Information Technology

"My Accounts Aren't Over-sold, but They're Not Under-Machined!" (Peter Pollack, circa 1970)

How Much Computer Power Do You Really Need?

This topic takes us back to the first column in this series and to the tongue-in-cheek remark made by Peter Pollack years ago. In the first of three columns, we'll discuss how to match business needs to the myriad of computer models and options available. The next two columns will discuss purchasing and implementation strategies.

In the days when mainframes rented for thousands of dollars per month, upgrading or downgrading was easy. If you were over-sold, or workload declined, you called your IBM, Honeywell or Univac sales rep to exchange the computer for a smaller one. When workload increased, you got a larger one, making the Peter Pollacks of the world happy.

With pocket PCs, laptops, desktops and technical workstations available in hundreds of models and sporting thousands of features, things today are complicated, but by using a few rules of thumb you can make the right investments. As frequently said in these columns, start by assessing your needs. What do people in your organization use their computers for? The vast majority of computers in business are used just for word processing, e-mail, spreadsheets, Internet access and database updates. Any PC or Mac made since mid-1999 is entirely adequate for these tasks. Does this mean that the $499 model featured in the ad is the one to buy? Maybe. Should you spend an extra $60 for XP Professional? Yep.

Applications that involve design – graphic design, CAD/CAM, engineering, programming or video editing - require higher performance and more memory (RAM). Rather than tune each machine to individual requirements, group needs by category and define two or three machine configurations: standard, special, and, if needed, unique. Thus, the design department would get special and everyone else standard systems.

It's easy to be misled by "megahertz mania". One vendor's 1.8GHz PC may be faster than another's 2.0, because of more or faster memory, faster hard drive, or other factors. (Megahertz comparisons between Macs and PCs are utterly meaningless because the machines have radically different designs.)

So here's the Peter Pollack Principle, paraphrased per Polonius, "Be not over-sold, nor yet under-machined"!

This column by Denis Williamson of MacLamor Computer Consulting aims to help readers maximize the value of information technology. You can reach Denis at 845-357-1877 or denis@maclamor.com.