

Computer Basics – Reading a Computer Ad

Overview

This part is about

- reading a computer ad.

Buying a personal computer

You can buy a personal computer as a complete system or build your own from scratch. It is much like buying a car. Depending on your resources and needs, you can choose to buy a new car or a used car, one that is loaded with accessories or one that is simply basic transportation.

Reading a computer ad

Personal computers are advertised like cars with the same selling points of power, accessories, and appearance. But it is easier to read a car ad because the features and accessories are familiar. Understanding what you are buying makes it possible to be sure that you are getting what you want. Once you are familiar with the components of a computer system, reading a computer ad carefully can tell you whether the system being offered fits your needs.

Two computer ads

The ads below appeared recently in the newspaper. They appear to offer essentially the same components—a computer, a keyboard, and a pair of speakers—but they differ in price by \$300. Comparing the features explains the difference in price.



System One

**1.1GHz Intel® Celeron™ PROCESSOR
LINUX BASED INTERNET READY
MULTIMEDIA PC**

- 1.1GHz Intel® Celeron™ Processor
- 128MB SDRAM
- 20GB Hard Drive
- 52x CD-ROM Drive
- 10/100 Fast Ethernet Adapter
- 56K Modem
- ThinLinux, Linux Operating System
- Many Software Applications Prebundled Including Word Processor, Spreadsheet, HTML Editor, Graphics Editors, Web Browsers, Lots of Games and More!

Limit 1 per customer.
#3308362/ #3409413

**NO REBATE
REQUIRED**

\$299⁹⁹



System Two

**1.3GHz Intel® Celeron™ PROCESSOR PC
WITH CD-RW DRIVE**

- 256MB PC133 SDRAM
- 40GB Hard Drive
- CD-RW Drive
- Intel® 815E Integrated Graphics
- i.Link (IEEE 1394) Interface
- Four USB Port Connectors
- Movie editing and Video Email Software included
- v.90 56K Fax/Modem
- Integrated 10/100 Mbps Networking
- Windows® XP Home Edition

MODEL RX641
#3323952

EVERY DAY LOW PRICE

In-Store Price: **\$649⁹⁹** Mail-In Rebate: **-50 =**

\$599⁹⁹
Price After Mail-In Rebate

**System One's
features**

Feature	What it is
1.1 GHz Intel Celeron processor	The Celeron is Intel's cheaper version of the Pentium. It does not process data as fast as the Pentium, but you probably would not notice it unless you were trying to process image or video data. 1.1GHz refers to the clock speed at which the processor can execute commands. Generally the higher the speed, the faster a processor can perform commands, but system performance is also affected by the other parts of the system.
128MB SDRAM	SDRAM is synchronous dynamic random access memory, a type of RAM that allows the computer to read and process data quickly. 128MB is an adequate size for word processing and drawing programs, but it would be the minimum size for editing video data.
20GB Hard Drive	If you use this computer primarily as a word processor, this hard drive would be more than adequate. Even so, it is a small drive by today's standards.
52x CD-ROM Drive	A CD-ROM drive is a standard feature on new computers because most software comes on a CD. The 52x refers to the data transfer speed. This drive would be able to transfer from 1.8 to 6 megabytes of data per second.
10/100 Fast Ethernet Adapter	This is a card that will allow you to create a network with two or more computers. If you only have one, it is an irrelevant piece of hardware. It will support data transfer rates of both 10 and 100Mbps (megabits per second).

56K Modem	This is a standard dial-up modem. The 56K (56 kilobits per second) refers to the highest speed that the modem can transfer data, but the actual speed you are able to achieve depends on the quality of your connection to your Internet service provider.
ThizLinux, Linux Operating System	Linux is an open source operating system that is free to anyone to use. Some companies sell their own version of it.
Many Software Applications Prebundled Including Word Processor, Spreadsheet, HTML Editor, Graphics Editors, Web Browsers, Lots of Games and More!	Programs that run on Linux are not as common as those that run on Windows even though they are able to do the same things.
NO REBATE REQUIRED	You won't be loaning these people free money for a few months.

System Two's features

Feature	What it is
1.3GHz Intel Celeron Processor	Almost the same processor that System One has.
256MB PC133 SDRAM	Twice the RAM size as System One.
40GB Hard Drive	Twice the hard drive size as System One.
CD-RW Drive	This drive allows you to store data on a CD disk as well as read a CD ROM.
Intel 815 Integrated Graphics	The processor's ability to manage graphic data efficiently has been enhanced on this computer.
i.Link (IEEE 1394) Interface	Also know as a "firewire" connection, this allows your computer to download data from a digital camera or digital video camera more quickly than using a USB port. If you don't have a digital camera, it is an irrelevant piece of hardware.

Four USB Port Connectors	The USB (Universal Serial Bus) port is able to transmit data quickly between the computer and devices such as a printer, mouse, keyboard or scanner. It is able to connect many different kinds of devices to the computer without having to add an adaptor card for each device.
Movie editing and Video Email Software included	As a marketing strategy, many software manufacturers have try-out versions of their products installed on new computer systems. The idea is that you will try it out because it is on your computer. But because the try-out versions do not have all the features of the “real thing,” you will probably feel motivated to buy the full version of the program.
v.90 56K Fax/Modem	This modem has the capacity to send documents from your computer to a fax machine. It is optimized to transmit data as fast as possible over a phone line, which makes it somewhat better than the modem that is offered by System One; but again, the actual connection speed is going to depend on your Internet service provider.
Integrated 10/100 Mbps Networking	This computer also has a network card like System One.
Windows XP Home Edition	This is the latest version of the Windows operating system and would be able to run any program that has been written for Windows. There is no mention of any other bundled software, so if you wanted to use Word or Excel, you would have to buy the Microsoft Office Suite, and that would cost just about as much as this computer.
Mail-in Rebate	It usually takes about 3 to 6 months before you get your rebate. This amounts to an interest-free loan for the company.

The bottom line

System One is \$300 cheaper than System Two because it uses a cheaper operating system and does not have as many hardware resources as System Two. If you were comfortable using software that is not widely adopted, this might be a good deal. If you wanted a Windows-based system, System Two would be the obvious choice, but needing to buy standard Microsoft programs such as Word could just about double the cost of this system. In both cases, you would also need to buy a monitor, and you would probably also want to get a printer. This would add about \$400 to \$500 more to the cost of the system.