

To Upgrade or Not to Upgrade, That is the Question!

By Gregory S. Michaels

Bang for your computer-buying buck has never been better. A basic bare bones system can be purchased for around \$500 or less. So, is it time to replace your old computer with a new one or is it worth the investment to repair or upgrade your existing system? Some experts would say that a business should replace their computers every 2-3 years and consumers every 3-5 years. Others would suggest a more quantifiable approach. For example, if the cost to upgrade or repair your current computer is more than half the price of a new computer then you should buy the new computer. As it turns out, the real answer to that depends on a lot of factors and is not always that clear cut.

Generally speaking if you mostly use applications such as word processing, spreadsheets, accounting, email, and the Internet, you should not need to upgrade as often. This is because most of these applications are manipulating text-based information and do not require anywhere near the amount of computing power that today's systems provide. On the other hand applications that manipulate graphics, photos, audio, video, or animation will always benefit from increased computing power.

For example, applying a stained glass texture filter to an eight by ten image in Adobe Photoshop on a high end system will go a lot quicker than doing the same task on a bare bones system. If you are a graphic artist that does that kind of stuff all day, at the end of the day you will be able to do more work on the high end system. The same holds true for computer aided design (CAD), 3D animation, or video editing. Number crunchers can benefit from the faster disk drives and multi-core CPUs available in today's bleeding edge systems. So, if there is a direct correlation between on the job productivity and the speed of your computer, you should consider upgrading more often.

Increased productivity is a compelling argument for upgrading. However, there are some other very good reasons to be considering a new computer that have nothing to do with processing power. Maybe you are dependent on a version software that is no longer supported by the vendor and your current system does not meet the minimum system requirements for running the latest greatest version of that software. If frequent lockups and "blue screens of death" plague your current system, upgrading to a more stable operating system can eliminate these problems. Video game enthusiast will always want to upgrade so they can run the latest greatest video games at their highest performance level. If liquid cooling and dual video cards gives you goose bumps you know what I mean.

Sometimes just adding some memory to your existing system can mitigate a problem and extend its life for another year or two. In fact adding memory is one of the best upgrades you can do to bring new life to an older computer. Other times all the memory in the world will not be enough and a complete system upgrade is more appropriate. Other upgrades that can extend the life and usefulness of your PC include swapping a new DVD burner for that old CD burner, adding a dedicated video card, adding extra USB or

firewire ports, adding a wireless network card, or a second hard drive to hold all your music, pictures, and video.

As you can see the question of upgrading is not always a cut and dry proposition. There is a tendency for people to buy more computing power than they really need. When in doubt you should consult an expert. With millions of computers already earmarked for the land fills and recycling centers, you should always consider extending the life of your existing computer as long as possible. Like the 100,000-mile car owner, you should be proud of getting the maximum mileage out of your system. So, if it ain't broke don't fix it. Haven't you heard change is stressful!

By Line:

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