost over \$100 and tend to fail when they are between 2 and 4 years old.

With a \$600 computer, you may also want to confirm the performance of key equipment components. Often a fast processor (2.4 GHz) won't provide the

speed you are looking for unless you also purchase a fast Front Side Bus (800 FSB) and ample memory (512 RAM) along with it.

The upshot is computers are no different than other products. You tend to get what you pay for. If a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is. A typical, business-class desktop costs about \$1300 and a laptop costs about \$2000.

I wish you a smart shopping season!

===== If you have questions or concerns about your particular situation, please e-mail me at [tpsnyder@xantrion.com](mailto:tpsnyder@xantrion.com). I will use your input to direct future columns. =====