Basic Office Needs

By Nicole Dawson

Recently, I asked the question, “What are the basic needs of an office?” The options and information available on this topic are dizzying. I posed just such a question to my colleague, Sam Boyster, Director of Information Technology at University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture Cooperative Extension Service. My hope was to find answers that would help our readers. Below is how he responded.

When determining your computer needs, answering a few questions will help guide your decision. Ask yourself:

How will the computer be used?

Which brand am I looking at?

What are the benefits of a laptop versus a desktop computer?

What type of printer should I choose?

What type of network connection should I have?

What type of software should I use?

How will the computer be used?

For basic office and personal use the following configuration should suffice unless there are specific needs:

Processor: Intel® Core™ i7

Operating System: Windows 10 64-bit

Memory: 8GB RAM
Graphics Card: default graphics card will suffice unless there are specific graphic needs.

Hard Drive: 500GB minimum

Optical Drive (CD or DVD) - yes

Connectivity: For physical connection - Ethernet LAN 10/100/1000; for wireless connection – wireless card.

Monitors: basic monitor, recommend 18 inches diagonal measure minimum

Keyboard and mouse: basic units come with both.

Audio Speakers: basic unit usually ships with a pair of speakers.

Which brand am I looking at?

According to International Data Corporation (IDC) in the second quarter of 2015, the following three vendors held 53.3% of the market: Lenovo 20.3%, HP 18.5%, and Dell 14.5%. Purchasing a reputable brand from a trusted source can reduce problems and provide a helpful face when installation issues occur.

What are the benefits of a laptop verses a desktop computer?

Laptops cost more than desktop systems but allow you to take your office with you.

What type of printer should I chose?

Similar to the computer purchasing decision, look at how your printer will be used. Many all-in-one printers can print, copy and fax from the same device. The cost is typically determined by how quickly the printer can print, whether it’s color or black and white, and how it’s connected to your computer. Many can now connect wirelessly (which will require a wireless network in your home or office) and shared between multiple users.

Laser printers produce a more durable printed image since many inkjet printed pages will bleed if they become moist. However, be aware the cost of replacement color toner cartridges may exceed the original cost of the printer. Be sure to check the cost of replacement cartridges before making a final decision. A small office that primarily needs black and white print with only a few needs for color may decide to purchase a black and white laser printer and a lower cost multi-function printer for their low volume color needs.

What type of network connection should I have?

Connecting to the Internet can be a bewildering array of options and services. Cable and telecom providers offer wired and wireless solutions. Wireless solutions usually require you to pay based on the amount of data used each month. Again, depending on your needs, a small office with one to three employees can function effectively with at 5 to 10 megabit per second (Mbps) connection.

What type of software should I use?
Microsoft Office is still used quite widely and can be purchased through an affordable subscription model. Free versions of Google's application software are also available. E-mail services are available from several sources including Microsoft, Google, and Yahoo!

Security – Anti-virus software is also recommended.

In today's business environment it is critical that you have online capabilities. Most solicitations are online and you may use your internet connection to submit your bid. Having newer technology could also make your job easier. For example, having a printer with scanning capabilities might allow you to scan and send your response to a solicitation. You may consider upgrading your office equipment a little at a time. This allows you to get comfortable with newer methods at your own speed, without breaking the bank. Don't be afraid to ask friends and family for help when learning. There are also websites, tutorials, and you may be able to find free classes at places like community colleges or public libraries. You can use new systems and technology to benefit your personal life and business.

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