

# Consumer Affairs Victoria

## eCommerce Factsheet

### Buying a computer

January 2004

*Buying a computer can be a confusing experience. There are many products available, with great differences in price. Computer technology is changing all the time, so it helps to do your homework and lots of planning before you buy.*

#### ***Need more information?***

Call Consumer Affairs Victoria Helpline on 1300 55 81 81

#### ***Quick Tip***

It's easy to be tempted by the latest and greatest in computer technology, but extra features mean a higher price.

#### **Understand what's available**

It helps to understand how a computer works and what the jargon means before deciding what kind of system would satisfy your requirements.

- Check the technology section of the newspaper, or computer magazines.
- Ask trusted friends and colleagues for their advice and recommendations.
- Look through ads and the Yellow Pages to get an idea of reputable stores and what they offer. Big department stores aren't necessarily the best place to shop for value and variety in computers.
- If you have access to the web, look at some of the material that's available in all of the major search engines in their Computers and Magazines sections.

To get a handle on the jargon, go to Webopedia ([www.webopedia.com](http://www.webopedia.com)) and What Is ([www.whatis.techtarget.com](http://www.whatis.techtarget.com)).

#### **What kind of computer do you need?**

Before you buy, you should be clear about what you want to do with your computer. Salespeople and even well-meaning 'experts' may try to persuade you to buy expensive packages with features that you'll hardly use. The type of hardware and software you buy should suit your real needs for the next few years. You will need to decide whether a PC or a Macintosh computer suits your needs best, and whether you need the portability of a laptop computer.

Have a look at different models of a few well-known brands and compare prices and features. As a rough rule of thumb, if you need a computer to play games and work with photographs, graphics, video and sound files, you need the expensive high-end model with lots of power.

You'll also probably be up for a hefty software bill. If you want a computer primarily for word-processing and spreadsheets, the lower-end model will be adequate. But you'll probably still need to pay for software, depending on what software the retailer throws into the package, and you should make sure you can upgrade the computer's speed and memory if your needs become more complex.

### **Quick Tip**

Make sure you have a good idea about what your needs will be before you start shopping around.

### **Big brand or custom built?**

With ready-to-go brand name packages, you have the guarantee that all the hardware is compatible and well-matched. Built-to-order systems require more homework and research and lots of discussion with people at the store, but may save you quite a lot of money.

### **New or second hand?**

Second hand or refurbished computers are cheaper, but you should be careful to buy from a registered business rather than at auctions, swapmeets, online or from private dealers. You'll have more chance of redress if things go wrong.

### **Buy, lease or flexi-rent?**

Leasing has advantages if you will be using the computer for work as well. Just remember to read the fine print of any contracts, and be clear about all the costs involved and what you're getting in return for your money.

## **Shopping around**

- Choose retailers close to you, so it is easy to keep contact with them in the future.
- Salespeople don't always have your best interests at heart, so it's a good idea to bring along someone whose advice you can trust.
- Be wary of dealers who try to pressure you into buying certain systems, or who don't bother explaining or answering questions, or who don't seem very knowledgeable. Just move on to the next store, and take all the time you need.

## **Quotes**

- Get quotes from at least three different stores. Get them in writing, with every component listed. That way you can make sure that you're getting everything you need, and you can make real comparisons. Don't automatically go for the lowest price. There may be a difference between cheap prices and true value for money.
- Ask about after-sales service and support: it's very important and should be part of the quote.
- Consider warranties carefully when comparing deals. They don't always offer the same level of protection.
- Never make a down payment or sign anything just to get a preliminary quote.

## Questions to ask before you buy

### Hardware

- Will this system be able to do all the things I want it to?
- Can you demonstrate how this system works?
- Is this computer upgradeable? Is it worth upgrading this system in a few years' time?
- Can I compare monitors to check actual display size and quality?
- Do I get all the instructions and manuals?
- Are all necessary cables included?

### Software

- Is this the latest version of the software?
- Is the software a fully functional and upgradeable version?
- Does the software manufacturer have a helpline or support website?
- Do I get the original CDs for any software that is pre-installed?
- If I don't get the original CDs for pre-installed software, how will I be able to re-install or recover it when I need to?
- Do I get all the manuals, licenses and certificates of authenticity for the software I'm buying? (the retailer should supply all these things upfront, and not leave them for you to download from the Internet or send away for)

## After-sale service and support

- What after-sale service and technical support does your store offer?
- Do you have a helpline I can call rather than bring in my computer each time?
- Do you have a call-out service? Does it cost anything?

### Warranties

- Are warranty repairs done at my home, at the store, or away at the manufacturer's premises?
- Does the warranty include all freight, labour and parts?
- What costs will I still be liable for under warranty?
- Can I buy an extended warranty from the manufacturer?
- Under which circumstances will the warranty be voided?
- Does the warranty cover software?

### Payment and delivery

- What is your store's return and refund policy?
- Can I pay most of the amount on delivery, and after it has been set up and checked?

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## Further reading

Consumer Affairs Victoria has a range of eCommerce related factsheets:

- Domain names
- Getting a refund on the web
- Internet service providers
- Online auctions
- Online privacy
- Online scams
- Online security
- Shopping online
- Spam
- Tips for business
- Top 10 tips for shopping online

## More information

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Information on eCommerce is available from:

**Consumer Affairs Victoria  
Victorian Consumer &  
Business Centre**

113 Exhibition Street

Melbourne 3000

Telephone: 1300 55 81 81

Website [www.consumer.vic.gov.au](http://www.consumer.vic.gov.au)



The information contained in this fact sheet is of a general nature only and should not be regarded as a substitute for a reference to the legislation or professional advice.  
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