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ReadyNetGo ... News

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Tip of the Month

All Video Cards Are Not Equal!

If games, desktop publishing and/or web work are on your mind, it pays to get a high performance graphics accelerator card. These cards have a co-processor built into them that perform graphical computations. Not only do they allow you to run programs at higher resolutions without added distortion but they can also simulate 3-D images which enhances viewing quality.

Features to look for:

- Graphics memory: 64MB
- Clock speed: 300-350 MHz
- Chip maker: nVidia or ATI
- Interface: AGP
- Memory type: SDRAM, SGRAM or VRAM (pricey)

Important: Make sure the graphics card you purchase has hardware acceleration capabilities. If you don't have an AGP slot, you'll have to buy a PCI compatible graphics card. And no matter how good a graphics card you buy, if you don't have the system resources such as enough RAM or a fast processor, you won't get the best performance.

When searching for a video card, make sure the card you choose has efficient drivers, reliable support, and is compatible with your OS and major programs you will be running.

For more info, check out:
www.pcguide.com/ref/video/index.htm

In the Market for a New Home Computer?

Follow these tips before you buy

When looking for a PC for home use, the best thing you can do before making a purchase is to decide what kind of activities interest you. Do you want to watch movies, check your email, surf the internet? What about telecommute or network with your laptop? Have you thought about trying out the new digital cameras and printing photo quality images from your color printer?

The options (and creative pursuits) seem endless for the personal home computer. While business applications are pretty standard — people generally work on documents (spreadsheets, word processing, databases) and email/web in a networked environment, home users have many more options.

Home users can watch and create their own movies, play games and listen to music on Dolby Digital surround sound, download images from their digital camera and email them to friends and family, wirelessly connect your computers with HomeRF or Wi-Fi (802.11b) systems and the list continues. You can even match your PC to your home's décor with colorful, stylish models instead of the dull beige we've come to expect from office PCs. With all these choices, where do you start?

Ask yourself a few initial questions:

1. Will I use the computer for more than just email and internet?
2. Do I want to play games and work with audio/video/photo applications?
3. Will I network my home PC with other desktops or laptops?
4. Do I want a computer that will be easy to expand if my needs change in a few years? (over)

WWW (Websites Worth Watching)

1. www.birding.com - Find the best birding spots in PA
2. www.nature.org - The Nature Conservancy; international non-profit working to preserve wild places
3. www.hawkmountain.org - Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, PA
4. www.audubon.org - National Audubon Society; protect and learn about our feathered friends
5. www.wilderness.org - The Wilderness Society

Answers to the above questions will get you started, at least enough to narrow your choices. Depending on your desired applications, your computer configuration can change drastically. The following list can serve as a guide for average home/multi-media users when doing your research:

<u>Processor/ speed:</u>	AMD Athlon or Pentium III / 700+ MHz
<u>Hard drive:</u>	30+ GB
<u>RAM:</u>	128 MB (up to 256 mb)
<u>Operating System:</u>	MS Windows 98se / ME / XP
<u>Application:</u>	Microsoft Works or MS Office 2000
<u>Sound Card:</u>	PCI, supports A3D or EAX; S/PDIF, multiple audio inputs
<u>Speakers:</u>	2-4 w/subwoofer, Dolby Digital (must for DVD), 3D surround sound
<u>Modem:</u>	US Robotics 56K faxmodem v.92/v.90
<u>Video Card:</u>	AGP (accelerated graphics port), 2D/3D, 32 or 64 MB
<u>CD-ROM Drive:</u>	40x Max or greater
<u>Monitor:</u>	17" or 19" (min: 1280 x 1024 res; 75 Hz refresh; .27mm dot pitch)
<u>Extras:</u>	Zip Drive, CD-RW Drive, 10/100 PCI Network Card, DVD-ROM

If you've set your sites on a multi-media showcase or want to play all the newest games, get at least a 1 GHz processor and the largest hard drive you can afford (50 -80 GB are becoming common). Spring for a 64 bit 2D/3D AGP graphics card and high end monitor and you're in business. For monitors, look for at least a 1600 x 1200 resolution, an 85 Hz refresh rate and a .25 mm dot pitch.

If networking your home computers is appealing, get a 10/100 PCI ethernet card for each machine. If you're leary about running cable through your house, get a wireless home networking kit ... such as 802.11b. As long as you don't have concrete walls, you should get 8-10mbps transfer. (We will review wireless networking options in a future newsletter.)

Money saving tip: If you just want a machine to check your email, surf the web and print out a picture or two now and then, you won't need a powerful machine. Look for an Intel Celeron or AMD Duron processor @ 600 MHz, 10 GB hard drive and 96 MB RAM. Include modem and cd-rom above as well as any necessary peripherals like a printer or scanner.

Additional Tips for the Home PC Buyer

1. If you plan on playing **games**, doing a lot of **graphic** work, or searching the **internet** often, you may want to invest in a good graphics card (see tip of the month) and a 19" or 21" monitor. Most graphic cards are 2D but you can also buy 3D dedicated (to be used with your 2D card) or 2D/3D graphics which display both dimensions on one compact card.
2. If you do not have a need to save many of your documents, purchase a **DVD-ROM** so you can watch DVD movies and play audio CDs. If you need a **temporary backup system**, purchase a **zip drive** (up to 250 MB) or get a **CD-RW** (650MB).
3. If you want to **download** a lot of **software** or store **MP3s** on your hard drive, get at least a 40GB drive. A good rule of thumb is 3 MB per MP3 song.
4. If you're looking for **expandability**, make sure you look for a computer that has at least **two free drive bays** and a **few empty PCI slots**. Drive bays enable you to add an extra hard drive, DVD drive, CD-RW drive etc. PCI slots enable you to add new components like a networking card, USB or SCSI adapter card, or video capture card.