



## SeniorNet Mangawhai Inc.

### A Guide to Buying a New PC

#### Introduction



“The only thing that’s constant is change!”

The computer industry is no exception to this rule, and therefore chances are that you will be faced with a myriad of issues and options if you are considering buying a new personal computer. Since we first published this guide in mid 2010, much has changed resulting in this new edition.. produced in time for you to possibly consider buying a new PC in time for Christmas!

This guide has been published to highlight the major points that are worthy of consideration, and possibly to provide a checklist when facing your next decision to purchase.

A brief disclaimer.... we do not promote any preference as to brand or type of technology. It’s your choice, but inevitably we have our opinions! When in doubt please feel free to contact the SeniorNet Mangawhai committee or tutors to discuss your requirements. Furthermore this guide is for personal computing and not business computing.

#### Let’s Start With Bill Gates!

Before going any further, if you get a new PC based on the Microsoft Windows operation system, chances are that it will have the Windows7 operating system already installed for you. If you currently have an older PC, maybe running the XP operating system, you should look into getting some training on this new operating system from SeniorNet... This is not a big hurdle to jump by any means, but something you should consider. Most popular programs that run on older operating systems should run on Windows7, so there should be minimal need to start learning new applications all over again.

## **Next.. What about my existing stuff?**

It is important that you identify all the programs and data on your current computer that you wish to continue to use on your new one. If you have purchased a software application (e.g. Microsoft Office) hopefully you have retained the box and CD and can reload it onto your new computer. Your data needs to be copied onto a removable device (e.g. flash card or CD-ROM) so that it can be inserted into the new PC and the data files readily downloaded. Again, if you are unsure do consider getting trained by SeniorNet.

## **What Is A Computer Nowadays?**

Great question as you will now be faced with an ever increasing array of sexy technology to invest in!

Whereas a year ago, the basic choice was to invest in either a “desktop”, “notebook” or “netbook” personal computer, much has changed in the past 12 months. During this period of time, the traditional “desktop” computer has almost disappeared from the market, or at least the computer retail stores. There is still a role for them as we will outline below; however added to the “notebook” and “netbook” computers are now “Smartphone’s” and “tablet” personal computers. And just for fun, finally the “iPod” entertainment computer!

## **How to Define a Computer**

We believe that a modern computer needs to satisfy all the “6 key design criteria” for it to be considered relevant to today’s user. These criteria are

- ✓ The ability to create, use and distribute information in the form of words and text.
- ✓ The ability to create, use and distribute information in the form of numbers.
- ✓ The ability to create, use and distribute information in the form of images.
- ✓ The ability to create, use and distribute information in the form of sound.
- ✓ The ability for your information to be communicated anywhere in the world.
- ✓ The ability for the technology to be easy to use, reliable, affordable, and to go where you go!

For more information pertaining to computer design concepts please refer to our guide “SeniorNet 101 - an absolute beginners guide to personal computing”.

**So let's look at each technology one by one...**

### **The "Desktop"**

For many a year this was the only viable option for personal computer users; mainly because the only alternative (notebook PC's) were simply way too expensive to consider. These computers are currently used at the Kaiwaka Learning Centre. The desktop invariably consisted of 4 separate units (processor cabinet, screen, keyboard & mouse) with any other device needed (e.g. speakers, printer) being plugged into the back of the processor cabinet.



The benefits were, and still are, that you could "upgrade" one component whilst retaining the rest of the computer e.g. buy a larger colour screen or ergonomic keyboard, and also as they are seldom moved due to their weight, they proved very resilient. However they are not "portable" and therefore of only practical use in one's needs. Buying additional components e.g. webcams, microphones and speakers are costly and cumbersome when compared to all the other forms of computers where they are inevitably already incorporated. Over the past year they have ceased to be any cheaper than notebook PC's, and therefore offer minimal benefit for the typical user. However if you need a larger keyboard and screen, they become slightly more cost effective.

### **The "Notebook"**

Notebook PC's support ALL the same functions and uses of a desktop PC, but offer the fabulous benefit of mobility. Today they are just as cost effective as desktop PC's and now represent the majority of PC's purchased for both work and home use. Usually the screen and keyboard are slightly smaller than found on desktops, but chances are that this should not be an issue for you. They have inbuilt webcams, speakers and microphones as standard, therefore greatly supporting applications based on images and sound e.g. entertainment and communications. Even the "least configured" notebook personal computers currently on sale provides more than sufficient power and capacity for most users. Definitely portable, but not able to fit into your pocket; a minor limitation is battery capacity, normally around the two hour mark, so it helps to be near a power point when using it away from the home.



## The “Netbook”

Similar capabilities and shape as a notebook computer and introduced specifically for those folk who use the internet for their computing and value mobility. They are smaller, lighter, and considerably cheaper than Notebooks and Desktops and have far less technology incorporated as this is deemed not relevant if you are only “on the net”. Therefore memory and disk storage is normally less and no integrated DVD or CD drive for software transfer or playing music or videos. The keyboard and screen are also more compact than a notebook personal computer, so essential that you give one a “test drive” before buying so as to make sure that you are comfortable using one.



## The Tablet

These computers have taken the market by storm over the past year since their introduction. Normally about the size of a standard book, very slim, very light, great colour screen, and operated by downloading inexpensive applications or “apps” over the internet. Most of the popular applications are already pre-loaded. Everything is controlled and used by moving your fingers across the “touchscreen”. These devices are wonderful for accessing the internet, being a multimedia entertainment centre, displaying electronic books, and have fabulous communication facilities e.g. videoconference calls. Cameras are included, as is “wifi” to provide broadband access to the internet. No keyboards, no mouse, very limited connectivity and storage but a wonderful device for watching movies, playing your favourite music, and lots of games. They also support “3G” communications, for an additional cost, for when internet access is needed and no “wifi” service is available.



The lack of a keyboard and very limited storage capacity makes tablet computers far from ideal for typing large reports and for storing tons of information. A number of manufacturers, headed by the Apple iPad2 (pictured here) have computers on the market now, and sales are strong. Prices are comparable to notebook computers, but far more expensive than Netbooks. These computers are promoting storing all your information on the “cloud” in preference to flash drives and CD’s.

Finally these devices are expected to be highly mobile and therefore battery powered, ten hours being a typical charge, with an adapter provided for recharging from the mains.

## The Smartphone

Surely a phone cannot be a computer? Well yes, if you apply the six key criteria mentioned above! Naturally they are fantastic phones! They all come with internet capabilities and therefore able to be used for accessing a vast array of entertainment and information applications. These are wonderful devices for anyone who is highly mobile and wants to take their “home office” around with them. Making appointments, checking calendars, sending email messages, downloading newspapers and games, taking photos, accessing all the popular web sites such as Facebook and Twitter... Smartphone’s are magic!



So what’s the catch? None really however if your main need is for computing, they may be the most expensive option. Chances are that you can either buy one from any electronics retailer and then select your mobile service provider, or go straight to the providers e.g. 2 degrees, Vodafone or Telecom, and they will invariably discount the price of the phone if you commit to one of their term contracts. The longer the term, and the greater the monthly expenditure, the cheaper the mobile smartphone. In fact many will be “free” if your commitment is for two years.

Telecommunications companies are actively promoting Smartphone’s, as the more capabilities they offer you, the more you spend on mobile calls!

Smartphone’s employ touchscreens similar to Tablet computers; however the screen is relatively minute, and therefore not suited to producing letters or reading electronic books. However their portability and literally hundreds of thousands of applications that can be inexpensively downloaded over the internet make them a “must have” especially for the teenage, Generation Y and upwardly mobile professionals.

Many of these people will still use a personal computer in addition to the Smartphone!

## The “iPod” Entertainment Computer

OK I get Smartphone’s, but you must be kidding me! Maybe, but in recent months the traditional “iPod” for years the standard in personal and portable music and entertainment now has a “touchscreen” capability and can perform most of the functions available on personal computers and especially tablet computers. Now with amazing sound and picture quality screens, cameras and wifi are included to give one access to the internet and therefore all the usual applications. Smaller than the tablets, and around the same size as Smartphone’s, the iPod Touchscreen will be first and foremost used for



storage of music, videos and movies, but its capability for internet access, videoconference calls, games, emails, and recording and edition video are impressive.

If your main need is for entertainment on the move, the iPod is wonderful, incredibly versatile and less than half the price of a tablet computer. You will inevitably use a different personal computer for word processing or for all your hobbies, but as an entertainment device, they are wonderful.

### **What's Driving Your Decision?**

We tend to find that there are four main criteria that exist when looking for a new computer:-

- ↳ What do I genuinely need to do on one?
- ↳ Where do I need to do it?
- ↳ How much can I afford?
- ↳ How crucial is it to retain my existing applications, information, skills and knowledge?

### **Sound like the Notebook's may be my best bet!**

Quite possibly! And maybe this should be the starting point when considering what to buy. They do offer lots of advantages. These include nice keyboards and colour screens, offer tons of power and capacity for home computing, have batteries to enable you to work when no mains supply is available, and are incredibly easy to carry around. This last benefit gives you the opportunity not only of being able to use it around the house, but also take it away with you wherever you go.



Most new Notebooks provide a range of features as standard. These are “integrated” into the computer and include a microphone, speakers, web camera, Wi-Fi connectivity, DVD reader/writer and a mouse. Some of the benefits... it becomes your personal stereo and cinema; it becomes your phone (and with programs such as Skype a video phone); and with wifi it enables you to access any wireless broadband service e.g. going to Bennett's Cafe and surfing the net and

getting your latest emails over a latte!

What to look out for? Just like taking a test drive for a new car it's important that “everything feels right”. Therefore it is important that you find the keyboard comfortable and easy to use. The screen needs to be clear to read. Finally many people who are comfortable using a normal mouse find the “integrated mouse” quite difficult to adjust to. If so plug in and keep using a “USB” or wireless mouse and simply “disenable” the integrated one. Not a biggie as modern quality “wireless mice” are very inexpensive (less than \$40, and

often found in sales at the usual electronic stores). If at all possible we recommend that you actually check out the PC before buying just to be sure that your “test drive” is pleasurable.

### **How about a Netbook though?**

If you are using a home PC primarily for accessing the Internet, then Netbooks are frequently cheaper than either Notebooks or Desktops. The concerns? Firstly they may need more memory and an external disk drive to load and run applications such as Microsoft Office. Secondly by definition they are smaller than Notebooks, and therefore the keyboard and screen are smaller. If you cannot type with confidence and comfort or see the screen clearly, then your use and enjoyment will be seriously impacted. By all means consider Netbooks, but your test drive is even more important and you need to be assured that it will be possible to run applications other than those based on the Internet with ease.

### **Those Tablets look sexy!**

Yep, and you will be the envy of all your friends. Even your grandchildren will want to visit you to play with one! As mentioned they are great for accessing information, and for entertainment, and are a wonderful tool for education and learning. No doubt costs will reduce as more computers come onto the market, but beware that whereas your monthly wifi based broadband costs will be the same as other computers using wifi, if you incorporate the “3G” capabilities you can be exposed to significant monthly mobile phone costs.

### **But I still need a mobile phone!**

Chances are that you do, and if you have been using one for years it’s more a case of which phone to buy. The traditional mobile phone is still very good value for money if all you need to do is call people! Therefore only consider a smartphone if all the other features and benefits are worthwhile for you. e.g. internet access and email. As mentioned chances are that you may still benefit from a more traditional personal computer as well as having a smartphone.

### **But surely not an iPod!**

Same as for the smartphone! Check it out especially if you are a lover of music and spend tons of your leisure time out and about. A great “computer” to listen to and use when you are out on your daily walk or jog!

## Confused By Now?



Hopefully not. But how to go about buying one?

There's no shortage of retailers or reputable computer brands nowadays! There are very few "Kiwi" computer manufacturers around anymore, so chances are that you will be considering one from a major "multinationals". These companies and their products are very reliable, and their sheer volume of sales results in very competitive pricing. They will all offer a 12 month warranty, and extended warranties are often available via the retailer if needed.

For typical home computing we find that most "entry level" PC's offer perfectly adequate performance and capacity. Also with great regularity, the "multinationals" are introducing new models and will frequently discount the older ones to clear the shelf space for the newer products. There are super bargains to be had and these "specials" will be highlighted in their advertising and invariably right in front of you if you enter the retailer's store!

The New Zealand Herald is loaded with advertisements for consumer electronics, with the Saturday edition favoured by the retailers. One particular brand, Dell, always advertises by inserting very colourful brochures into newspapers and your mailbox. Otherwise check out the usual retailers on the web. Also check out the SeniorNet web site (<http://www.seniornet.org.nz>) for those companies who offer products at discounted rates to SeniorNet members. Last but not least, talk to your local SeniorNet friends and learn from their experiences.



## I Seem to Hear A Lot About Apple Nowadays!



Yep, and why not! They are after all the most valuable company on the planet! They produce wonderful technology, incredibly well designed, very reliable, and easy to use. Apple is one of the very few computer companies that provide products across the whole range of modern computers ... desktops, notebooks, netbooks, tablets, Smartphone's and the iPod! In fact the tablet (iPad2), smartphone (iPhone4) and iPod (iPod Touch) all use exactly the same technology, touchscreens and applications. Clever!

Apple has been pioneers in the computer industry and have revolutionised our use of technology and the enjoyment derived from it. For many of these devices it is not overly relevant what "operating system" they run, as it's all about the applications and how to use them.

Apple computers are normally more expensive than their generic counterparts especially in the desktop and notebook categories.

### **Is Windows on the way out?**



Not in the short term, and personal computers running Windows operating systems still dominate the marketplace, especially at the price-sensitive level. Certainly the vast majority of SeniorNet Learning Centres are still based on Windows based computers and applications, accepting a trend to provide learning experiences with Apple computers. Furthermore for people who have used Windows in the past, their retained knowledge and skills as well as applications and data makes for a strong argument to protect these “investments” by staying with a Windows computer when upgrading.

### **And finally...**

We thank you for reading this guide, and hope that it has been of assistance. Nowadays home computing provides amazing opportunities for accessing and creating information, for entertainment, and for communications. At the heart of this exciting proposition is the need for a modern personal computer that is easy to use, affordable, powerful, and will support your needs now and into the future.

We wish you continued success and enjoyment with your personal computing journey, and trust that your membership of SeniorNet aids this journey.