

Tech Talk With Jeromy Patriquin

Help buying a new laptop?

This week's first question comes from Jane from lands unknown. *She asks: "My husband has to use a specific piece of software. I would like a recommendation which type of laptop to buy."* For the sake of this article I've changed the question slightly and removed the brand names. Jane, I hope my e-mail reply was detailed enough for you.

This question comes in a lot at the store. We're always being asked to make a specific recommendation based on either software demands or the user's needs. Sometimes it's very difficult to pinpoint a machine based on limited criteria and there are numerous brands and machines which fit users' requirements and needs. Basically, you should look at three things: processor speed, memory and hard drive capacity. Everything else will fall into place.

This is a case where it's wise to be pound foolish. The machine I recommended is from a manufacturer that sells both direct to consumers and through retail channels. There were two machines that easily met her needs; one was \$400.00 and the other was \$500.00. The more expensive machine has more memory, a bigger hard drive and most importantly: the process or was substantially better. Spending the extra \$100.00 now will allow Jane to use the machine well into the future.

This week's second question comes from Shane in Templeton. *He asks: "What kind of laptop should I buy my son who will be enrolling at WPI this fall?"* Shane, WPI has historically required its students to have IBM or Lenovo ThinkPad laptops. Specific to WPI, they will suggest the precise machine he will need when he starts school. Unless things have changed, WPI will also have representatives from Lenovo on campus at the start of the school year.

WPI is different than most schools around. Each college has a different way of handling computer requirements for students. Most schools will provide pretty loose specifications based on expected use. Usually colleges provide processor, memory and hard drive 'suggested requirements' which are pretty low compared to today's standards.

Because the specifications are low doesn't mean you should purchase a machine which barely meets them. I believe you should make an investment and expect the machine to be used very hard for four or more years. I'm not saying buy an army tank, but I am saying you should spend some money and invest in a machine that suits the student's needs both in and out of school.

At the repair shop we see student machines all summer long. The lower end machines usually show their age; however, the better machines hold their own. You should understand that student owned machines are going to be used morning, noon and night and will be used for school work as well as personal work. One calculation I read years ago said that a student owned laptop will open and close more than 2,000 times per year – that's more than 5 times per day, every day!

Tip of the week: A good laptop bag is essential. Bags are classified by laptop size and the machine you will be putting into it. A good bag will have adequate padding and will hold the laptop snug without too

much floating. The style of the bag is a personal choice and there are many to choose from depending on your taste and budget.

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