Buying a New Desktop PC
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The following recommendations are solely the opinions of the author after consulting with several knowledgeable club members. The reader should consider these recommendations against their own criteria to reach the best choice for their particular situation.

These recommendations assume the PC will be used for e-mail, internet browsing and downloads; word processing; moderate size spreadsheets; moderate picture processing; simple video processing; listening to DVDs, CDs and MP3 audio files without the need for superior audio quality; playing DVD and MP4 videos; webcam; and other uses requiring low to moderate computer processing power. Interactive gaming is not considered since it requires special processing and video power.

The PC can be purchased new or refurbished. Read this article about refurbished PCs.

The PC will likely come with various trial versions of software. And the seller may try to convince you to buy other "necessary" software. Don't buy any additional software. Free software is available that will do very nicely, and is listed below.

The retailer may also try to sell you an extended warrantee. The standard warrantee that comes with the PC should be sufficient, and extended warrantees are not recommended.

Brand: Dell, HP, and Acer have good reputations.

Operating System: Windows Vista Home Premium

Processor Type and Speed: The Intel Core 2 Duo processor is recommended. It will cost more than less powerful processor types, but its use will extend the useful life of your PC. If a lower cost PC is required, choose the AMD Athlon 64 2X processor. Any speed is acceptable with either processor type.

Memory: 2 Gbytes is necessary and sufficient for most needs. However, if cost is an issue; or if your processing needs are minimal, 1 Gbyte may be sufficient for your needs. Additional memory can be added later if required.

Disk Capacity: 250 Mbyte is commonly available and should be sufficient unless you plan to store a lot of large video files.

CD/DVD Drive: DVD +/-RW recommended. A speed of 16X is commonly available.

Video: No upgrades are required; however, a graphics card can be added later if additional video performance is required.

Audio: No upgrades are required; however, an audio card can be added later if additional sound performance is required.

USB ports: 4 minimum (keyboard, mouse, printer, other for temporary use for camera, video camera, etc.) – add more if you plan to have additional USB peripherals such as a webcam. If the PC you want does not have enough ports, you can add on an inexpensive internal card or external hub to create additional ports. There are two USB speeds available: the older version 1 and the newer version 2. Version 2 is recommended.

Firewire port (IEEE 1394): Video cameras use this type of port for transfer of digital video. This port may not be provided on lower cost units. If you need this port, you can add an internal adapter card later if it is not provided.

Keyboard: The included standard keyboard should be sufficient.

Mouse: A mouse is usually included. An optical mouse is recommended. A wireless mouse adds some convenience, but is not required.

Monitor: A 17 inch monitor is the minimum size you should consider, but larger sizes (19-21 inch) are recommended if affordable. Consider package deals that include an LCD monitor.

Speakers: Speakers are recommended, and are included in some packages. They usually have minimal sound quality; but will be sufficient except for users demanding higher quality.

Microphone: Included with many PCs and required if you plan to communicate voice over the internet. If not included, it can be added later. Some webcams include a built-in microphone.

Firewall Protection: The included Vista firewall is sufficient. A trial version of another firewall may be included with the PC and may be integrated into the virus protection program. [Note that only one firewall program can be running. If a trial version is included, the Vista firewall is turned off. If the trial version is removed, turn on the Vista firewall.]

Virus Protection: A trial version may be included, and free programs are available. AVG Anti-Spyware Free Edition is recommended. [Note that only one virus protection program can be running. Remove the trial software before installing another virus program.]

Spyware Protection: A trial version may be included. Free versions are available and more than one is recommended to be used. The following three are recommended and all can be installed: AVG Anti-Spyware Free Edition, Spybot, and Ad-Aware 2007 Free.

Microsoft Works and Office: Works may be included, but don't by Office. A compatible suite of programs is available for free from Open Office.

Networking Software: A free program called Network Magic will assist you in setting up a network.

Other Free Software: Lots of other free or low cost software is available for download on the web. Don't buy anything until you check out what may be available.