

Desktop Guerrillas

GUERRILLA BRIEFS

BUILDING AN OFFICE WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK

It's not that expensive to equip an employee with the latest office technology. We'll show you how.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

While it's always nice having state of the art equipment, it's completely unnecessary these days. In fact, PC prices have dropped to the point where you can buy a great desktop for well under \$1,000. If you know where to look, that is.

The key is to not be picky about particular configurations, and jump on the specials offered by computer manufacturers - usually around the end of their fiscal quarters. The best way to find these deals is to monitor the bargain sites. Two of the most popular ones are www.techbargains.com, and www.gotapex.com.

Dell is one company that's very aggressive about its pricing. In a recent offer, just \$369 would have scored you a 2.8 ghz Intel desktop with 256 megs of RAM and a 17" CRT monitor.

You may also be able to opt out of the Windows XP Professional upgrade option, which adds about \$80 to the price. Its features are typically not necessary in home offices and many small businesses. Check with your administrator to be sure.

FREE MARKET

Back in the 1990s, Lotus 1-2-3 ruled the earth, but the spreadsheet program was incredibly expensive for most small business owners. Competitors fought back by creating their own programs that had the same features as this market leader, but sold for a lot less.

Today, that spirit is alive and well, this time battling against Microsoft. OpenOffice.org offers word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation programs which closely mimic the set in Microsoft Office - including the ability

to read and write Microsoft-format files. If you don't need a spreadsheet program, check out AbiWord. It's only a word processor, but is a much smaller download. In either case, you'll be able to exchange all but the most complex documents with your business partners without any problems. Both are completely free.

If you're the no-imitations type and want the real thing, Microsoft does offer some à la carte options. Does your admin assistant only need Microsoft Word? You'll find it for about \$60. Need Excel as well? Get it, and Outlook, for \$150.

PDF, FOR 100% LESS

PDF files, more commonly called "Adobe Acrobat" files, are documents that, although not easily edited, maintain their formatting perfectly on any computer. Viewing them is free - but did you know the software to create them is a staggering \$299? Way too expensive for most offices to justify.

Consider PDF995 as a free option. This product creates PDF files that are viewable by anyone with Adobe Acrobat. The one catch is that it is ad-driven, so you'll get an advertisement pop up in a browser every time the program is run. If that bugs you, just \$9.95 will buy you an ad-free version.

VIRUS AND SPYWARE SAVIORS

Bad news: viruses and spyware are now a bigger problem than ever. No computer should be without some level of virus and spyware protection.

The good news is there is a great spyware scanning tool that is available to businesses at no cost. Spybot Search and Destroy has been

around for some time and can detect some 15,000 variants. It also has some features that provide protection against the installation of these products in the first place.

While there are some free virus scanners for personal use, there is nothing that can be used in the office without purchase. That being the case, I recommend the leader, Norton Anti-virus 2005. Besides catching viruses before they have a chance to invade your system, this latest version also detects other undesirable programs (trojans, worms, etc) as well.

Of course, the best free protection you can have is to keep your operating system up to date with the latest patches. It's a good idea to turn on "automatic updates" and take advantage of all the protection Windows XP Service Pack 2 provides, including popup blocking and a basic firewall.

There you have it. For under \$450, you can have an Internet ready, word processing beast that should last you several years.

LINKS »

BARGAIN-HUNTING SITES

www.gotapex.com
www.techbargains.com

OFFICE SOFTWARE

www.openoffice.org
www.abiword.com
www.microsoft.com/office
www.pdf995.com

SECURITY

www.safer-networking.org
www.symantec.com