



As time goes by your once proud and powerful PC will start to show signs of age. It could start to slow down, not start, develop annoying habits etc. When that happens it is time to start to think about an upgrade. When I am faced with the question of needing to buy a PC on a certain budget I have a system I use to get the most bang for the buck. I will focus here on the desktop and not a laptop, that will be another article. In order to figure out what is correct for you there are several questions you need to ask yourself.

1) Do I have the skills to build it myself?

2) Can I live without a total PC manufacture warranty and on call help? (Just have the parts warranty)

If the answer to both those questions is yes then read on I will tell you how to get the best parts to build your own PC. If not read on anyway and you will learn how to find out what the best hardware is for you so that when you do buy the PC from Dell or HP or whoever you will know how the hardware that comes with it performs and can base your choice on that.

The first thing you need to do is figure out what your budget is. You don't need to spend a fortune on a PC to get something that performs well and can do everything you need, you just have to be smart about what you buy. For those who think you need to spend thousands for a good PC forget it, you can build a machine that rocks for under a thousand and a good machine for a lot less than that. Once you have a budget in mind you need to start thinking about what you want the machine to do. I will use the example of a Gaming PC to help illustrate my point, after all isn't that why computers were invented anyway...to play games... The Gaming PC needs to be powerful, fast, and have a lot of storage, therefore if you build a good gamer it will be good at most everything else. Gaming really pushes the hardware and that is why it is a good choice. Now you need to break down the PC into the various parts and figure out where you want to spend your money to get the best bang for the buck.

1) Memory - This is critical. Memory is so cheap now that you can get as much as you think you can cram in. More memory is always better but on the other hand you don't want it sitting there doing nothing.

2) Graphics card - This is definately an important decision. For the gamer this is where you want to sink in your money. If you are doing office type work then the motherboard video is usually fine and you can save some money.

3) Storage - Hard drives are dirt cheap now. Like memory more is better.

4) Mother board and CPU - I recommend you get these as a pair. There are usually combo pack deals around. That way you know you are not going to make a mistake and get a motherboard that does not support your processor.

5) Case and power supply - Get whats cheap. Get what you think looks cool. Just make sure the supply can support all of the hardware you are cramming into your PC.

6) Monitor - Totally up to you. Even the cheap LCDs look good these days.

7) Sound card - I am a musician and do my own recording. Even cheap motherboards have 5.1

or 7.1 surround sound now. Save your money and get a mother board with it built in. No real need to spend more here for an extra card.

So those are the basic parts you need to get, now to get into more detail about how to get the best of each of those parts for the money. DO NOT,,,,,I repeat...DO NOT... think you have to get the best and most powerful of everything, or anything. Remember that the part that is on the bleeding edge today is a door stop tomorrow. Spend your money wisely. If you want bragging rights and have a deep wallet then go ahead and get the fastest of everything and enjoy it for one month knowing you have the best...then enjoy not having the best one month later when the new hardware is released. I usually stay 2 - 3 levels down from the fastest and most expensive and I can play very demanding games with no issue. With the ever changing field of new hardware unless you deal with it every day there is no way you can know what is out there...unless you are reading this article! So the next step is to go piece by piece and figure out what you want to get. For this I have looked to [Toms Hardware](#) for years. This is my favorite place to see the specs and comparisons of all the different hardware. They do side by side benchmarks so you can see what the real performance difference of the various parts are and I have found them to be spot on. The two areas you want to pay particular attention to are the graphics card and the CPU. This will make or break your PC. Memory is so cheap I usually get whats on sale and have never had a problem. Same for case, power supply and hard drive. I have heard people say this hard drive or that hard drive crashes, is slow etc. I have found that to be BS and ignore the name on the box anymore. Just get one large enough to store what you need.

CPU/Motherboard

There are generally two choices here. AMD or Intel....neither is a bad choice. Intel has been historically more expensive and a better processor for things like graphics design but AMD is a better value for the money. Definitely get multi-core, also 64 bit. Even the cheap AMD 64 bit dual core processors can do an excellent job.I would stay away from the lower end Intel chips like the Celeron/Sempron. The motherboard will be designed to work with it as your getting a combo. I have spend good money on expensive motherboards and also bought the dirt cheap ones. Save your money here, don't spend a fortune on a mother board. The more expensive ones do have a lot of nice features, but you may never use them. Just make sure you have enough expansion slots to hold all of your devices plus extra should you decide to add something later.

Graphics card

I saved the best for last. This is really where you need to do some homework. There are many cards out there and you have to look at the amount of performance improvement you are going to see vs the extra money you will spend. Generally there is a happy area if you look at the performance benchmarks that will get you great performance at a good price at about 75% into the charts. So for example if the bottom of the cart was 0 and the top of the chart was 100 and the best most expensive card, look at the cards that are about 3/4 of the way towards the top. You will see that they perform well but are not the hottest thing out there. Once you start penetrating into that top 25% the amount of money you are going to spend will be exponentially related to the performance increase. In other words you will start to spend more and more money for smaller and smaller increases in performance. We keep you up to date right here with [PCModers Best Video Card for under \\$199.00](#) so that is a good place to start. Also [Toms Hardware](#) has always provided the metrics I needed to find that perfect balance.

So that is basically it. I could delve into the specifics of each part but that should get you started. PC technology is a constantly moving target and the right time to look for that new PC is right when you want to buy it. It is pointless to look six, or even three months before you want to buy it as by the time you do the technology will have changed. When I go to buy the hardware I have found that [Tiger Direct](#) is usually a good place to go but there are many others that are find..just look for the best deal for the hardware you decide you want.

My final piece of advice is GO FOR IT. New hardware is always better. Don't fool yourself into thinking this PC will be able to do the job for years and years. No matter what you get even the best PC today will really start to show its age in about two years. Get a new PC and be happy with it. When you start to have problems running applications you want to, then it is time to upgrade again. Don't fall into the trap of thinking you need the latest and greatest. What you need is something that does what YOU need and makes YOU happy.