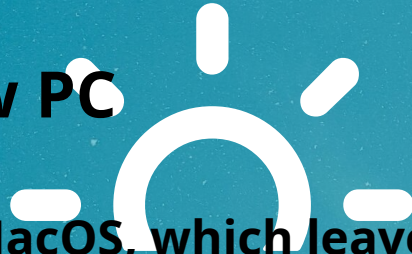


Buying a New Computer

By Bob Primak – April 8, 2026,
For Lexington Computers and
Technology User Group (LCTG)

Slide #1: Buying a New Computer, By Bob Primak.

Things to look for in a new PC



We'll probably either be running MacOS, which leaves us with their ecosystem, so few choices need to be made, or with Windows, which means Microsoft knows best what they want us to have.

Microsoft classifies users into four to six main categories:

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/learning-center/what-to-look-for-in-new-pc>

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/help-me-choose?r=1>

- 1)An everyday user who browses, streams, shops, and checks email
- 2)A creator editing photos, graphics, or video
- 3)A gamer playing indies, competitive titles, or both
- 4)A multitasker or remote worker juggling calls, files, and endless tabs

Slide #2: Buying a New Computer, By Bob

Primak

Or, another way to look at it:

- 1) Just the Basics
- 2) Family
- 3) Work or School
- 4) Entertainment
- 5) Creating Gaming

(approximate ascending order of less demanding to more demanding use cases)

I'll use the categories on this slide, as they are more practical.

Different needs point you toward different specs. Creators and gamers benefit from stronger processors and dedicated graphics; multitaskers thrive with more RAM; digital packrats want plenty of fast SSD storage.

Slide #3: Buying a New Computer, By Bob

Primak Just the Basics

Workload: Light -- I mostly work with basic programs and documents, or I don't use my PC for work at all.

Web browsing: Light -- I prefer to shop, connect and search with a few tabs open.

Photo or video editing: Beginner -- I don't edit my photos and videos, or I only know the basics.

Where the PC is used: Anywhere with a wireless connection. My PC needs to be as mobile as I am. (This is increasingly the norm among Basic category users.)

Where is your primary data storage? In the cloud -- I store most of my files on a cloud-based platform like OneDrive. (Again, this is increasingly the norm for Basic category users.)

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Primak Just the Basics

Most important thing in choosing: Usually for this category, it's portability -- I'm looking for a lightweight and compact PC that I can take anywhere.

Microsoft recommends either a laptop or a 2-in-1, with an 11 to 14 inch display. I think they're correct. Where I disagree is on specs for the best user experience with Windows 11, Cloud-first.

Processor:

Entry-level

The Intel® Pentium®, Intel® Celeron®, AMD Athlon™, Intel® Core™ i3 and AMD Rzyen™ 3 processors all balance performance and price, so that you can use your PC for the basics within your budget.

Unfortunately, these are woefully inadequate processors in today's AI-intensive world. Move up at least one tier. Intel Core processors are no longer marketed as core-ix.

Slide #5: Buying a New Computer, By Bob

Primak Just the Basics

Processor:
Entry-level

Unfortunately, these are woefully inadequate processors in today's AI-intensive world. Move up at least one tier. Intel Core processors are no longer marketed as core-ix. AMD Ryzen 7 (maybe Ryzen 5) is the floor of useful processors they offer now.

What you do **not** need at the Basics level is an NPU. Or excessive graphics RAM. I just slashed a lot of the 1/3 of the cost of a new PC which these elements impose. You're welcome.

More specs: (next slides)

Slide #6: Buying a New Computer, By Bob

Primak Just the Basics

RAM

4 GB to 8 GB

RAM is your computer's memory. It affects the speed and performance of your PC. 8 GB is fine for light browsing and most tasks. But for photo/video editing or gaming, you might need closer to 16 GB or more.

I would double these and all Microsoft recommendations for RAM. This is because even for the most casual users, Windows 11 needs more RAM to function smoothly.

So, 8 to 16 GB RAM

So there, I just took back some of the savings from the previous slide.

Slide #7: Buying a New Computer, By Bob

Primak Just the Basics

Storage

64 GB to 128 GB

If you want to save a lot of photos, videos and documents on your PC, look for higher storage. If you tend to store more in the cloud, you may not need as much storage.

Because of SSDs and their wear properties, overprovisioning is recommended.

So, at least 256 GB is needed even by people who don't store their entire lives on their system drive. Most useful PCs and laptops these days have 512 GB to 1 TB SSDs.

Buy more rather than less, as you probably will not be opening up an entry-level laptop to upgrade internal components.

Slide #8: Buying a New Computer, By Bob

Primak Just the Basics

Display resolution

HD to FHD

Resolution is the number of pixels on the screen and determines the image sharpness. For example, an HD display is 1920 x 1080 pixels, while a 4K display measures 3840 x 2160 pixels.

4K is not entry-level, and would add considerably to your costs for a laptop. These displays are marketed to gamers and video editing hobbyists and pros. Today's HD is what we used to call 2K. FHD is what is still called 4K.

We can see a progression as we move up the scale, but I'm going to skip a few Microsoft categories due to time limitations.

Try Microsoft's page for yourself, and see what they come up with.

Slide #9: Buying a New Computer, By Bob

Primak Gaming – Complex and Realistic

This is the most challenging category, and shows the opposite extreme.

A gamer would say, I play immersive games with more sophisticated graphics like Forza and Halo.

Where used -- At home, but I move around. I mostly want to use my PC at home, but I also want to be able to take it to a café or library.

This is common among serious gamers.

Where data is stored -- In the cloud. I store most of my files on a cloud-based platform like OneDrive.

This is common but not universal among gamers.

Most important feature – Performance. I want a PC designed for speed, performance and multitasking.

Ask any gamer, and this is the answer.

Slide #10: Buying a New Computer, By Bob Primak

Gaming – Complex and Realistic

Microsoft recommends a laptop with a 13 to 17 inch display.

Processor -- Advanced

The Intel® Core™ i7, AMD Ryzen™ 7, Intel® Core™ i9 and AMD Ryzen™ 9 are advanced processors that have some of the highest gaming frame rates and cutting-edge features.

Again, Intel is no longer using Core-ix and the AMD chips are more advanced. But these specs are more realistic than the previous specs for Just the Basics. An NPU may be necessary for some of the more advanced games. AMD has an AI series of chips now.

Graphics – dGPU (Dedicated GPU and vRAM, and as above, a good NPU)

An NVIDIA® GeForce RTX® or AMD Radeon™ RX, or Intel® Arc™ discrete graphics processing unit (dGPU) helps perform graphically intense tasks such as gaming graphics and effects as well as photo and video editing. Check the system requirements for the games you plan to play or software you plan to use.

Slide #11: Buying a New Computer, By Bob Primak

Gaming – Complex and Realistic

RAM -- 8 GB to 16 GB

RAM is your computer's memory. It affects the speed and performance of your PC. 8 GB is fine for light browsing and most tasks. But for photo/video editing or gaming, you might need closer to 16 GB or more.

Again, Microsoft's RAM estimates are way low. Double these numbers, in spite of prices. For gamers, 16 GB RAM (and additional vRAM on the graphics card) is the absolute floor. 32 GB RAM or even 64 GB RAM is common in gaming PCs now. And they are priced accordingly.

Display resolution -- QHD to 4K

Resolution is the number of pixels on the screen and determines the image sharpness. For example, an HD display is 1920 x 1080 pixels, while a 4K display measures 3840 x 2160 pixels.

(We'll have to ask gamers what QHD is.)

Slide #12: Buying a New Computer, By Bob Primak

Gaming – Complex and Realistic

Storage -- 256 GB to 512 GB

If you want to save a lot of photos, videos and documents on your PC, look for higher storage. If you tend to store more in the cloud, you may not need as much storage.

Again, Microsoft vastly underestimates disk consumption of Windows 11. Especially for gamers. At least 512 GB is the floor for serious gamers, with 1 TB, 2 TB and even 4 TB SSDs common.

So now we have a range, from Just the Basics to the most advanced gaming and video editing, or content creator needs.

What's out there, and what do reliable tech sites say about what's good, and what's best?

And then I'll offer some insights based on my search for a new laptop. I am a hobbyist or system tweaker type of user, but not a gamer or content creator. And not a programmer.

Slide #13: Buying a New Computer, By Bob Primak

Reviews of 2026 new PCs (mostly laptops)

Let's see what's out there.

When I selected the reviews to include today, I made some choices based on my experiences with review sites lately.

I am not going to use sites like Consumer Reports, Cnet Reviews or Tech Radar. Tech Radar may be reviewing PCs not available in the North American market. Consumer Reports has lately been less and less informative. Cnet has a reputation for not promoting the technically best products, but rather the ones which are best paid for to the publication.

I also did not select Phoronics, as they give a lot of technical details, but much more detail than our time today allows me to cover adequately.

Slide #14: Buying a New Computer, By Bob Primak

Reviews of 2026 new PCs (mostly laptops)

PC Mag Reviews

<https://www.pcmag.com/picks/the-best-laptops>

The Best Laptops We've Tested for 2026

Tom's Hardware Reviews

Best Ultrabooks and Premium Laptops 2026

<https://www.tomshardware.com/best-picks/best-ultrabooks-premium-laptops>

Windows Central Reviews

<https://www.windowscentral.com/best-windows-laptop>

Best Windows laptops in 2026: 9 top-rated PCs tested and reviewed by the Windows Central team

Slide #15: Buying a New Computer, By Bob Primak

What I considered buying

I decided early on not to consider HP laptops. They simply don't have a good repairability reputation, and I found the business-class models don't offer the features of Lenovo, Dell and a few others. Framework laptops can be configured similarly to business-class laptops for a little more money up-front, but long-term upgradability.

All good, solid, repairable PCs and laptops are more expensive than you may expect. Just know this going into your search.

I have some tabs bookmarked from my search, comparing several models of prebuilt and DIY laptops which might suit my needs – until I looked into some of the actual specs of the components listed. Let's just say some sellers are more honest than others in presenting specs.

(Go to Browser.) (Will only work on my Framework 13 laptop, Chrome. I'll add the URLs later.)

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What I considered buying

Hardware: Laptops considered.

<https://www.amazon.com/Dell-16-Computer-Business-Bluetooth/dp/B0B9RKBG7H?th=1>
\$990.95

No NPU (The advertising on Amazon is entirely false.), Windows Home (\$129 to upgrade to Pro), and yet it is marketed as a "copilot+" laptop. 1 TB SSD. 1900x1200 display. Touch screen. Otherwise, respectable specs. With Windows Home, this is not a business laptop. 16 in class. WiFi 6E.

Ports:

1 Universal Audio Jack

1 Power Jack

1 SD Card Reader

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What I considered buying

<https://www.amazon.com/HP-EliteBook-G1i-Touchscreen-Professional/dp/B0FMK8RLZ8?th=1> \$2,699.00

2 TB SSD. 14 in class. Intel Core Ultra 7 258V (NPU Up to 47 Tops). Windows 11 Pro. Wi-Fi 7, BT 5.4. 1900x1200 display. Touch screen. This is business class, and priced accordingly.

Ports & Slots:

2x Thunderbolt 4 with USB Type-C 40Gbps signaling rate

1x USB Type-C 10Gbps signaling rate

1x USB Type-A 5Gbps signaling rate

1x headphone/microphone combo

1x HDMI 2.1

Fingerprint Reader

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What I considered buying

<https://www.bestbuy.com/product/asus-rog-strix-g18-18-2-5k-240hz-gaming-laptop-amd-ryzen-9-hx-32gb-ram-nvidia-geforce-rtx-5060-1tb-ssd-eclipse-gray/JJGGLH8WFC>

ASUS - ROG Strix G18 18" 2.5K 240Hz Gaming Laptop - AMD Ryzen 9 HX - 32GB RAM - NVIDIA GeForce RTX 5060 - 1TB SSD. 2560x1600 display. \$1,749.99.

1 TB SSD. WiFi AX (6E). Windows 11 Home. So no, not a gaming laptop. 8 gigabytes NVidia dedicated graphics. GDDR7 vRAM. (This will run HOT!) NPU, certified copilot+ laptop. Pro upgrade adds \$129.

Ports:

1 x HDMI 2.1, Display connection via USB port

2 x USB-C 4

2 x USB-A 3.2

1 of the USB ports is also a charging port.

10/100/1000 Ethernet Port.

Headphone Jack.

2 M.2 slots (2nd internal drive possible.)

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What I considered buying

<https://www.bestbuy.com/product/asus-zenbook-14-14-fhd-oled-touch-screen-laptop-intel-core-ultra-9-32gb-ram-1tb-ssd-jasper-gray/JJGGLH7H3Y>

ASUS - Zenbook 14 14" FHD+ OLED Touchscreen AI PC Laptop - Intel Core Ultra 9 285H - 32GB RAM - 1TB SSD - Windows 11 Pro. 1920x1200 display (OLED). 14 class. Wi-Fi 7 AX. \$1,399.99.

NPU is only 13 TOPS, so no, this is not a copilot+ laptop.

Ports:

1 x HDMI 2.1

2 x Thunderbolt 4

headphone, microphone jack

touch screen

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What I Actually Bought

<https://frame.work/products/laptop13-diy-amd-ai300/configuration/new>

Framework Laptop 13 DIY Edition (AMD Ryzen™ AI 300 Series) \$2,315.00 as configured.

Ryzen™ AI 7 350 (Has a good NPU)

13.5" 2880x1920 120Hz matte display

Storage: WD_BLACK™ SN7100 NVMe™ - M.2 2280 - 1TB

RAM: DDR5-5600 - 32GB (2 x 16GB)

Power Supply is weak, at 60W.

Ports:

2X USB-C, up to 20 Gbps

1X USB-A (5 Gbps)

1X HDMI 3rd Gen

(Ports are hot-swappable, plug and play. All connect to internal USB-C connectors.)

Wi-Fi 7 (AMD RZ17 -- Mediatek MT7925)

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So, what do you think?

As can be seen, Windows PCs are getting more expensive, and parts for some models are becoming harder to find. Now is not an ideal time to be buying new hardware, but if you really need it and want to buy new, the world is what it is and we pay the price. Waiting will not make PC hardware any more affordable any time soon. Nearly every tech publication agrees on that point.

So, what did I miss? What did I get all wrong? Is anyone planning to buy a new PC any time soon?

What about those of you who still don't have replacements for Windows 10 PCs? What are your plans?

-- Bob Primak

For Lexington Computer and technology User Group (LCTG)

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