Title:
Accessory Computer

Word Count:
673

Summary:
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Keywords:
computer technology, new trends, hardwares, accesories

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A home away from home is a great thing, so why not have an office away from the office too?The spare room or a quiet corner can be a perfect place for productivity. To outfit your workspace, you might need to invest in some new hardware like a second computer, a bigger monitor or a high-quality printer. Once you've got your home computer set-up, you'll need to connect it to the Internet or network it to other computers and peripherals in the house. With a good grasp of the facts and a firm idea of your work habits, you'll be ready to make sensible choices for your home-made office.

• The Computer. Not everyone needs the same level of performance in a home office computer. You might use your computer primarily for word processing and email which requires little processing power. On the other hand, you may want more power to run database analysis, large spreadsheets or graphics applications. The type of work you do and your work load will determine whether you need a computer with a lot of brawn or just a little.

• Processor. A computer's processor or central processing Unit (CPU) is the engine that powers the device. The speed of the processor is called the clock speed which measures how fast the processor can carry out instructions. Speed is measured in MegaHertz (MHz) and is one measure of a computer's power. A typical home office Windows PC should have at minimum a 500 MHz processor. A power user would probably prefer 800 MHz or higher. If you know your computing needs are

modest, and you want to save some money, an older machine with a slower processor is worth considering. When looking at an Apple Macintosh, keep in mind that you can't simply compare processor speeds with Windows machines, as the two types of computers have different system designs. Macs generally have lower processor speeds in MHz but don't let that fool you. Newer Macs like the iMac can definitely keep pace with PCs.

• Random Access Memory (RAM). When the computer is turned on, RAM is used to hold the operating system, applications and data that you're currently running. Information in RAM is rapidly available to the processor. When RAM fills up, the computer slows down because it now has to retrieve information from the slower hard drive. Imagine documents on your desk in front of you, readily at hand when you need them. But when your desktop is full, you have to file and retrieve documents elsewhere, which takes more time. The amount of RAM you need is influenced by the type of applications you use. Graphics programs like Adobe PhotoShop or Illustrator use a fair bit of memory. Word processing and spreadsheet programs use somewhat less memory. Users who like to multi-task and prefer having multiple applications running simultaneously will definitely want plenty of memory. More memory gives you a larger "workspace" and makes your computer perform faster with fewer glitches. A typical user needs at least 64 MB of RAM with 128 MB becoming the norm. In virtually all computers, you can expand the memory as you need more.

• Hard Drive. This is the computer's filing cabinet where all your applications and data are permanently stored. Most users can fit many years of productivity into a 6 to 10 GB hard drive. If you need to store a lot of information like several years of business records or image catalogues, then you may want a more spacious hard drive. Luckily, a bigger hard drive won't cost you that much extra. Alternately, you could invest in a removable storage drive.

• Expansion. It never hurts to get a system with room to grow, especially if you foresee your home office needs evolving. Find out how many RAM slots a system has and what the maximum amount of RAM is. Adding expansion cards to your system for 3D graphics or ethernet will increase the functionality of your computer. Look for a system with two or three free expansion slots and room for additional disk drives.