

Saving money on computing

By Ben Delaney, CEO, ReliaTech

Even in a down economy, ambitious people start new businesses and expand their existing ones. But, with near-daily news of new stock market lows, bank failures and reduced consumer spending, an entrepreneur, no matter how optimistic, must look for ways to reduce expenses.

One place a lot of money can be saved is in Information Technology (IT) infrastructure. When you look at the start-up costs of a new office or the cost of adding staff, one of the larger line items is the cost of computers, printers and network connections. Purchased new, these items can add several thousand dollars to the cost of each person sitting in your office. But, by carefully assessing the real needs for IT, an innovative entrepreneur can find IT equipment costs savings of as much as 80%.

While a reliable, brand name business computer system typically costs \$500 to \$1,000, and a business-grade printer can cost several hundred dollars more, it is possible to buy equivalent, lightly-used, refurbished equipment for less than half that. Consider: does your sales manager really need a machine that can calculate a missile trajectory in real time, or would a slightly less powerful system run his or her spreadsheets just as well? In most cases, the correct choice is the latter.

Can you count on a refurbished computer?

Working at one of the largest refurbishers in the Bay Area, I am often asked about the reliability of our refurbished systems. I assure the questioner that refurbished systems are even more reliable than new ones. In fact, we guarantee our refurbishes for a full 90 days. And, we get less than 1% of them back for warranty service. Here's why.

When new computers are built by a major manufacturer such as Dell or HP, they are subjected to statistical quality control. This means that out of, say, every 10,000 that are built, just one is actually tested. The assumption is that, much like political polling, you can get an accurate view of a large population from a small sample. We all know how accurate political polling can be.

Every refurbished machine coming out of our shop has been individually tested and subjected to a rigorous 18-point checkout. Every sub-system is tested, and faulty components are replaced. Hard disks are wiped clean (to Department of Defense security standards) and reformatted. A fresh, authorized version of genuine Microsoft Windows is installed, along with anti-virus software and an office suite. Finally, the computer is cleaned inside and out, and our warranty is taped to the side. When a refurbished computer hits our store shelf, it is actually as good as, if not better than new.

What you don't get with a refurbished computer

There are also some things you won't get with a refurbished computer. One of them is Vista. Like most reputable refurbishers, we belong to a program called Microsoft Authorized Refurbisher. This program enables us to use Windows XP on our refurbished machines. This proven operating system is preferred by many and has none of the compatibility issues that plague Vista.

Further, you don't get tons of nagging reminders to install programs you don't want and didn't order. We don't install free sample versions of AOL or spyware or useless utilities or free offers from people you never wanted to hear from. This means you get a more pleasant out-of-the-box experience, and your hard disk has a lot more usable room left on it.

Finally, what you don't get from a refurbished computer is massive environmental damage. A refurbished computer saves our landfills from several pounds of toxic waste and avoids the tons of environmental pollutants and huge energy costs of manufacturing a new system. All in all, refurbished computers are right for our times and can offer you major cost savings.

Ben Delaney is CEO of ReliaTech, a leading refurbisher and service provider in the San Francisco Bay Area. ReliaTech is the non-profit social enterprise of the Stride Center.