COMPUTERS DON’T MAKE MISTAKES—THEIR PURCHASERS DO!

When contractors decide how much to spend, rather than how much they need, the computers they buy end up in the closet.

By Arnold L. Kanov

When buying a computer, carefully and thoroughly determine exactly what you want the computer to do. Develop a checklist of functions the computer must perform, so when shopping you are not influenced by nonessential features the computer salesperson will undoubtedly show you.

All too often, contractors decide to spend a certain amount of money and then look for a computer to match that amount. Obviously, if you give salespersons a budget, they’ll find a machine within that budget.

Instead, consider the needs of your business.

If the computer you need is not within your budget or cannot be economically justified, don’t buy. Contrary to popular belief, there is no stigma in not owning a computer.

Corroborate the information given by the computer salesperson. Buyers, generally speaking, have great respect for the technical expertise of the computer vendor or retailer, and tend to ac-
If you ask a question and get an unintelligible response, insist the salesperson repeat the answer in language you can understand.

cept their statements at face value. However, many retail salespersons lack the business experience or computer training to offer much help in selecting the proper equipment.

Be a “brain picker”. Talk to several salespersons about your needs. Talk to other contractors. Obtaining differing views can provide valuable insight into the capabilities and limitations of a particular computer.

Don’t be snowed by technical jargon. Many contractors are reluctant to admit they don’t know what the computer salesperson is talking about. Therefore, a favorite sales ploy is to use a great deal of technical terminology—which sounds authoritative and stops customers from asking questions.

If you ask a question and get an unintelligible response, insist the person repeat the answer in language you can understand. Salespersons use technical mumbo-jumbo as a smoke-screen to cover up their own technical inadequacies. Truly competent individuals can explain the meaning and significance of computer terms in language the average contractor can understand.

Before finalizing your decision on the equipment, ascertain requirements for any software that interests you. Many contractors, not knowing what they intend the computer to do, buy more hardware than they really need. For example, micro-computers with million-byte memories have more capacity than most software packages will ever use. Thus, money is being spent for features that will never be needed.

Before you buy any computer or computer program, ask yourself, “Am I sure I need this; do I know what to do with it; and will it serve my purposes, or am I just buying an expensive toy?”

Don’t be mislead by advertising that suggests you’re an expert after mastering the three-page manual that comes with the machine.

Learning to master the computer, like any other task, takes dedication and time. If you don’t want to invest the time, don’t invest your money. You will only add to the already large number of purchasers of unused equipment.

Even if you have a staff to do bookkeeping, inventory record keeping, etc., you must know how a computer works if you are to own one. First, you want to maintain control of the operation so employees don’t become your “partners” by stealing. Second, if your operation is rather small and the computer operator takes sick or quits, you can pitch in so recordkeeping doesn’t grind to a halt.

A computer is nothing more than a tool. Careful thought prior to its purchase will allow you to reap all of the potential benefits it can offer.

---

About the author . . . Arnold L. Kanov is a CPA, and heads A.L. Kanov & Associates, a Miami-based computer consulting firm. He has more than 30 years of experience assisting clients in the selection, design, and implementation of computer-based systems.