

Cheap computers - not such a good deal

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Article written 8/21/2014 - while the specs may change over time from the writing of this article, the principal will still apply years from now.

"You get what you pay for." Ever hear that expression? It holds true for computers as well as so many other things.

Often I hear "I can buy a new computer for \$300", to which I cringe and then try to explain why that computer is \$300. Many take my advice while others feel I'm selling them a bill of goods simply to get them to spend more.

Let's define a couple terms first.

Cheap: Simply meaning of little cost.

Value: The worth of an object compared to what you paid for it. Example: If you buy a brand new Lincoln MKX for \$15,000, you wouldn't say it was cheap, but it was of excellent value because it's really worth \$35,000.

Today in the Fry's ad I saw front page a computer for under \$200. I want to use this to illustrate the difference between a cheap computer, and a "well valued" computer.

Cheap Computer: Here is the Ad:



The advertisement features the Acer logo in green at the top left. Below it, the text reads "Powerful & Productive 15.6 inch Notebook. Perfect for Back to School." To the right of this text is an image of a black Acer laptop with a Windows 8-style interface on the screen. Below the text, the pricing is listed: "Regular Price \$249.99" and "In-Store Sale Price \$225". At the bottom left, the price "\$195*" is displayed in large red font. To its right is a red circular badge with white text that says "Save 21%". Below the price, the fine print reads: "*After Personal In-Store \$30 Promo Code" and "Limit 1 Per Customer". At the bottom right, the code "#8119265" is visible.

acer
Powerful & Productive
15.6" Notebook.
Perfect for Back to School.

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\$195* **Save 21%**

*After Personal In-Store \$30 Promo Code
Limit 1 Per Customer

#8119265

Now, here are the actual specs of that computer:

Acer® Aspire ES1-511-COM4 Notebook

Operating System: Windows® 8.1

Processor: Intel Celeron N2830

Memory: 2GB

Display: 15.6" Screen

Storage Drive: 320GB Hard Drive.

Let's break this down.

Intel Celeron Processors: These processors are aimed at targeting the low-end budget PC's. Intel was losing the low end market to competitors and thus developed their low-end version of the processor. From the Wiki page on the Celeron:

..but their performance is often significantly lower when compared to similar CPUs with higher-priced Intel CPU brands. For example, the Celeron brand will often have less cache memory, or have advanced features purposely disabled. These missing features can have a variable impact on performance, but is often very substantial.

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celeron> [2]

So as you can see, you are getting a gimped processor - which is the "brain" of the computer.

Memory: This computer comes with 2GB RAM. I could sum this up pretty quickly by saying my cell phone has 2GB of RAM. The demands on the cell phone are far less than what a PC is required to do, and they are operating with the same amount of memory. Traditionally computers sold today that are acceptable have 4GB of ram OR MORE. No less than 4GB is acceptable for a modern computer.

ACER Brand: There are two brands of computers we recommend avoiding. Acer is one of these two brands. We find their parts to be cheaply made and break more frequently than other brands. So you can be pretty confident all the other components inside the machine are the cheapest Acer could get its hands on to produce this computer. Acer aims for cheap - not quality.

So is it such a good deal after all? I think not - but if all you want is a sad computer that can kind of sort of get things done - then it'll be fine for you. Be realistic about your expectations though. So many people convince themselves that all they want is to "facebook" on the computer; then later demand more and more and the computer simply cannot handle it. Then you have to buy a new computer - and you really haven't saved anything.

Now let us look at a good valued computer:



Dell i3542-6666BK Notebook

Operating System: Windows® 8.1

Processor: Intel Core i5-4210U

Memory: 8GB

Display: 15.6" Display

Storage Drive: 1TB Hard Drive

Optical Drive: DVDRW

Processor: Intel i5 – one step down from their “top of the line consumer (the i7). It’s a good processor! The i7 is more for high-end machines or gaming computers. They are “overkill” for what the average person needs.

Side note: The amount of “Mhz/Ghz” is only one of many factors that determine how powerful a processor is. A 3.2Ghz Celeron will generally be significantly slower than a 2.7Ghz i5 Processor.

Memory: This computer has 4 times the RAM as the cheap computer above. Memory/RAM is a critical component for speed. If the CPU/Processor is the “Engine”, the RAM/Memory is the “transmission.”

Hard Drive: The hard drive in this is 3X greater than the other. Frankly though, hard drives are usually irrelevant, people rarely use more than 100-200GB of data so either would be fine. However the BRAND of hard drive can be significant. We can’t tell from these specs what hard drives are being used, but not all hard drives are created equal. Seagate hard drives tend to fail much more frequently than Western Digital or Hitachi drives – which just once again drives home the point that you pay for better quality.

Conclusion:

I wouldn't be caught dead with the ACER above for the reasons listed. The dell however is a GOOD VALUE purchase. I generally recommend my customers spend between 500-800 on a computer to get decent life and performance out of it.

There Cheap computers are just that... cheap. Don't be surprised or upset if you get a cheap computer and find yourself replacing it in 1-2 years. For some people - that's ok and if it is, more power to you! But if you want something that's going to be a good buy, then go for value over cheapness.

For general recommendations on what you should look for check out our Article: [Recommendations on buying a new computer](#). [3]

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