

Back in the distant past I decided to buy a computer. The problem was that I knew next to nothing about them and had experienced only limited after-hours use of an office word processor.

Fortunately I stumbled across a piece of advice that stood me in good stead.

It suggested that I spent some time reading computer magazines. Buy several magazines and read them to get the gist of what people are thinking, it said. Take your time. Read the advertisements, remembering that they are trying to sell you something. Read expert reviews from different sources. In short, get the feel of the market.

It worked. I found a company that was interested in satisfying their customers rather than cutting prices to the bone. It came top in customer surveys for satisfaction and service for several years until it suddenly vanished, I know not why. Experts mourned its demise.

For anyone reluctant to do the research, I explain that there is no quick answer to their question. I turn the question around and ask what car I should buy.

The immediate response is to ask questions. What do I want to do? How many passengers? Long journeys or short? Touring or just pottering around. Will I be towing anything? How much do I value reliability? How long will I keep it (for depreciation and resale value)? How much power do I want? What sort of fuel consumption am I looking for? A hard or soft ride? Budget?

"In turn", I reply, "you need to answer my questions"

What do you want to use your computer for? For home or on-line gaming; word-processing (for letters or a novel); databases for CD or book collections; financial management; spreadsheet calculations; project planning; storing and editing photographs; editing home videos; emailing; free telephone calls around the world; projecting for a home cinema; producing posters, greeting cards; social network sites; web browsing?

Do you want a desktop a laptop or a notebook machine? Will you be linking several machines together to make a network (cable or wireless)? What peripheral equipment will be on it – printer, scanner, an all-in-one, external storage?

Do you want high quality sound reproduction for the music you want to play (or compose)?

Oh yes, what's your budget? We haven't even considered the software options – and that comes with a price range from free to costly.

If you know enough to answer the questions you probably don't need any advice. If the questions are bewildering, just remember don't be talked into paying for features that you don't need.

Your options are:

- A) Do the magazine research.
- B) Ask a friend (He will ask all the above questions and, unless you have done some research, he will soon sound as though he is speaking mandarin.)
- C) Buy a cheap machine and use it. The 'On the Job' research will let you discover your precise needs without excessive costs. The next machine you get will be exactly what you need - and you can confidently invest in it.
- D) Get together with people who share all or part of your problem and understand it. They will have formed a club.
- E) Join the club.
- F) Research the club before joining.

It just so happens that, as part of the Penarth Festival, the Penarth Computer Club will be holding an OPEN EVENING on Tuesday 13th July at 7.45 p.m.

All Saints Church Lesser Hall, Victoria Square, Penarth,

For more information ring Howard on 029 20708439.

How convenient is that?

In Brief

Computer Club

As part of the Penarth Festival the club will be holding an OPEN EVENING on Tuesday 13th July. All visitors welcome. Chat with members; learn about the club; look at some computers. For more information ring Howard on 029 20708439.
