

What's The Single, Most Important Item I Should Look At When Buying A New Computer For Business Use?

The gigahertz speed, right?

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Usually, you know pretty much how much you are willing to spend on a computer before you actually purchase one. Because computers are becoming so inexpensive, many people are surprised to find that they may actually have a few extra bucks budgeted for a computer purchase than what they originally expected. This, in turn, brings up a new, unusual question: "If I have an extra one or two hundred dollars to spend on this computer, what should I get?"

Here are my answers, in order of priority.

1. More RAM. The typical, off-the-shelf computer usually includes 256 megabytes of ram. This is a good minimum. Doubling the RAM to 512 megs is a fantastic idea, since it is the amount of RAM that will make the most difference in the day-to-day speed and responsiveness of your computer. If you really want to beef up the RAM, you can even raise it to 768 megs, 1 gig, or even further. Going to these levels usually isn't needed unless you run programs that suck a great deal of resources from the computer (like heavy graphics applications), but it still couldn't hurt.
2. A CD or DVD Burner. There is virtually no reason, any more, to not have at least a CD burner in addition to, or in lieu of, a normal CD Rom drive. They run just as fast, and can create and copy CD's instead of just being able to read them. In many cases, the price difference between a CD burner and CD Rom can be as low as \$30. Also, you *can* copy CD's with just a CD burner alone; it's just easier to do when you have a CD rom in your computer as well (but it's more expensive, since you have to purchase both the CD Rom and the burner). For those of you have a little extra cash beyond that, getting a DVD burner instead of the regular CD burner is another way to go. DVD burning-drives run about \$350 right now...a little pricey for a simple frivolous add-on, but well within the budget if it's something you really need, or if you simply want to resist the need to upgrade later.
3. A Flat Screen Monitor. Like CD burners and CD roms, the pricing in flat screen monitors are now almost parity with normal CRT monitors. Not only are flat screen monitors beautiful to look at, with their crisp resolution and colors, but the primary benefit (in my mind at least) is one that is rarely touted: the supreme savings in desk space. What a difference people realize in their precious desktop real estate when they pull out that gigantic 19 inch, two-foot deep CRT monitor and replace it with a three inch deep flat screen! If you

have extra dollars to spend on your computer purchase, besides more RAM and a CD burner, this is a fabulous way to use these funds.

4. **Faster Processor.** Now we finally get to it. Number four on the list. Once you have exhausted the first three items, and you still want to beef up your computer, then it's time to increase the speed of the processor. Buying a 2.4 gigahertz Pentium? Take a \$120 or so and kick it up to a 2.66 GHz, but only after you have increased your RAM. The reason I recommend increasing the processor speed last is because it is expensive to do so, and the speed difference that you, a mere human, will actually see on your screen is minimal. If you're really after a speed demon, then go for it, just be aware of what you're going after.

Other aspects of the computer that could be upgraded really only come into play if you are working with heavy graphics programs, or you are building a recreational computer for playing games. These kinds of upgrades I will discuss in a future article, but basically you are looking for a better video card, more video ram, an enhanced sound card, a larger monitor, or a monitor with a lower dot pitch rating. ❖