

Should I get a Mac or a PC?

by Karl D. Susman, Westside Gadget Guy

One question that I get asked the most often is: “I need a new computer, should I get a MAC or a PC?” The answer to that question is quite simple, requires a two-word answer, and can enlighten and/or infuriate as quickly and invariably as asking which political party you plan to vote for. The answer is, “it depends”.

Let’s work through this one, and see about coming up with details that you can sink your teeth into. Grab a pencil, and get ready to take notes. We’re going to go over a bunch of features for both operating systems, and in the end, you will have a clear idea of which way you should be going.

What do you use your computer for MOST OFTEN? I understand that nobody does only one thing with their computer. Well, okay, maybe someone like my father may spend 90% of his time surfing the Internet, scouring the latest tidbits on electric vehicle technology and the other 10% of the time emailing that information to all of us. But for the most part, people do an average of 5 things with their computer regularly. For each item below, circle the sentence that best describes how you use your computer for each of the following tasks:

(A) I use my computer for pleasure, surfing (viewing) web pages. I probably spend a lot of time reading articles and forwarding my views on what I’m reading to other people. (You know who you are out there) I do online research and shopping, and use 1-Click® from Amazon.com. I use my computer for emailing a lot.

(B) I use my computer for work. I log in to my company’s corporate web page, or I connect to my company LAN (If you don’t know what it is, this just isn’t for you). Some of the web pages I visit have Certificate requirements that must be loaded into my internet browser.

(C) I use my computer for watching movies or DVDs. I also plug in my digital camera to my computer and copy all of the photos from my camera to my computer. Since I’m no Ansel Adams, I use my computer to clean up my photos, remove my acne and red eye and email the photos to family and friends. I also listen to lots of music, have a large MP3 collection (again, if you don’t know what that is, this isn’t you...and where HAVE you been?)

(D) Blood! Guts!! Gun shots!! Kill, destroy annihilate!! Games man...I use my computer as the ultimate gaming machine! I have ridiculously expensive hardware in my computer with lots of names and lots of digits after it like a Wapaduzee 2400TZPX with a water-cooled CPU. (If you don’t see water as being a good thing anywhere near your computer, again, not you)

(E) I do all of the above on my computer, and I do it all day, all night and everywhere. Going on a vacation means packing my computer, wires, accessories, batteries, speakers, external hard drive etc, and if there is room in the suitcase I will pack clothes too.

OK. Are you ready to see whether you're heading out to get yourself a Dell, an HP, an E-Machine, or any other Windows based box, or heading to the nearest Apple store (which there is no shortage of in our area) and drinking the Steve Jobs cool-aide, and merging into the Reality Distortion Field? It is time to find out! Don't say I didn't warn you, and yes, this is an exact science, and there is absolutely no going back. Never, ever, ever, ever (well, maybe).

If you quickly circled the (A) column above, then the decision is quite simple. You get a MAC. Apple's OSX, or actually 10.5.5 today, has all the love and joy you need to get done your favorite pastime- gathering information and annoying others with it via email. Oops, that is a little harsh, but if the email fits! You can look to get either an IMAC or a MacBook. No reason for you to get the heavy duty Apple Desktop hardware, it will just take up space on the ground and suck up power from the utility company for functionality you don't need.

If you chose (B), it puts you smack dab into the heart of Microsoft Windows land. Bill Gates has completed his goal in life, with his desire to have as he said "a computer on every desktop" and you're going to help make that a reality. I assume when he said that, he was referring to a computer on every desktop that was running Microsoft Windows software. Anyhow, a PC it will be for you. Windows, whether it is XP or Vista, has certain capabilities that are just designed to work better in the corporate environment. As I mentioned above, Windows Internet Explorer has a feature for having Certificates assigned to web pages, and this can only be accomplished while running Windows and Internet Explorer. Your IT person won't complain as much with you having a brand new Windows machine either. It is what they are used to, it is what they learned on and learned to love. Adding a windows machine to your company's group of computers is like a family reunion where everyone shows up wearing the same color jeans and tie-dye t-shirt. You'll fit right in.

If you picked paragraph (C) then we're going to whip you back to the Mac side of things. If you're watching DVD's, Macs are notorious for having superior quality screens for watching them on. If you're going to watch them on a notebook, or laptop, or whatever you want to call a computer when it is small and you can carry the darn thing around with you, Mac's product line does the best job saving your battery while you watch DVD's too. Your digital camera will take to your Mac like a politician takes to a corporate sponsor, or a baby takes to a bottle. Hmmm, I suppose they are pretty much the same thing, eh? Macs have all the outlets to plug your camera in with ease. They have Firewire and USB, which are industry standards. What really makes the camera experience on your Mac special, and fill you with warm fuzzies about how you supported California by purchasing something designed in Cupertino, albeit made in China, is that the software that comes with the Mac will literally do all of the work for you. Plug in your camera to your Mac and iPhoto will literally pop up, it will smile at you, brush the bangs out of your eyes and ask if you would like to copy all of your photos over to the computer. How thoughtful, that was exactly why you plugged the camera into the computer now, wasn't it? IPhoto will also keep track of your photos by date, by event, and it does a pretty darn good job for you. Want to get rid of red eye, which I suffer from with my big eyes and huge dark pupils, iPhoto will help. Want to get even fancier with your photos? IPhoto can take you pretty darn far, and if you want to reach for the stars, note that practically all industries that make movies, print photos, even create the layout for the very newspaper you are reading this on, are created on Mac software. Ok?

Enter the "Dark Side" paragraph (D) – the Gamer! Now for me, I grew up playing with an Atari 400 and then upgraded to the Atari 800. (Did you know that Steve Jobs chose the name Apple when they originally went into the business because they wanted a name that would

appear in the phone book above Atari? Yes, it's a true story!) These days if you are a hard core gamer, somebody that truly spends hours and hours with games that have taken years to develop, then you are going to the PC side. PC's that run Windows are, in a word, customizable (is that a real word even?). You can "tweak" them with super de-duper fast processors (the brains) able to perform more tasks in a second than most people do in a day. (You know who you are) They have special graphics cards you buy to make that 3 dimensional game look so realistic and scary you'll have something new to talk to your therapist about. A few years back I played one of these intense shoot 'em up games, and I seriously was twitching in my sleep and having nightmares for about a week. My wife has thus banned me from "those" games.

Finally, Paragraph (E) – the all of the above. This is the category that is near and dear to my heart, because as you can guess, it is the ME group. A little bit of this, and a little bit of that. You can guess that for the so called "Road Warrior", a person that does a lot of computer work on the go, you will need a portable computer. For this, there truly is no contest. You're going to get a MacBook Pro, and nothing else. All of the Mac functions mentioned above will work like a charm, and for the business professional that needs windows, have no fear! You can simply install a copy of Windows XP or Vista right on your Mac, and run a full copy of Windows, on your Mac, in its own window. You can run it in a full screen, or toggle back and forth, but the bottom line is, you have both operating systems in one. Note to self – you cannot run Mac software on a Windows box.

So there you have it! Now you know exactly what you are going to be shopping for in the rapidly approaching holiday season. Computers can be daunting critters, I will admit, but properly trained and tamed they can be your best ally and advocate. If you find yourself with a question, comment or just need plain old help – have no fear, I'm here! Shoot me an email over to WestSideGadgetGuy@WestSideToday.com and I promise to respond to you personally. You can also follow my wild and wacky world, by visiting www.karlsusman.com.

Thank you Karl! As seen here: <http://www.westsidetoday.com/n303/westside-gadget-guy.html>