

WHERE DO YOU BUY, STAN?

The title of this month's article represents a question I am often asked. Five years ago, my advice would have been to purchase a current copy of Computer Shopper, then spend the four to eight hours necessary to do comparative shopping in its pages, in order to home in on an affordable, inexpensive system. This advice is still good. It gives you a fairly rapid picture of current prices in the industry.

However, this approach does not really tell you which brand of computer in a particular price class is the best (or even more important, the worst). It also does not reveal which companies are reliable, and easy to work with in the event of a problem. For this information, you will have to consult back issues of several different computer magazines that have published reviews on brand performance or customer service surveys.

All of this can be a formidable task, especially if you are not experienced in all the nuances of comparing Central Processing Units (the CPU is the MOTHER OF ALL CHIPS on a motherboard), hard drives, monitors and so on. Even with experience, the job can be frustrating and time consuming.

My personal solution is to purchase either parts or complete systems locally, from an honest vendor who knows his stuff and who sells at a competitive price. Several years ago, Dave Barrow (N9UNR) recommended a person who has turned out to fit the bill. He doesn't have a fancy store or showroom; he builds units in his basement. But, those units are really good, in performance and value. I purchased a number of complete systems from him over the years for my employer, as well as several motherboards, hard drives and other parts for myself. His prices have proven to be as good as or better than mail order vendors advertising in Computer Shopper. Very important, he knows computers well, and his offerings upgrade rapidly with new advances in the field. Most important, he is helpful, honest, and stands behind his products. Everyone I know who has dealt with him feels the same way.

I originally intended to write this issue using generalities, without naming any particular vendor. After some thought, it seemed clear that most readers would really want to know specifics. Therefore, I will name names, even at the risk of sounding like an advertisement. But please note that I gain nothing from this plug; I am merely one of Mr. Putnins' very satisfied customers.

I spoke with Jerry him in mid-September and he gave me the following system quote (you might want to leave this page lying around for your OM or XYL to spot while trying to figure out what to get you for a Christmas present). This is what he expects to have in December as a basic, "starter" system.

CPU: 80486 CPU, 66 MHz (depending upon how industry prices change in October and November, this may well be upgraded to a 100 MHz 486 chip with no price increase, but Jerry cannot guarantee this at this time).

MEMORY: 8 Mbytes RAM installed (note this is eight, not four)

DRIVES: 1.44 Mbyte (3½") floppy, 540 Mbyte hard drive

MONITOR: Super VGA color monitor

MISC: Mini-tower case, 230 watt supply, keyboard included

SOFTWARE: Windows 95, plus a whole variety of other shareware utilities, games and programs.

PRICE: \$950, plus tax

All software is installed and ready to go when you power up. And, of course, you must pick up the system. Call Jerry for further details, or to have him help you design a system to fit your needs.

Quite a value. An amazing feature of this system is the computing power it supplies for relatively few dollars, especially when considering that around 5 or so years ago, this was very close to the price for a starter XT system, with two floppies but no hard drive!

If you call Jerry, tell him you read about him in the Computer Corner.

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