

Computer Tips

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Buying a New Computer—Part 4

When looking around for a new computer, you will come across a specification that we get asked about regularly - 32bit or 64bit? This is referring to the Windows 7 operating system that will come with your new computer, and here is a couple of things about 32 bit vs 64 bit.

32 bit versions of Windows 7 can only use up to 3.25GB of system memory. Even if your laptop or desktop comes with 4 GB of memory, a 32bit version of Windows will not be able to use it all. However, on the plus side, 32bit versions of Windows are more compatible with older software and device drivers, such as printers. Should you go with 32 bit? Only, and I mean only, if you need to run an older piece of software or hardware that is no longer updated by its manufacturer. Otherwise, I would recommend 64 bit.

64 bit versions of Windows 7 do not have a limitation on the amount of system memory that can be used (theoretically, 64 bit can access up to 256TB of system memory). This allows computers to have large amounts of memory installed (currently only limited by the memory chip and motherboard manufacturers). The possibilities of memory access are huge, and is the way of the future. For this reason we recommend the 64 bit version of Windows 7, but 64 bit is still not without its problems.

64 bit versions of Windows 7 do have some software and device driver incompatibilities. Some PC games will not run with 64 bit versions of Windows. Also, some older printers, scanners, and other peripherals do not have 64 bit drivers, and will not run with Windows 7 64 bit. If you are looking to use Windows 7 64 bit, check whether the software and/or devices you want to run on your computer are compatible with 64 bit.

If you are unsure whether you should use 32bit or 64bit Windows 7, consider the following. Both Windows 7 Professional, and Windows 7 Ultimate, have a feature called Windows XP Mode. This mode is essentially a virtual Windows XP running on top of Windows 7. What this means, is that those old programs and PC games you loved from years ago, that now won't run in Windows 7, can be run in the Windows XP mode. This is a godsend to all those older programs; however, as good as this sounds, there are a couple of limitations.

Before you go installing all your XP only games in the Windows XP mode, this mode only uses software video drivers. This means that the extra hardware graphic accelerators needed for a lot of games like Quake or Diablo 2 will not run in the virtual XP mode. Games like Tetris or Hoyle's Card games will run ok however due to their lesser graphic requirements.

So if you are really wanting a play-all, use-all Windows 7 setup, you will need to use the 32-bit version. If however, you will be using the latest games and software, 64 bit is the way to go. To be continued....

Computers



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