



Buying a PC

Laptop vs Desktop



LAPTOP	DESKTOP
Portable outside the house	Not Portable
Portable within house	More units and wires to move in house
A bit more expensive / less for money	More value/power per £
Small screen, less bright, narrow viewing angle	Choice of screen size, brighter, wider viewing angle
Flat compacted keyboard	Standard Keyboard
Mousepad (can add mouse)	Standard Mouse
Highly minaturised, more prone to problems, less updateable	Space in box for components and upgrades
Replace entire PC if damaged, serious fault or obsolete	Replace only unit necessary e.g keyboard if coffee spilt in it or a key not working. Keep monitor when upgrading etc.
Usually ready for wired and wireless broadband	Usually ready for wired broadband, needs adaptor for wireless
Takes less space overall	Larger but same desktop footprint
Cheapest Dell £299	Cheapest Dell £219+Monitor

As a compromise between portability and other factors consider an “all-in-one” design, saving space and portable within the home but with ‘proper’ screen and keyboard. (Dell £399)

Consider also:

Wireless **mouse & keyboard** are attractive but they contain batteries that need regular replacement.

Printer: No need to pay more than £50. Consider combination scanner/printer which effectively provides a photocopier. Factor in ink prices if you may use a lot. The ink cartridges that come in a new printer will not usually be full. You usually need to buy a cable separately. If you want to print a lot of photos consider a specialised photoprinter with 7 ink colours instead of four.

Speakers: PCs can play (and make) CDs and DVDs and of course replay TV programs. Check what the PC comes with and maybe add speakers. Laptops, All-in-ones and some monitors have (very) basic speakers.



Software:

The computer will nearly always come with a version of Windows (currently Windows7) pre loaded. However Windows is all about the basic functions of the computer, you will need other software for the computer to do anything useful:

An Internet Browser will also normally be provided allowing you to access the Internet once you have a physical connection.

For Wordprocessing, Spreadsheets, Presentations etc you need either Microsoft Office starter (a cheaper version of Microsoft Office) or the full Microsoft Office. Full versions or time limited trial versions may be supplied with the computer. It is normally cheaper to buy this software with a new machine than separately at a later date. Open Office is free software which mimics Microsoft Office but is not used in most schools or workplaces.

Software for Email, Security, Photo editing, Movie Making and more can be downloaded for free from Microsoft but can not be pre-loaded on your computer because of competition regulations.

Broadband: It is still possible to connect to the internet via dial-up, this requires a modem (not in new computers) and occupies your telephone line whilst connected. You only pay for the minutes you use but it's so slow you may end up paying more even for minimal use.

Broadband can be wired, your PC must be near a phone socket, this gives the best connection. However you can also choose wireless, allowing more than one PC in the house to share the connection and doing away with wires, however the signal may not be good in a large house with thick walls. Broadband uses the existing land line but phone calls can be made at the same time. It is always on when your computer is on, any restriction on amount of use apply to the traffic you generate not to the total time connected.

There are so many packages from different companies that it is impossible to pick out a specific deal at one point in time but general points are:

- The packages on offer can combine any or all of land line, mobile phone, TV packages with the broadband service.
- For less complication do not mix different providers of land line and broadband they will blame each other when its not working!
- In rural areas BT will be the ultimate provider, it may be best to deal direct.
- The bigger companies offer more reliable service and a sounder service, to protect their reputation they may include free support, free security etc in their package though at a higher price.

You may also want:

- A power distributor with surge protection to protect you PC from power spikes, if your broadband connection is wired, buy one that also protects your PC from lightning strikes on the local phone line.
- Paper for the printer (ordinary paper will do) but special ink jet paper if you want top quality.
- Blank CDs and/or DVDs
- A memory stick to back up your files and take pictures etc to someone else's PC/TV