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1

Introducing Your PC

Computers aren't just for your children's work or for your grandchildren's games, they are equally meant for you. They are there to help with those must-do jobs and also with fun-to-do things. We identify and explain the bits and pieces you need to get them done.

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Now's the Time

You have heard about the wonders of the Internet and are beginning to realize that access to both the Internet and email is becoming essential in today's world. You have friends who communicate with their far-flung family with ease and speed and your children or grandchildren keep encouraging you to become involved. If you really don't want to get left behind, this is just the book for you.

Many people in their fifties or older have not had the opportunities to use computers the way that younger generations have. Those who are now in their twenties and thirties will have learned to use computers during their school days, and a majority of working people will use or have access to a computer within their jobs.

This book is designed to introduce you to the world of computers and let you get involved. It starts with very simple and easy-to-do activities that will let you explore the computer's capabilities whilst at the same time gaining confidence.



Don't forget



You don't have to be a laptop cowboy to be able to understand the PC, it just takes time and practice.

It leads you step by step to achieve those things that you are most likely to want to do with the computer, such as find information on the Internet, write a letter or contact friends.

It's all based on the latest Microsoft Windows 7 software for your PC. So, by the time you have worked through the examples and suggestions in the book, you'll be completely at home with the system and ready to start your own tasks and activities.

A Walk Around the PC

1

The **systems** unit, with the **processor**, the **memory** the **hard disk** and the **CD** or **DVD** drive

2

The **monitor**, which shows the text and images. Resolution is measured in pixels



3

The **speakers**, to allow you to hear audio signals from the PC, to play music CDs and to listen to the audio on your DVDs

4

The **keyboard** and the **mouse**, which are used to enter information into the PC and to select items and options

5

Other components such as the modem (for connecting to the Internet) and the network adapter (for connecting PCs together) are found inside the systems unit

6

Your mouse and keyboard may be connected by cable, though frequently such devices are becoming wireless, using a transmission method such as infrared (just like the TV control unit)

Hot tip



If you choose to have two hard disks, you'll be able to keep a second copy of your most important data on a separate drive.

Beware



To use Windows Media Center on your PC, you may need a TV tuner and additional hardware.

Hot tip

If you are thinking of buying a laptop PC, pick up the computer and check the weight to make sure it's not too heavy. You will need some kind of case for it which will also add to the weight and bulk.

Beware

When checking the weight of a portable PC, look to see if the weight includes the battery installed or separate.

...cont'd**Laptop PCs**

With a **Laptop PC**, rather than a **Desktop PC**, all of the components will be combined into the single system, keyboard and display unit, and the mouse may be replaced by a touch pad or a pressure sensitive toggle button. The laptop PC will usually have a CD or DVD player.



Laptop PCs are designed to be portable and therefore weight is very important. To decrease the weight, some of the features of a desktop computer may be absent.

Screen size is also an issue. If you intend to spend a lot of time browsing the Internet or working on photos, then a larger screen size would be ideal. This will, however, make the unit heavier and less portable.

Netbooks

Netbooks are even lighter and smaller in size than laptops, being on average only 1.5in or 4cm thick. They do not have a CD or DVD player and will need to be connected to an external drive, by cable or wireless, for program updates. The average weight is approximately 3.5lb or 1.5 kilo, about half of that for a laptop.

Netbooks are ideal for travelling, for checking mail, staying in touch and keeping up-to-date. However, they may prove to be tedious to use for long periods.

Battery Life

Large laptop PCs will usually only run for about two hours on the battery. The smaller netbooks may last up to ten or more hours, depending on how many programs you are running and whether you have items such as Wi-Fi turned on. Windows 7 has new features for power management.

Computer Hardware

Basic Requirements

If you are in the process of selecting a new system, you need to work out what features are essential and what are merely nice to have. It depends on your particular plans, but there are some general guidelines that you can follow:

Processor

The speed of the processor is measured in megahertz (MHz), or in gigahertz (GHz) which are 1000 MHz. Windows 7 requires at least 1 GHz, so the processor must be in the range 1-3 GHz (that is, 1000-3000 MHz) and faster is better especially if you expect to work with video clips and digital photographs.

You may be offered choices from the Intel range (e.g. Pentium and Celeron), or the AMD range (e.g. Athlon and Opteron). The functional capabilities are similar.

Memory

The PC memory is measured in megabytes (millions of bytes) and gigabytes (thousands of megabytes). You will need at least 1 GB but choose 2 GB or more if possible. You should then be able to run any application, without having to worry about the memory that you have available.

Hard Disk

You'll need a minimum of 16 GB of hard disk space for Windows 7. Adding applications will increase the requirement considerably. A disk size of 100 GB or more should be considered, especially if you plan to store music or photographs. At today's prices, the size of the disk drive ought not to be a limiting factor.

Display

The LCD flat panel display is more or less the standard today. For Windows 7 you will need a DirectX 9 graphics adapter and driver. For video games, the territory of many teens and twenty somethings, and for video playback, you may need extra memory and advanced graphics hardware.

Don't forget



Processors operate in 32 bit mode or 64 bit mode. There is a separate version of Windows 7 for each.

Hot tip



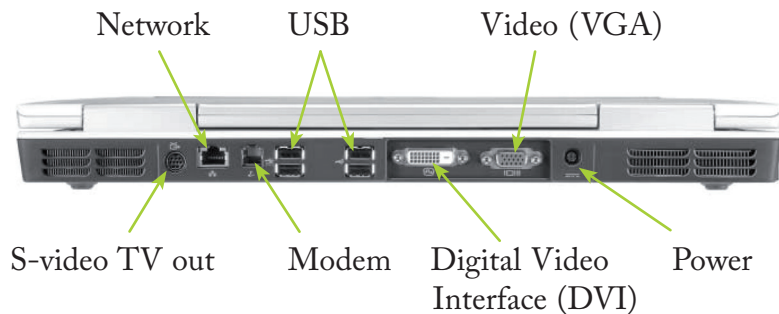
You may find that your hard disk is divided into two parts (partitioned). This is so that the manufacturer can store a backup of the original factory settings. Then if necessary, the computer can be completely returned to its previous status.

Connections

All types of computers come with facilities that will allow you to connect other hardware. There are three main types of connections:

- Device specific such as for the monitor or network
- Generic USB connections used for multiple device types (see below)
- Wireless (radio) connections e.g. for broadband or printer

The picture below illustrates the connection points on the back of a standard laptop computer. There are more connection points on the sides.



Hot tip



Using wireless connections means few or no trailing cables. It allows for greater flexibility when positioning equipment. Wi-Fi broadband also has the great advantage of allowing visitors to share your Internet connection.

USB Ports

These connection points are used by a multiplicity of devices including cameras, flash drives (memory sticks), external disk drives, projectors, navigation systems and iPods.

Wireless Connections

The laptop illustrated above has a built-in wireless transmitter/receiver, evidenced only by an indicator light on the keyboard when the machine is operating. Wireless, or Wi-Fi broadcasting is used for larger items such as broadband routers, Internet connections and printers.

Bluetooth wireless (see page 17) is used for smaller equipment such as mobile phones and PDAs.

Computer Peripherals

Printer

There are two main types of printers – the laser printer, which uses toner cartridges (like a photocopier) and the inkjet printer, which uses ink cartridges.

Laser printers are ideal for higher volumes of printing. They may be monochrome (with black toner only) or color and produce excellent results for text, but they are not generally suitable for printing photographs.

If you choose an inkjet printer, make sure to select one that has a separate black ink cartridge. For the colored inks, there may be a single tricolor cartridge, which is suitable for occasional color printing.

For serious color printing, such as digital photographs, it is better to choose a printer with individual color cartridges. This allows you to change just the one cartridge when a single color gets depleted – a much more economical proposition. Many mid-priced inkjet printers come with a feature such as PictBridge which allows you to print directly from your digital camera memory card.



You could consider a dedicated photo printer. These are easy to use and come with photo-sized paper. However, many are limited to 6" x 4" prints, with a few offering 7" x 5".

Scanner

This allows you to copy letters, documents and pictures, so you can store their images on your hard disk. The scanner can also be used in conjunction with your printer, to give you photocopier capabilities. You can buy combined printer and scanner units, which are known as all-in-one printers, as pictured above.

Beware



Some inkjet printers use a mixture of colored inks to produce a rather muddy greenish-black.

Don't forget



Many printers come with wireless capability.

Hot tip



The card reader on a printer can usually handle several different types of data card, but make sure that the type used by your camera is supported.

Hot tip

When one bluetooth enabled device comes within the range of another similarly equipped, they will automatically connect.

Don't forget

Blackberry and iPaq are examples of Smart phones. A PDA is a Personal Digital Assistant.

...cont'd**Digital Camera**

You can transfer the pictures from your digital camera to your PC. From there you can use Windows 7 editing software to enhance or make corrections. You can upload them to the Internet to share with friends, or copy them to DVD to play back on your TV.

You may be able to connect your digital camera directly to your PC, or you may have a card reader that allows you to take the storage card from your digital camera and read the contents on your PC. Both methods involve using a USB connection.



Some cameras have bluetooth capability. If your printer was similarly equipped, you would be able to transfer images for printing without any cable connection.

Flash Drive

This is also referred to as a memory stick, pen drive or external drive and is attached through the USB port. Its purpose is to enable you to transfer or store data – pictures, films, music or just document files. A 1 GB drive will hold up to 540 standard size photos, 12 hours of MP3 music files, or 6 hours of video files. They can be up to 256 GB capacity.

iPod or MP3 Player

At the base level, these systems simply play music and sometimes radio. They use the computer to manage, store and provide backup of the music files. The more sophisticated of these systems take photos, provide satellite navigation, access to email and the Internet and also act as a mobile phone.

Smart Phone or PDA

The computer is used to synchronize and manage emails, contacts and calendar information.

Sales Jargon Explained

Bluetooth

High-speed wireless communication for PCs and other computing devices including mobile phones.

Back to Base, or On Site

Types of PC guarantees. With Back To Base, you are required to return the system for repair, if a problem arises. With On Site support, the supplier sends a technician to your home.

Gigahertz, GHz

Billions of cycles per second, a measure of the processor speed, typically 1 to 3 GHz for a multimedia PC.

Integrated Graphics Adapter

Some PCs have an integrated graphics adapter on the system board, that shares the computer memory. However, if you are planning to do extensive photo editing, or play 3D games, you might prefer a separate graphics adapter.

Modem

The device or program that allows your computer to transmit computer data over the telephone line.

MP3

A compressed audio file format, used for music, much smaller than the equivalent wave file, but still high quality.

Pixel

Picture cell, the basic element of a computer screen or printed image. More pixels mean higher image quality.

Virus Protection

This is software that protects the computer from viruses and worms. It must be updated regularly, via downloads from the Internet, to cope with the latest threats.

Wi-Fi

Wireless networking, allowing you to connect computers and devices and shared data, without having to string cables.

Hot tip



When you visit a computer store, look at a computer seller's website, or just read your PC invoice, there will be many computer terms used. These are some of the more important terms.

Don't forget



You can also connect PCs and devices, and share your Internet connection, using Ethernet adapters and network cables.

Don't forget

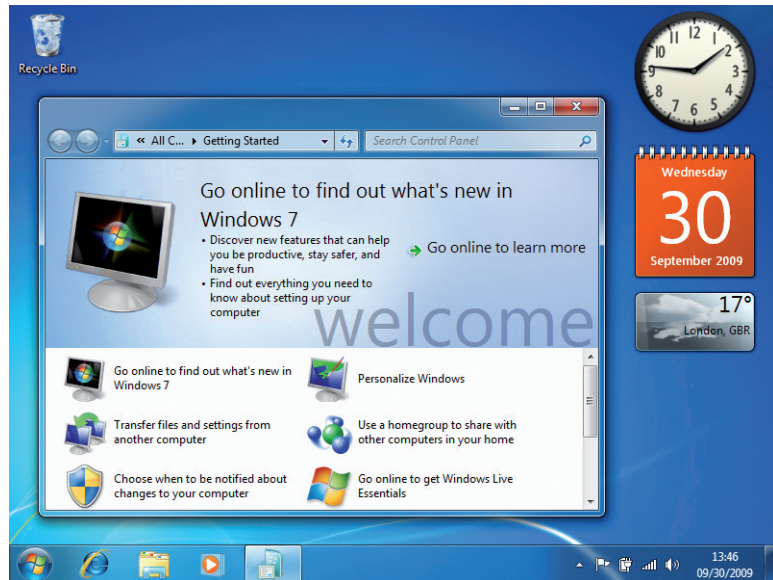
When you start Windows 7 for the first time, you will only see the Recycle Bin on the desktop.

Hot tip

The taskbar has icons for swift access to the Internet, Windows Explorer and Windows Media Player.

Software

Just as important as the equipment that makes up your PC, are the items of software that have been included with it. The primary element is the **operating system**, to provide the working environment. This will normally be Microsoft Windows. There are several versions, including Windows Vista and Windows XP, but in this book, we will assume for illustration purposes that you have Windows 7 installed.



The Windows operating system runs all the hardware and software on your PC. It allows you to access programs, save files to internal and external hard drives, and personalize and change computer settings to your own requirements. It enables you to communicate with the printer and other peripheral devices.

The image above shows the Windows 7 desktop, on which is superimposed the Welcome/Getting Started folder with a list of options. At the bottom of the image is the Taskbar with the Start button, the access point for all the programs and applications.

The Clock, Calendar and Weather **Gadgets** are also shown.

Windows 7 Editions

Features	Home Basic	Starter	Home Premium	Professional	Enterprise & Ultimate
Windows Aero User Interface			Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Flip 3D			Yes	Yes	Yes
Fast User Switching	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Anytime Upgrade	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Backup to network drive				Yes	Yes
Premium games			Yes	Yes	Yes
Snipping tool			Yes	Yes	Yes
Sticky Notes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Journal			Yes	Yes	Yes
Bitlocker					Yes
Windows Remote Media Experience			Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Media Center			Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows DVD Maker			Yes	Yes	Yes
HomeGroup Sharing	Yes*	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes
Internet Connection sharing	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
Windows Slideshow			Yes	Yes	Yes
Multi-Touch			Yes	Yes	Yes

* Join HomeGroup sharing only, not create

Hot tip



This table highlights the differences between Windows 7 editions. Home Basic edition is in developing countries only, while Enterprise is for business users. There's a similar range of editions for Windows XP and Vista.

Don't forget



All the editions of Windows 7 have a Backup program. The higher editions allow backup to a network drive.