~1987
Macintosh Plus

~1992
PowerMac

2000
iMac

~2003
Compaq Presario 2190

2006
Alienware Area-51 M5550

2010
Lenovo ThinkPad T500

John's Worldly Ramblings 4.22

Just a Computer

JWR 4.22

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Just a Computer

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     I answer questions people have at work about computers with a scoff and a disdainful, pained look of you-are-so-stupid on my face (or so I'm told). Because of this, or in spite of this, I'm also asked questions about what kind of computer to buy by some of the same people. I'm no stranger to buying computers.

     How do you like the cover? Those are all the computers I've had. That Macintosh Plus was a weird little thing. It was my family's first computer, and I knew it was odd the first time I sat in front of it. It had, like, a nine-inch screen that was black and white. I used it for playing games, but even back then I was never all that into computer games. I preferred game consoles; I still do, with the exception of playing SimCity, but I'm getting ahead of myself. My brother still had the Macintosh Plus as of a couple years ago as a bit of nostalgia, but I think it's gone now.

     Next my parents got a PowerMac WhatEver. This was when Apple went away from unique designs to their profit margin's detriment. I remember that was back when you had to pay for your internet usage by the minute. I once worked on a drawing that

took up half the hard drive. My brother was very particular about the way the dust covers be removed and folded when you took them off and that they get put back on when you were done using the computer.

I eventually used that computer for college work. And playing lots and lots of SimCity. I learned with this computer there is a battery inside computers that may not let your computer boot up if it dies. I'm pretty sure I trashed this computer myself similarly to the way I do to computers at work. I take pleasure in retiring a server or tower. I crack them open, remove any useful components. It's usually only RAM we save in case we need it (we never do). I also remove the processor, like ripping the heart out of a fresh kill. I take out the hard drives just to separate them from the chassis, and I damage the hard drive connectors so they are not readily usable. Then I throw the computer off a second floor balcony into a dumpster below.

When I moved out of my parents' house I bought my own computer for the first time. I got the first incarnation of the iMac. I wanted the $2,000 Mac Cube, but my brother talked me out of it. I was still able to play SimCity. Dial-up was a monthly expense.

After a couple years my parents' offered a trade of my iMac for their Compaq laptop that my brother helped them pick out a few months prior. I was cool with that. This wasn't my first time using Windows (up until then I was using a 98 desktop at work), but the laptop was an XP Home machine and it was more capable than my work computer, so I just brought it in and started using that.

After some upgrades (installing more RAM and XP Pro), the Compaq was pretty usable until my job continued to evolve and I began experiencing problems with CPU-intensive programs. I started looking for a new laptop, one the company would pay for. After a pretty exhaustive search I settled on Alienware. They were a boutique computer company that was best known for gaming machines (until Dell bought them out), but I was honestly more interested in a laptop that was powerful and had a decent graphics card. That's irony for you.

My Alienware laptop arrived with a malfunctioning optical drive. They sent a replacement. So much for their QC they touted. Assholes. Within a few months my touchpad started acting up, jumping around on its own. I tried a few fixes, but it was a hardware issue. I lived with it because I usually use a mouse anyway, I just disabled it.

So, the Alienware and I had a decent relationship for over three years and about the time I began to wonder when I might need to start thinking about a new machine, I noticed those dots all over the screen weren't going away when I scrolled the screen anymore. My work laptop came down with a case of my-video-card-is-going-and-you-can't-source-a-replacement-or-get-it-fixed. A call to Alienware support confirmed that the video card was going, but they don't support my model anymore. They did give me the part number I needed and told me a few places I may be able to source it, but I haven't found a replacement yet – I still look.

Well, my boss proved to be practical and said, "Start looking for a new laptop." All of a sudden I was at a loss of what kind of computer to buy. I just figured Dell. Our engineers and salesmen have a bunch of D-series Latitudes (many of which I've specified, purchased and set up), but Dell is now selling E-series Latitudes and the reviews are pretty awful: complaints of cheap quality and *gasp* horrible touchpads. No thanks, mister; but now I was at a loss. I don't want another Compaq/HP even though the laptop is still going strong after seven years. I've never been impressed with Sony or Toshiba. I know a few people with Acer laptops, but they don't strike me as business quality.

I contacted a local IT company we use and told this dude I sometimes drink with to quote me a killer laptop. I continued my own research and then I shot him an email:

Any thoughts about Lenovo?

Lenovo is the company that bought IBM's laptop and desktop business. For at least a year after the purchase, Lenovos still had IBM badges on their chassis. IBM is made specifically for business. His response:

Lenovo I love. That's what I use. I will price hp and lenovo for you.

Well, he generated a quote for me while we were having beers at his house that weekend. So, now I'm typing this on my two-day-old Lenovo.

Uh, it's got a blue Enter key. I think the fingerprint reader is stupid; I don't plan to use it. There's a light next to the webcam that shines down on the keyboard. I don't like that there are no USB ports on the right side or back. As I said, I usually use a mouse, and not just because my Alienware's touchpad sucked. I do graphic design and I'm a mouse guy. As nice as wireless and Bluetooth mice are, there's this delay,

hesitation, and general jumpiness cordless mice have that would send me to the asylum if I had to use one of them while working in Photoshop.

What I really like about the Lenovo is it feels like it's built to be used. There's not a single glossy square inch on it. It's not a rugged device, but it's designed thoughtfully and assembled well. I don't think I'll have problems finding replacement parts should I need them.

I think Windows 7 is okay. Different. Kinda weird. It still asks a bunch of bullshit are-you-sure questions, but it's not as annoying as Vista. I didn't have to do anything to start synching my files with our storage server, but because everything's different from XP, I didn't know it did it on its own for awhile.

You ever take a laptop apart? I recommend it. It's actually kind of fun. Lots of screws. Find instructions.

The motherboard on a Dell laptop used in our Milwaukee area warehouse needed to be replaced. I bought a barebones laptop with a cracked display off EBay for $60 to use its motherboard as a replacement. I was shocked when I put it back together and it worked. I saved $300 from Dell's quote for a new motherboard. But I spent $1600 on the Lenovo.

I used to think I was a Mac-*cum*-Apple guy. Working in an office made me a Windows guy. Windows isn't perfect and it never will be; I don't expect it to be. I get fucking pissed when something goes wrong. And you'd be surprised how often something goes wrong with 50 users, even when most of them are Windows Terminal users locked out of system files and blocked from downloading programs; they're even

blocked from right-clicking, for crying out loud. The amazing thing it how frequently I am able to fix the problem. Then I get frustrated when I can't find a solution. A few years ago my boss thought I should become Microsoft Certified for all the software you get. I took and failed one test before we found they sold a software pack for low cost.

I'm not immune to problems, either. System Restore is your friend (one of the best features of XP along with the really good plug and play abilities). I don't know why I get attached to computers I use. I'm not adverse to reinstalling the OS and starting from scratch if something is funky and I can't solve it. In some ways that's better than the uncertainty of a solution that may or may not work posted on a forum by some chump. I don't lose information. I back up work stuff through sync on a server at work and music on an external hard drive. What's with the attachment?

I mean, it's just a computer.

I get asked to spec computers for people's personal use sometimes. The truth is there's not really a lot you need to choose from if you're the general email/photo/music person. Laptop or desktop? Get a big hard drive and plenty or RAM. You can do with less RAM if you don't mind hiccups here and there. The processor: just go middle of the road. AMD processors are usually cheaper than Intel and they work just fine, if you can find them. Apple is popular and easy to use (I guess), but they're overly expensive; you're paying for design and while I've been known to do just that, I don't see the upside to Apple. Windows is easier to use than ever; that is, it's like Apple's OS now more than ever. If you want to impress people, run GNU/Linux.

A guy I met through work asked me to make his Gateway laptop run faster. I was checking it out. SpySweeper: what a shitty program. That was his only problem; it just chugs away and insists upon itself. Other than that, he can upgrade his RAM.

I do have one piece of advice for everyone. I've fallen in love with AVG antivirus. They have a free version that is superb and fast. I used to use an antivirus program along with an anti-spyware program called Spybot, but AVG is so good Spybot didn't have the chance to find anything anymore. See ya later, ya somnambulist.

Well, that's it. I hope this wasn't as boring as my "Go Screw, Cable" Rambling.

John

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