

Bargain Hunter

FOR THOSE WITH TIGHT BUDGETS, SPENDING MORE THAN \$1,100 on a laptop or \$800 on a desktop is not an option. And you need something that will last you for at least the next two years, perform everyday computing tasks, and look halfway decent. Aim for a dual-core processor, upgrade the RAM if you can, and see if you can find a system with discrete graphics, from either ATI or nVidia. For laptop weight, think about how often you take the system out of the house. A decent desktop-replacement laptop, with a big screen, is what you'll usually find in this price range. It's also worth spending a couple more bucks to upgrade from a so-called "budget" processor.



Dell Inspiron 1420

\$1,099 direct



It's one of the best deals on the market, because you get an Intel Core 2 Duo processor, 2GB of RAM, and discrete graphics from nVidia. You'll be hard-pressed to find anything else like it. The frame is built for transportation, and the 14-inch screen is a boon to those who work hard but like to enjoy a DVD movie on the side.

Acer Aspire 9300-5005

\$1,000 street



This is a great candidate to replace your old desktop. The biggest prize is the 17-inch widescreen, but you also get a capable dual-core processor, enough memory to run Windows Vista, and a desktop keyboard with a number pad. Best of all, it's cheap. Just don't stray too far from an outlet.



GRANDPARENT

At this point in your life, simplicity is key. Look for a basic system that can browse the Web, send the occasional e-mail, and watch a family video. Also look for the cheapest system available, preferably something under \$1,000.

Gateway MX6214

\$580 street



It's one of the cheapest laptops you'll find, and it offers a 15.4-inch screen and an 80GB hard drive.

Toshiba Satellite

A135-S4467

\$999 direct



This mainstream laptop is a great way to start your retirement without taking a toll on your pension.

eMachines T5088

\$450 direct



The T5088 desktop has some oomph, thanks to a Pentium 4 processor, and it still manages to come in at \$450.

Preview

Zonbu

\$249 direct, \$99 direct with 2-year contract.

The Zonbu is a Linux-based PC that uses Amazon's S3 online storage, and basic Web and Microsoft Office functionality is included.

Systemax Venture DH531V

\$799.99 direct



It's a little more expensive than the "bargain basement" desktops, but this PC comes with a dual-core Intel Core 2 Duo processor, 1GB of RAM, and a 160GB hard drive, resulting in a decent bang for the buck. Having the Core 2 Duo will help you to resist the urge to upgrade for many more years than you could with a Celeron or Pentium PC. And the system comes without a lot of bloatware (unnecessary trial software), always a good thing.



Micro Electronics PowerSpec V300

\$450 direct



The PowerSpec is a basic PC with Windows Vista Home Premium. It's a low-frills system best equipped for Web surfing and e-mail. Unlike the eMachines T3612, with its Celeron processor, the V300 has a slightly more powerful Pentium 4 631 processor and 1GB of RAM, so it will last a bit longer. Although it costs \$50 more than a T3612, that's a good trade-off. It's a utilitarian PC for people with modest needs.

