# Bits and Bytes

*Arkansas' Premier Computer Club*

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## Bella Vista Computer Club - John Ruehle Center

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Tis the time of year when folks like to by "stuff". Let's talk about what to consider when shopping for "stuff" like; computers, printers, scanners, routers, digital cameras, and ebook readers. What's the one thing to look for? Price, sooner or later just about everything goes on sale so decide what you want, use your resources to check the ads at all of the reputable companies, and be ready to buy. If you're not willing to purchase on-line you'll probably miss some of the best buys. Don't get hung up on brand names, in many cases it's not important. A company's reputation for service after the sale might turn out to be the most important factor. Last, ask yourself, "What am I going to do with this product?" The answer will help you decide on the model and/or price you pay for the product.

What makes a good computer? One that can do what you want to do. If you just do e-mail and a little research on the Web, you don't need a computer with a quad core processor, six gigs of memory, and a two terabyte hard drive. That's like buying a dump truck to haul the sand you need to fill a sand box. On the other hand, don't buy a crew cab pickup truck with a small bed to haul the rock you need to rock your yard. If you're using resource intensive programs to edit DVD movies then you need that quad core processor, four to six gigs of memory, and a two terabyte hard drive. Assuming the manufacturer is using state of the art motherboards, the two components that make or break a computer are the processor and memory. There are two processor manufacturers – Intel and AMD. Price wise there's no need to accept anything less than an Intel Pentium Dual Core or AMD Athlon 64 X2. Simply stated, don't consider a computer that doesn't have a dual core processor or two gigs of memory. If you already have a nice wide screen flat panel monitor, look for a place where you can buy just a computer. If you're interested in a laptop, consider a 15.5/15.6 inch wide screen with a full keyboard (one that includes the numeric keypad). Might as well get one that has a built in webcam. You'll need that if you want to make a video call to a friend or relative using Skype. If you want something smaller, take a look at the Acer Aspire One 721 netbook. You'll get an 11.5 inch screen with Window 7 Home Premium (64 bit), AMD Athlon II Neo processor, 2 gigs of memory, a 160 gig hard drive, card reader, b/g/n/ wireless technology, gigabit LAN, and a webcam for $400.00. Why mention the Acer netbook? There are a lot of netbooks with the Intel Atom processor, just one gig of memory, and the Windows 7 Starter or Windows XP operating system. If you're going to invest in a netbook, why not go with one that has the same features as a full size laptop.

When it comes to purchasing a printer, it's the cost of printing that's important if you do a lot of printing. The least expensive way to print text is with a mono laser (sometimes referred to as black and white). You can reduce your paper costs by purchasing one that has automatic

duplex (automatically prints on both sides of the paper). For convenience you might want to purchase a network printer that can be shared by several computers. If you have a wireless router you can purchase a wireless printer that can be shared by several computers and be placed in a convenient location away from the computers. Inkjet printers have the same capabilities. The cost of printing increases due to the price of ink cartridges. You have two choices; printers that use individual color ink cartridges or tri-color cartridges. If you opt for tri-color cartridges you'll be throwing ink away. When you run out of red ink there will probably be some blue and yellow ink remaining in the cartridge. Then there are the All-in One printers that will print, scan and copy. With most of these printers the copy quality is excellent and it's sure is a lot easier than trying to copy using a scanner.

Scanners – purchase a nice All-in-One printer.

Routers are designed to allow you to connect multiple computers over a network. This allows the computers to share information over the network and have access to the Internet. There are two types of routers – wired and wireless. If you have multiple computers located in close proximity, you can hard wire them together through the wired router. If you have computers that it would not be convenient to hard wire, or you have a laptop you want to use around the house, then wireless is the way to go. As stated above, you can use the wireless router to access wireless printers. There are three wireless technologies – b/g/n. Currently, "g" technology is the most common and is perfectly satisfactory. The latest "n" technology has improvements like dual input/output antennas, faster data transfer, and longer range. To benefit from these features all of the devices using the router must be "n" capable. If you don't have multiple computers, adding a wired router to your high speed setup will add an additional layer of security between the Internet and your computer.

Digital cameras generally fall into two categories – pocket or purse size point and shoot and larger more expensive full features cameras. Ten to fourteen megapixel cameras are becoming the norm. For most folks that's more than they need, but with a nice selection of cameras for $100 or less, go for it. Generally, the more you spend on a camera, the more features you get. If you just take casual photos to view on the computer, you don't need a lot of extra features. Two features you should look for; a large LCD (3" preferred) and a nice telephoto lens. The large LCD allows you to see if you've captured the photo you're satisfied with. Having something more than a 3X or 4X optical zoom lens can be a real advantage in many shooting environments. Steve's Digicams (www.steves-digicams.com) is a great web site for researching digital cameras.

Ebook readers allow you to read a book electronically. There are three major devices; Sony's PRS-700, Amazon's Kindle (3G+WI FI) and Kindle DX, and Barns and Noble's Nook. All are black and white with screen sizes from 6" to 9.7". Barns and Nobel's Nook Color ships on November 19 and may raise the bar with its 7" color touch screen and all the bells and whistles. Two negatives with the Nook Color are price and battery life.

Having a problem with your computer? Having a problem doing something on the computer? If you're a Club member 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. If you're not a Club member you're welcome to join the Club and take advantage of this service.