Bits and Bytes

Arkansas' Premier Computer Club

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PC Magazine has just concluded their 20th Annual Reader Satisfaction Survey. The results were published in the October 16, 2007 issue and posted on their Web site at go.pcmag.com/sr. The following excerpts are from the Web site. In the accompanying survey results, the data pertaining to the business application of desktops and notebooks has been omitted. Also, data on printers is not included here. To read the complete results of the survey got to their Web site at go.pcmag.com/sr and click on the link, 20th Annual Reader Satisfaction Survey.

It's not enough to just buy a new computer with great specs and good looks. You need to know if the manufacturer will stand behind its product, be it your always-powered-up desktop, your travel-abused notebook, or the ink jet printer that delivers something to hang on the refrigerator. For almost 20 years PC Magazine has asked our readers to rank the vendors they use, and this year is no exception. We received detailed information from users of 20,690 PCs, both desktop and notebook, as well as over 21,000 printers running the gamut from inexpensive color ink jets to color lasers with integrated scanners and fax capabilities, or AIOs (all-in-ones). Even more telling may be the scores that have gone down this year. And most of them did. Why? What's changed? And what should you be watching out for? Before you buy, read this essential guide to make sure the vendor you're considering will give you the same consideration in return. We admit it. Sometimes from year to year, not much will change amid the scores the big-name PC vendors receive in this survey. Readers shook things up this year, however, adding companies that have never made the desktop list before (Acer, Cyberpower, and Velocity Micro) and adding back one that didn't make the cut last year (Systemax) despite a good showing in 2005. Velocity Micro is the company to watch. It swept in with the highest overall score among Windows PC manufacturers, 8.6 out of 10. Systemax also did very well with an 8.2. Only Apple and Gateway managed to keep the same overall score as last year. Every other company from the 2006 list fell in terms of service and reliability, a couple of them substantially: eMachines went from 7.8 to 7.4, Lenovo from 7.4 to 7.1. They had the worst scores in the group. Why are readers so grumpy this year? Simply put, more and more Windows PCs require tech support just to set them up properly or, worse yet, require a full-on repair. The big loser this year, at least compared with previous years, is Sony. Last year you gave the company a Readers' Choice recommendation, but the drops in score and increases in repairs needed pulled it out of the running for 2007. Readers didn't find the software Sony includes as reliable (though Sony wasn't alone there; HP's software is also considered less reliable). Sony also didn't get enough responses for desktops less than a year old to be included in that part of the chart, which made us wonder if the Japanese giant is losing market share. The biggest problem readers told us about: The overall reliability of Windows PCs is down. For example, last year, MPC received an 8.3, the best reliability score among those manufacturers preinstalling Windows XP. Its 8.0 this year doesn't inspire as much confidence. Velocity Micro once again surprises with a very fine showing of 8.6 for reliability—higher than any other Windows PC vendor's score, this year or last. That's even higher than the reliability of desktop PCs self-built by the reader technorati. Those savvy readers gave their own handcrafted systems an

8.5 score. And the score of 8.6 for likelihood of recommending shows their confidence in their own skills. The rumors are true: Even Windows users sometimes recommend Apple's Macintosh computers. And the numbers show that people already using Macs almost always recommend Macs. The score of 9.4 out of 10 for Apple is the highest ever seen in any of our surveys. The only Windows PCs that come close? Self-built. Those who roll their own think everyone should. Though there's a lot to be said for knowing all of your components inside and out, there are plenty of people with no desire even to open up the case. For them, Velocity Micro scores highest again, with a better-than-average 8.3 score. Last year MPC was close, with 8.2 out of 10 in the recommendation category, but the company has stumbled sharply since last year, to 7.5. Behold the power of a household name, as the overall scores of the vendors don't always correspond with the likelihood someone will recommend them. Dell and HP don't have great overall scores, but still manage a good likelihood of recommendation. Likewise, relative unknown Velocity Micro's recommendation score doesn't equal what it got overall. Apparently, word of mouth isn't the best way to find a reliable computer these days. A lot of companies make both notebooks and desktops. Alas, few do both well. For example, Lenovo/IBM scores terribly with desktops yet does very well with laptops. Where does that leave Windows notebooks? All the vendors garner what we consider "very good" overall scores, ranging from 7.0 (Averatec) up to 8.4 (Fujitsu). With the exception of Fujitsu, Gateway, and HP (the latter two with 7.8), all Windows notebook manufacturers' overall scores are down. Particularly worth mentioning is Dell. The company unquestionably leads in market share among our readers. Yet Dell never quite makes it as a leader in our Annual Reader Satisfaction Survey. This may be due to its extreme scores—in the wrong direction: It received a worse-than-average software reliability score (68 percent) and a significantly worse percentage of notebooks needing tech support (37 percent), for example. Newer computers should get more and more reliable. And for the most part, that's what's happening: The average number of repairs for notebooks less than a year old was down one percent from last year (in this case, lower is better) but up individually for Apple, Dell, and HP.

There is also some interesting commentary on Velocity Micro, Dell, and Canon, both on the Web site and in the magazine article.

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IMPORTANT – Put a note on your calendar, tie a knot in your navel, or do whatever you need to do to remind yourself that the November meeting will be held in the Community Room at the Highlands Crossing. Equally important, it will be held the second Monday of the month (November 12) at 7 p.m.. For those not familiar with the Highlands Crossing, the Community Room is located just down the hall to the left of the computer lab. The room will hold 125 people and we would like to fill every seat. After the meeting we will be asking your opinion on holding our monthly meetings at that location. The computer lab will be open prior to the meeting

Having a problem with your computer? Having a problem doing something on the computer? Stop by one of the Open House Help Clinics we have at the John Ruehle Center and see if we can solve your problem. These clinics are from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on the first Saturday and the third Wednesday of the month. The clinics are open to the public so you can invite a friend or neighbor.

The Computer Club's membership year runs from September 1st to August 31st. See Mary Lou Zolli, Membership Chairperson, about renewing your membership.

Survey Results: Desktops

	OVERALL SCORE†		RELIABILITY		TECH SUPPORT		REPAIRS		PERCENTAGE NEEDING REPAIR		LIKELIHOOD OF RECOMMENDING	
ALL DESKTOPS												
Apple (501 responses)	9.1	▲▲	9.2	▲▲	8.4	▲▲	7.8	▲▲	10%	▲▲	9.4	▲▲
Velocity Micro (70)	8.6	▲▲	8.6	▲	—		—		26%		8.3	▲
Self-built (3,934)	8.3	▲▲	8.5	▲	—		—		24%		8.6	▲▲
Systemax (73)	8.2	▲	8.3	▲	—		—		26%		8.1	
MPC (51)	8.0		8.0		—		—		27%		7.5	
Sony (350)	7.9		8.0		6.5		6.5		19%		7.6	
Cyberpower (57)	7.8		7.5		—		—		28%		7.3	
Gateway (719)	7.8		7.9		6.5		6.3		19%		7.7	
Locally built/clone (711)	7.8		8.0		7.7	▲▲	7.6	▲▲	28%	▼	7.5	
Dell (5,797)	7.7	▼	7.9		6.7		6.7	▲	18%	▲▲	8.0	▲▲
Acer (104)	7.5		7.6		—		—		13%	▲	7.2	
HP (2,912)	7.5	▼▼	7.7	▼▼	6.3	▼	6.2	▼	19%	▲	7.7	▲
eMachines (368)	7.4	▼	7.7		6.7		6.8		21%		7.6	
Lenovo/IBM (309)	7.1	▼▼	7.6	▼	7.0		6.6		18%		6.6	▼▼
Avg. of Windows PCs	7.8		7.9		6.6		6.5		21%		7.6	
HOME												
Apple (355 responses)	9.2	▲▲	9.2	▲▲	8.3	▲▲	—		10%	▲▲	9.4	▲▲
Self-built (3,136)	8.4	▲▲	—		—		—		—		8.6	▲▲
Dell (3,047)	7.9	▲▲	8.0	▲▲	6.5		6.8	▲	18%	▲	8.1	▲▲
Gateway (480)	7.9		8.0	▲	6.3		6.1		19%		7.8	
Locally built/clone (444)	7.9	▲	8.1	▲	7.6	▲▲	7.6	▲▲	29%	▼▼	7.5	
Sony (286)	7.9		8.0		6.4		—		15%	▲	7.6	
Acer (72)	7.8		7.8		—		—		14%		7.5	
Cyberpower (51)	7.8		7.5		—		—		29%		7.3	
HP (1,487)	7.8		7.8		6.2	▼	6.3		18%		8.0	▲▲
Lenovo/IBM (83)	7.8		8.0		—		—		22%		7.8	
Compaq (403)	7.5	▼	7.7		6.6		6.8		19%		7.6	
eMachines (301)	7.4	▼	7.7		6.7		6.7		21%		7.5	
Avg. of Windows PCs	7.7		7.8		6.4		6.5		19%		7.7	
DESKTOPS LESS THAN A YEAR OLD												
Apple (208 responses)	9.2	▲▲	9.3	▲▲	—		—		9%		9.4	▲▲
Self-built (1,452)	8.7	▲▲	—		—		—		—		8.8	▲▲
Locally built/clone (186)	8.4	▲▲	8.6	▲▲	7.8	▲▲	—		19%	▼	8.3	▲
Dell (1,468)	8.1	▲▲	8.2	▲▲	6.9	▲	6.6	▲	15%	▼	8.2	▲▲
Gateway (222)	8.1	▲	8.3	▲	6.8		—		11%		8.2	▲
eMachines (84)	7.8		8.2		—		—		11%		8.0	
HP (957)	7.7		7.9	▼	6.3	▼	5.8		14%	▼	7.9	
Acer (65)	7.6		7.7		—		—		11%		7.2	
Lenovo/IBM (79)	7.3	▼	7.9		—		—		8%		7.1	▼
Avg. of Windows PCs	7.8		8.0		6.7		6.2		12%		7.8	

* At least 2 confidence intervals from the average.

** 1 confidence interval from the average.

†Overall score is based on the answers to the question "Overall, how would you rate this desktop PC?" It is not the average of the other scores in the table.

RED denotes Readers' Choice.

Except for Percentage Needing Repair, scores are based on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is best.
A dash indicates that we do not have enough survey data to give the company a score.

Survey Results: Notebooks

▲▲ Significantly better than average*
▲ Better than average**
Within the average range
▼ Worse than average**
▼▼ Significantly worse than average*
RED denotes Reader's Choice

	OVERALL SCORE†		RELIABILITY		TECH SUPPORT		REPAIRS		PERCENTAGE NEEDING REPAIR		LIKELIHOOD OF RECOMMENDING	
ALL NOTEBOOKS												
Apple (509 responses)	9.1	▲▲	9.2	▲▲	8.4	▲▲	8.1	▲▲	16%	▲	9.4	▲▲
Fujitsu (84)	8.4	▲	8.6	▲▲	—	—	—	—	15%		8.2	▲
Lenovo/IBM (927)	8.2	▲▲	8.4	▲▲	7.7	▲▲	7.3	▲▲	19%		8.1	▲▲
Sony (378)	7.9		8.0		6.3		5.9		19%		7.8	
Toshiba (928)	7.9		8.0		6.6		6.4		19%		7.9	▲
Dell (3,066)	7.8		8.0		6.8	▲	6.9	▲	21%	▼	8.0	▲▲
Gateway (372)	7.8		8.0		6.7		6.6		18%		7.7	
HP/Compaq (1920)	7.8		7.9		6.4	▼	6.2	▼	20%		7.8	
Acer (290)	7.5	▼	7.8	▼	6.1		—	—	15%	▲	7.5	
Averatec (74)	7.0	▼	7.3	▼	—	—	—	—	30%		6.4	▼▼
Avg. of Windows PCs	7.8		8.0		6.6		6.6		20%		7.7	
HOME												
Apple (366 responses)	9.2	▲▲	9.3	▲▲	8.7	▲▲	8.4	▲▲	15%		9.5	▲▲
Lenovo/IBM (269)	8.5	▲▲	8.6	▲▲	7.8	▲▲	—	—	16%		8.6	▲▲
Dell (1,554)	8.0	▲▲	8.1	▲	6.3		6.6		19%		8.1	▲▲
Sony (264)	8.0	▲	8.1		6.6		—	—	17%		7.9	
Gateway (273)	7.9		8.1		6.5		—	—	18%		7.8	
HP (987)	7.9		8.0		6.1	▼	5.9		17%		7.9	▲
Toshiba (690)	7.9		8.0		6.4		6.2		17%		8.0	▲
Compaq (308)	7.7		7.9		6.4		6.4		19%		7.7	
Acer (229)	7.5	▼	7.7	▼	5.9		—	—	14%	▲	7.6	
Averatec (57)	6.9	▼	7.2	▼	—	—	—	—	30%		6.4	▼
Avg. of Windows PCs	7.8		8.0		6.5		6.2		19%		7.8	
NOTEBOOKS LESS THAN A YEAR OLD												
Apple (284 responses)	9.3	▲▲	9.4	▲▲	8.5	▲▲	—	—	8%	▲	9.5	▲▲
Lenovo/IBM (335)	8.3	▲	8.4	▲	7.6	▲	—	—	11%		8.2	
Sony (140)	8.2		8.3		6.8		—	—	9%		8.1	
Dell (1,101)	8.1	▲	8.3	▲	6.9		6.8	▲	14%	▼	8.2	▲▲
HP/Compaq (776)	8.0		8.2		6.3	▼	5.9		14%	▼	8.1	
Toshiba (331)	8.0		8.2		6.2		—	—	9%		8.2	
Gateway (141)	7.9		8.1		—	—	—	—	12%		7.9	
Acer (139)	7.4	▼▼	7.7	▼	—	—	—	—	9%		7.4	▼
Avg. of Windows PCs	8		8.2		6.8		6.4		0.11		8	

* At least 2 confidence intervals from the average.

** 1 confidence interval from the average.
†Overall score is based on the answers to the question "Overall, how would you rate this notebook?" It is not the average of the other scores in the table.
RED denotes Readers' Choice.
Except for Percentage Needing Repair, scores are based on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is best.
A dash indicates that we do not have enough survey data to give the company a score.