



How to buy

Before you scan the *What PC?* tables for your new computer system, take a look at our practical guide to help you make the right choice

Setting out to buy a PC can be a confusing affair, especially with so many products on the market. Which system is best for you? What options do you need? Are you better off buying mail-order or going to a high street shop? Most people

have a million and one questions, and it often seems as if there are just as many answers.

To help you through the buying process and make the right choice, we've compiled this practical guide to get you started.

Know your needs

While it may sound obvious, the first thing to do is to decide exactly what you want to use your PC for. Doing this first will help you choose the right specification, and ensure you get everything you need. The table below is designed to

What type of PC do I need?

What do you want to do?	Minimum specification recommended	Average price inc VAT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Word processing ● Spreadsheets ● Accounting ● Record keeping ● Other general office tasks ● Play some games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pentium 133 or equivalent, 16Mb of RAM, 1Gb hard disk, eight-speed CD-ROM, Sound Blaster or compatible sound card, 15in monitor, 1Mb graphics card, Windows 95 and mouse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● £900
All of the above and...		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Image editing/Drawing ● Desktop publishing (DTP) ● Run multimedia titles ● Video editing ● Play the latest 3D games 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pentium 166 MMX or equivalent, 16Mb of RAM, 1Gb hard disk, eight-speed CD-ROM, Sound Blaster or compatible sound card, 15in monitor 2Mb graphics card, Windows 95 and mouse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● £1,400
All of the above and...		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Advanced DTP ● CAD (computer aided design) ● Video/audio editing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pentium 200 MMX or equivalent, 32Mb of RAM, 2Gb hard disk, eight-speed CD-ROM, Sound Blaster or compatible sound card, 17in monitor, 4Mb graphics card, Windows 95 and mouse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● £1,800
Great. I also want to...		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use the Internet/on-line services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Add at least a 28.8Kbits/s modem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● £90
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Print documents/pictures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Add either an inkjet or laser printer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● £300/£400
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scan documents/pictures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Add a flatbed scanner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● £150

Buyer's checklist

Example		First system (fill in below)	Second system (fill in below)	Third system (fill in below)
Computer	Chimp 2000			
Manufacturer	Monkey Business Ltd			
Telephone	011 123 4567			
Price (inc VAT)	£1,040			
Processor	Intel Pentium			
Speed	133MHz			
RAM	16Mb			
Hard disk size	2Gb			
Monitor	15in			
CD-ROM drive	16x			
Sound card	16-bit Sound Blaster compatible			
Speakers included?	Yes			
Graphics card	2Mb			
Case type	Desktop			
Modem	Not supplied			
Warranty period	One year, return to base			
Carriage	£10			
Price confirmed	10/7/97			
Reviewed in	<i>What PC?</i> August page 24			
Bundled software	Windows 95, Office 97 plus 11 more titles			
Notes	£150 for extended on-site warranty for two more years Manuals and disks supplied Spoke to Simon			

help you match your requirements to the system that's suitable for the job.

At the moment the minimum specification worth considering is a Pentium 133 or equivalent, with 16Mb of RAM. The system should have at least a 1Gb hard disk, eight-speed CD-ROM drive, 15in monitor, Sound Blaster or compatible sound device and a 1Mb SVGA graphics card. You'll also need a copy of Microsoft Windows 95, which should come installed on the machine as standard. If you're not sure what these things are, turn back a few pages to our Getting Started section for a rundown.

Some manufacturers may be selling off slower machines with fewer features at bargain prices, but we wouldn't recommend these if you want to run today's software applications and games at a comfortable pace.

Once you've worked out your needs and specifications, the next step is to set

yourself a price limit. You may need to alter this after your research. Initially it should be what you think you can afford.

Shopping around

Armed with a price you can go shopping for a suitable machine, but which is the best place to buy - mail order or retail outlet? There are pros and cons to each of these 'channels' and it pays to consider them before setting out.

Buying mail order or 'direct' from the pages of a magazine generally offers the most competitive deals, and you're more likely to get the very latest technology. But you will need to check details such as whether the items you want are in stock, if the price has changed and if it includes VAT, delivery details, and warranty.

In a high-street shop or PC superstore you will be able to try before you buy, which is especially important when assessing screens and keyboard quality.

You can also take your machine home without delay, and there is somewhere local to return your equipment to if anything goes wrong.

The downside of buying from a retail chain is that you may not get the latest technology, prices may be higher and staff may not be as technically knowledgeable as you might like.

Once you've found some PCs that fit the bill, use the form above to compare them. Fill it in here or photocopy it if you don't want to damage your magazine.

A final note

Perhaps the best piece of advice when buying is to always go for the most powerful, well-specified system you can afford. This way your machine will happily run today's software, and still have enough power left in it for tomorrow's big and more demanding applications. Happy PC buying. ●