

Willie's Wonkey Computer Factory

Santa didn't bring a new computer?...never mind, January is the best time of year to go buy one yourself! All the top manufacturers stock up in anticipation of the Christmas rush, then have to clear out what's left before the 2010 models can be released, so shop around and do some price comparison. Have a fairly good idea what you are after before going into a shop, or they will have a field day getting you to spend as much as possible!

What do I need? Laptop or desktop? Laptops are great for travelling. They are also great as a second computer in the home and with a wireless connection can go anywhere, including the garden on a sunny day. Kids like to curl up in bed with them but adults tire of the small keyboard size. So, if you spend a long time on a computer and don't need 'portability' then a desktop is for you. They have a better 'performance to price' ratio and are easier to upgrade in the future.

What do I look for? It will be difficult now to buy any computer without getting Windows 7. Relax, it is brilliant, don't settle for anything less but do only settle for 'Home Premium' or better. Anything less is a waste as you will miss out on all the bells and whistles that '7' brings. It also comes in 32 and 64-bit, the latter will future proof it for some time, but make sure any existing extras – printer, scanner etc can run in 64-bit.

Laptop

Briefly – Dual Core or better is a must. Bigger than 15 inch screen is not really portable! Smaller means a small keyboard. Small netbooks can be tedious! Windows 7 needs 2Gb of RAM memory to run smoothly, 4 Gb makes it blistering fast. Memory is cheap now so haggle for an upgrade, 250 Gb hard drives are common, but unless you store thousands of photos/songs you will not need any more than that. 160Gb is quite acceptable. Web cam – you may have no plans to use one now but one day you will. All new lappies are wireless by default. Always handle a laptop before buying, build quality is obvious and will help protect it from the odd bump. Buy from a reputable dealer and check out the extended warranty. £350 of laptop will satisfy most people's needs.

Desktop

Again Dual Core minimum, (price the Quad), Doesn't matter if Intel or AMD, 4Gb of RAM (more if 64bit) and as big a hard disc as they offer. 500Gb or even 1TB (1,000Gb) are common. DVD writers are standard. Blue Ray writers too dear (as are the discs) and take forever, you can upgrade to one later when faster and more affordable. Widescreen monitors are all the rage, but remember they are measured diagonally, so a 19" wide looks a lot smaller than a 19" 4:3. Buy the biggest you can afford, you won't regret it, then consider buying a digital TV card so you can watch TV on it, saves filling the kids bedroom with 2 screens! Wireless optical mice are great but wireless keyboards are a love or hate item. Please buy 2.1 speakers with subwoofer - you will not regret it. Finally – if you want to buy a computer for kids to play the latest fast games on, the video card alone will cost more than the fab X-Box 360, or even the new PS3, which incidentally comes with a Blue Ray player built in, so choose wisely.

Willie