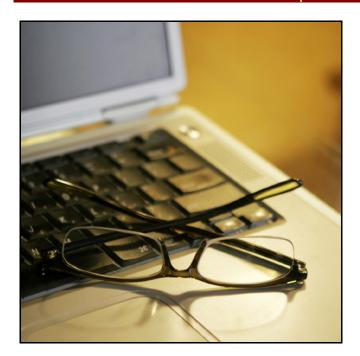# THE COMPUTER HELPER

PC, Mac, Laptop, Or Tablet?

Which method of computing is best for you? The good news is we have more options today. The bad news is...we have more options today. Should you buy a new desktop PC? How about a cool Mac? Maybe a laptop? Or what about those hot tablets like iPad or Kindle Fire? The answer depends on you, your lifestyle, and what you're trying to accomplish.

PC - The desktop computer is still the easiest to use of all the options. You can use a big keyboard, a mouse, printers, lots of accessories, and have a monitor screen as wide as a Buick. These attributes make it a great option for seniors and homebound users. Desktops can have huge hard drives, a ton of RAM memory, and are among the cheapest options. The downside is that it's about as portable as a dresser, need plenty of electricity, and take up a lot of room.

MAC - Apple isn't a company, it's a religion. Those who have them and believe in them are rabid in their adoration. Macs are better for graphics, artwork, and desktop publishing. Because of their limited titles for programs, they don't have a lot of games, and are obscenely overpriced. The learning curve is steep, especially since so few outfits provide support. It's tough for us to be objective, because while we've used them, Computer Help doesn't repair them, service them, support them, provide training for them, or particularly like them, so you'll basically be on your own.

Laptop - Laptops have become more popular as they've become cheaper and more powerful. They are perfect if you are on the go, travel a lot, or migrate from your summer home up north to your winter home in Mesquite each year. It's also a lot of fun to sit in the living room watching TV with a notebook computer on your lap, looking up movie facts, getting up to date scores, or checking out the latest on the Bedazzler. Unfortunately, even with the 17-inch screens, the keyboards still take a lot of getting used to, and many people hate the touchpad mouse. You can add separate USB keyboards and mice, but you're defeating the portable purpose of a laptop. Prices have come down below the $400 mark, about the same as a desktop and monitor. For older users, the small screens and small keys are tougher to navigate, so you might want to stick with a desktop. If not, laptops have become the way to go. (And yes, there's a pun in there somewhere).

Tablets - The newest and hottest innovations are tablets. Also known as iPads, Kindle Fire, Galaxy Tabs, or Touchpads, these are the lightest, most portable, and easy to use. Most require wireless internet access to be truly productive, which hampers the portability. iPads, which are tops in tablets, are expensive ($500-800), have very limited storage space (max 64gb), have no capability for a traditional keyboard, mouse, or monitor, will only work with wireless printers, have no USB port for any peripherals or accessories, and can't be upgraded. However, the iPad is the easiest to use and has thousands more "apps" (programs) available than other tablets. Apps are often free or extremely cheap ($1-10). These are great for taking with you, and extraordinary at e-mail, Facebook, e-books, and especially games, but not particularly useful for heavy productivity like writing, spreadsheets, or design (mostly because of the lack of a keyboard). This is best used as a travel partner.

COMPUTER DUDE
Avoiding Viruses While Web Surfing

Viruses are like potholes on the information superhighway on a rainy night. They're hard to see, and can wreck whatever you're driving if you're happen to hit one.

It's tough to avoid getting viruses because they're usually implanted in unobtrusive downloads, emails, or even inside innocuous looking websites.

Your best bet to "travel safe" is to install an anti-virus program like AVG or Avast. (Norton and MacAffee will also work, but can be expensive and cumbersome).

But no anti-virus will stop them all, so you have to employ some good old common sense defense.

For starters, avoid clicking the "come-ons" and sales pitches, especially those offering something free or spectacular. Sometimes they're legit, but a lot of times they aren't. Also stay away from promises to see naked photos of someone famous.

It's like anything else in life: if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Especially online.

Unfortunately, some online games are havens for hidden spyware and adware, and that's on top of all the ads they already show you while playing. Don't stop playing online games, just be vigilant.

One of the worst offenders are alternative web searches. MyWebSearch is nothing but a virus carrier, and it's invasive tentacles are particularly difficult to completely eradicate, so avoid anything that looks like that.

Ditto for most toolbars. If any program asks if it can add a toolbar to your Internet Explorer, just say NO! Notable exceptions include Yahoo, Google, and Bing, but we'd recommend a "no" on these as well, just to be sure. (Besides, they take up valuable screen space).

A few coupon websites and coupon print applications have become hard core virus sources. A coupon website might be okay, but don't let it add a toolbar or install anything.

That's another key: unless you know exactly what you're downloading, never let a website download some "enhancement" to your web page or PC. The popular come-ons include "this will speed up your computer" and "get big discounts/free stuff."

Also, be very afraid of any pop-up message that says your computer is infected, but isn't a normal message from your anti-virus program. Don't click the "X" on the popup, click the "X" on your browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome). If it won't let you get to it, use Start and Shutdown.

All that said, don't spend your online time worrying about viruses. Be vigilant, but don't be timid or afraid to go wherever you want on the 'net.

Use an anti-virus program, keep it up to date, and occasionally run Spybot or MalwareBytes to stay virus free.

Club Meetings Go Monthly

Following a vote of the members in attendance at the Aug. 30 meeting, Computer Help Club will now meet every month (except December). In addition to the change from every other month to monthly, the meetings will now start at 4:30 p.m. instead of 5 p.m.

The next meeting will be held Thursday, Sept. 27 at 4:30 p.m. in the Community Room at the America First Credit Union located at 590 W. Mesquite Blvd.

This month the meeting will feature "Saving, Moving, Sharing, and Fixing Photos," including discussion of how to organize your pictures, how to use them in emails and documents, as well as cropping, resizing, and changing your photos.

To help, this month's free CD of shareware handed out at the meeting will include Picasa, a photo organizing and sharing program; and Gimp, which can be used to "fix" photos (much like Photoshop).

With the earlier start, there should be more time for questions and answers, so bring along any questions or problems you've run into lately.

The Computer Help Club is for members and their guests. Membership is $25 per year. For more information on membership, go to http://www.compuhelpus.com/.

LINKS WORTH A LOOK

Here is a list of interesting websites we've found over the last month:

Free Microsoft Clipart
Thousands of free photos and artwork you can use in your documents, greeting cards, and postings.
http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/images/

Internet Movie Database
Look up information on actors and every movie ever made, including cast, summaries, movie goofs, production information, and reviews.
http://www.imdb.com/

Box Office Mojo
Lists the top movies weekend-by-weekend based on box office performance.
http://boxofficemojo.com/weekend/chart/

Kelley Blue Book
Thinking of buying or selling a car? Kelley Blue Book will tell you what it's worth.
http://www.kbb.com/

Mesquite Business License List
Review the list of every business licensed by the City of Mesquite. Separate list shows new business licenses issued last month.
http://www.mesquitenv.com/GeneralInfo/ABusiness