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1

Before You Start

This chapter outlines everything that's in this book. It tells you how to get started on the task of buying your computer.

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Seniors and Computers

Research shows that using a computer as you get older can help keep your brain active for longer. And that's in addition to other time- and energy- saving benefits. You can use a computer to:

- Communicate with friends and family
- Manage your finances
- Research and pursue your hobbies
- Book holidays or do shopping without leaving the house
- and much, much more...

Some people believe that computers are the domain of the young. But an increasing number of seniors are successfully using computers on a daily basis. In 2005, one quarter of people aged 70–75 used a computer online, and this has already significantly increased to 45 percent.

Some examples of real senior computer users include:

- An 88-year old British grandmother who uses her laptop to communicate with her daughter and grandchildren by email after they emigrated to the US
- A 68-year old who manages the administration of his local retired-professionals society using spreadsheets and word-processing packages
- A 66-year old who used social networking sites on the Internet recently to get back in touch with old friends she hadn't had contact with since leaving school all those years ago
- A 64-year old who uses his computer to manage his extensive photography collection and create DVDs of family occasions from video-camera footage



Don't forget



You don't have to learn on your own. Computers can be complex, however there are plenty of local training sessions and computer clubs you can join, many aimed specifically at seniors. Start by looking at your local adult education service.

Using This Book

You obviously don't have to buy a computer to use one or use the Internet. You can go to a local library or other institution and rent one. But while this gets you access to a computer for short periods of time, it doesn't bring you very many of the benefits of owning a computer.

This book explains why seniors in particular can benefit from having their own computer, how to simplify the process of buying one, and where to start!

This book is a guide to the computer buying process in easy steps, from identifying your needs, to choosing and buying a computer, and supporting it once you've got it home.

Coping with technology

As with all consumer technology, computers change and progress at an alarming rate. You may have bought computers for your children when they were younger, or have used computers in your workplace, but computers of today are very different.

You may need to learn some new techniques, however, technological advances are generally an advantage:

- Firstly, computers, components and peripherals (such as printers, scanners, web cameras etc) are cheaper than ever to buy – you don't need to spend as much to get connected.
- Secondly, each new generation of computer gets easier to use. Gone are the days when you needed to understand how a computer worked in order to run it.

If you have the inclination, you can use a computer, regardless of your age or previous experience.

Don't be put off by the large range of computers available, or the fact that you can buy them almost anywhere (including your local supermarket). This book will help you narrow down the options, while ensuring that you get what's right for you.

Hot tip



Don't be tempted to wait for newer technology to come out, or prices to go down. This is a continual process and you'll be waiting forever!

This Book Isn't...

This book is not a pricing manual or component buying guide. It doesn't contain specific prices for computers, or the names or costs of individual components.

There are several reasons for this:

- Details of components and their prices change as often as the technology does, and this can be as much as weekly!
- There are so many different suppliers it would be impossible to include them all
- Price and availability, of computers and components, varies considerably depending on where you live

Similarly, there is an ever increasing number of places to buy a computer, as existing shops diversify their sales lines, and as more commerce is done over the Internet.

What this book does

This book gives you the background and information you need to be able to make decisions for yourself.

It also gives you information about other places you can go to get that detailed and regularly updated information, both in person and using the Internet.

Hot tip

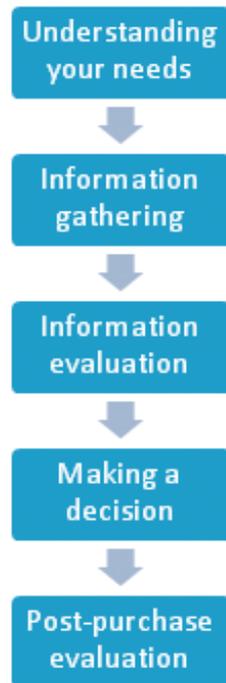


The Internet is the best place to go for the latest information about computer makes and models. There are lots of websites, updated by different people and companies. Read on for information.



The Buying Process

When you're making any purchase, you go through a number of decisions, collectively known as the buying process. It works as follows:



Hot tip



The time you spend researching what to buy is really valuable, otherwise you risk buying a computer that won't be able to do everything you want it to.

This process is very useful for reminding us to get all the information we need before we buy something. This is particularly appropriate for high value purchases like a computer:

- Unless you understand what you'll be using it for, how can you buy something that will meet your needs?
- If you don't research and evaluate information about all the options, how can you be sure that you're making the right decision?
- Once you've made the purchase, did you make the right decision – should you go elsewhere in future?

Hot tip

The first half of the book gives you an overview of computers and computing. It tells you as much as you need to know.

Chapter Overviews

Your requirements

The first part of this book is about understanding computers and what they can mean for you:

- **Computing for Seniors** (Chapter 2) shows you possibilities you may not have previously considered, using the common practices of other senior users. It shows you that how you use your computer affects what you should buy and how much you spend on it

Understanding
your needs



Learning about computers

These chapters give you an overview of the different components and technologies that make up a computer, as well as describing all the different types of computer currently available.

It also gives you information about the other activities you'll need to address but may not have thought about, for example, how to get Internet access for your computer:

- **Inside a Computer** (Chapter 3) teaches you about the key internal components of a computer. It explains which elements are worth knowing about and why
- **Peripherals** (Chapter 4) explains what common external components should be part of your purchase plan, including items that are particularly designed for senior computer users
- **Choose Your Type** (Chapter 5) helps you decide if you want a desktop, laptop or netbook, and whether to opt for Windows, Mac or something else. It describes each type, including its space and power requirements and other differences

Information
gathering



Information
evaluation



...cont'd

- **Software** (Chapter 6) explains what software you'll need, and whether it comes with the computer. It tells you about the market leaders, including free or cheaper alternatives where possible
- **Networking** (Chapter 7) explains what you need to link your computer and peripherals together, and how to connect to the Internet

Deciding what to buy

This part of the book helps you to put all of the information you've gathered into perspective, so that you can make decisions about what computer to buy, and where to buy it from:

Making a
decision



- **Buy The Right Thing** (Chapter 8) uses a set of questions to help you match your specific requirements to the right computer for you
- **Where to Buy** (Chapter 9) provides you with information about the different methods you can use and places you can go to purchase your computer

Life after your purchase

The chapters in this section cover all the tasks you'll need to look at once you've bought the computer of your dreams!

Post-purchase
evaluation



- **Getting Set Up** (Chapter 10) looks at the practical aspects of using a computer, including guidance on positioning your equipment, and the regular activities you should plan as soon as you get your computer home, for example backing up your data
- **Going Mobile** (Chapter 11) is an additional chapter that covers the use of handheld mobile devices, such as a mobile phone, and how to incorporate them into your home computing setup

Hot tip

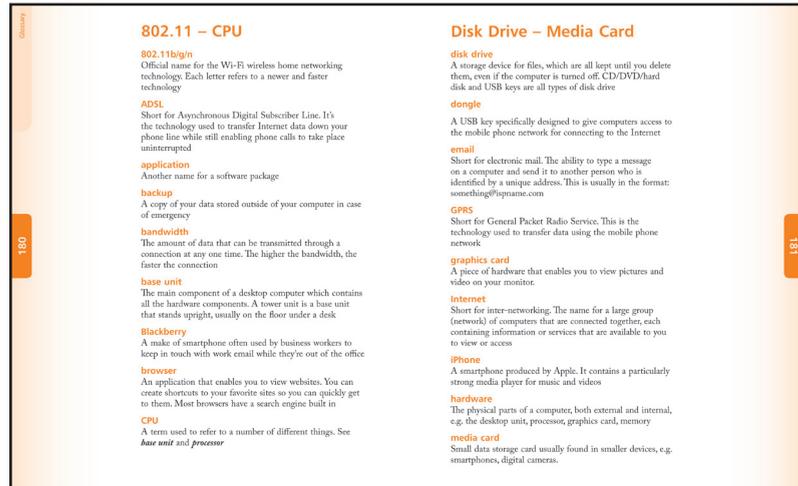


This part of the book helps you decide which computer to buy and the essentials you'll need to do to set it up.

Finding Out More

This book gives you an overview of computers and how to use them as well as information about the different things you can do, for example with access to the Internet.

It also gives you a glossary of the key terms you'll need to know: see Chapter 12.



If you want further information there are a number of places you can go, including:

- **Local library.** You'll find a number of resources here: a wide range of books about all the different aspects of computing. There are guides including learning about using different software packages
- **Website directory.** Addresses of websites where you can find more information about technology or online shopping sites
- **Other resources.** Other training and information resources specifically written or designed for seniors. We cover more of these in Chapter 2 (Computing for Seniors) and Chapter 8 (Buy The Right Thing)