Choosing and buying your IT equipment: checklist

Almost every type of business can benefit from some kind of IT system. The checklists below will help you choose a set-up that's right for your business.

Before you buy

(Tick the box as you complete each task)

☐ List the tasks you will use your IT for, now and in the near future - eg stock control, word processing, online sales, bookkeeping and email. This will help you identify your hardware and software needs.

☐ Consider IT equipment you have already - compare the cost for upgrading against replacing. You'll also need to consider compatibility between old and new equipment.

☐ Think about your business premises - eg is it a shop, factory or home? And do you need to be mobile? This will help you to decide between a desktop PC, laptop or tablet computer.

☐ Consider who (and how many people) will be using the equipment and whether they have any special requirements.

☐ Decide if other hardware is needed - eg a printer/scanner/fax/photocopier. Or even office furniture like a computer desk and chair.

☐ Decide what software you will need. Consider web-based 'cloud' software or 'open source' software as low cost or free options. But bear in mind that with free software help and support might not be as comprehensive.

☐ Calculate your budget. How much can you afford to spend on buying or leasing equipment, plus software, installation if required, security and maintenance?

Choosing where and how to buy

(Tick the box as you complete each task)

☐ Research and identify the most cost effective equipment and software that will meet your needs. You can do this at your local computer shop, online, through newspapers, computing and consumer magazines or from personal recommendations. Second-hand equipment could also be an option if it meets the needs of your business.

☐ Decide whether buying equipment outright or leasing (or a combination) is your best option. This will depend on your budget, which is most tax efficient and the level of IT support you might need.

☐ Determine whether it's best to use cash or credit - there are often many interest free or buy now pay later deals.

☐ Research IT retailers and suppliers to work out where you could buy. High street stores offer systems ready to go, but if your needs are quite specialist you might benefit from a set-up tailored for your business.

☐ Make sure any software you're offered - including that bundled with hardware - is fully licensed.

☐ Enquire about support and maintenance services, as well as security provisions - what does your business need to set up, run and maintain the system? You also need to know about length of warranty and security measures that protect your system. Find out what is included in the price and what costs extra.

After you buy

(Tick the box as you complete each task)

☐ Install equipment and all software - this can be simple for a single computer but for a network it may require specialist help from the manufacturer or supplier.

☐ Keep a record of all IT hardware purchases, including receipts, costs and dates - for warranty, accountancy and taxation purposes.

☐ Ensure your system is protected by adequate security measures, such as up-to-date anti-virus software and a firewall.

☐ If necessary, organise IT training for yourself and any other users.

☐ If any staff or contractors will use the system, create an IT security policy.

☐ Legally and safely dispose of any redundant equipment. You must also ensure that any sensitive data - eg on hard drives etc - is securely disposed of first.