



Stump the PC Club is a free tech-advice column written by members of the **North Orange County Computer Club**, which has been in existence since 1976. Visit the club's site at noccc.org.

QUESTION: My wife and I are ready to buy a new desktop PC. What should we look for and what do we need to do regarding transferring files from the old one to the new one. We use our PC for E-mail, the Internet and occasional Word processing. We also enjoy looking at pictures we've taken with our digital camera. Any tips would be helpful.

PC CLUB: This is a popular topic and since I just recently went through this process helping several others I thought I'd share my experiences.

You have several choices when it comes to buying a new PC. There are the old standbys such as Staples, Bestbuy and Office Depot for example. Most of these stores have a 14-day return policy and possibly a restocking fee. Always ask questions before you buy. Another choice is Costco whose PCs usually have more performance than the ones at the stores mentioned above and cost a little more. The advantage of buying at Costco is that they have a 90 day return policy with no restocking fee. Frequently, Costco PCs include a LCD monitor. They also don't pester you into purchasing an extended warranty.

One of the things I look for is which PC comes with the least annoying software such as trial versions. This software, often accompanying a new PC, is called Trialware, Bloatware or Crapware. You generally have to ask about this but most sales people will not be able to answer you. Many PCs come with trial versions of Norton or McAfee antivirus software and a trial version of Microsoft Office. I usually remove these programs and install my own. There are many free antivirus programs including Microsoft Security Essentials.

Some stores offer a service of removing all of the extra software but it comes with a price. Read the article about "PC Optimization" at <http://bit.ly/pcoptimize> before buying this service. Also read the article on the Microsoft stores at <http://bit.ly/microsoftpolicy>. And finally, read the article at <http://bit.ly/pcproarticle2>. You should now be an informed buyer regarding this topic.

You can actually remove all of the extra software yourself using a free program called PC Decrapifier available at www.pcdcrapifier.com. The name sounds awful but the program performs a great service, especially on new PCs. The next thing you have to worry about is transferring files from your old PC to your new one. The best way to do this is to use an external hard drive. After you use it for this purpose, you can continue to use it to back up your new PC periodically.

Next, you have to set up your E-mail. If you use Web mail such as Yahoo or Hotmail, you don't have to do a thing. If you're upgrading from XP and you used Outlook Express, you can download the free Windows Live Mail program from <http://download.live.com>. You'll have to have access to your Outlook Express user ID and password to set up your account.

For looking at pictures you can download the free Windows Live Photo Gallery from the same site as the Mail program. It's not the most powerful program but the price is right.

For those readers that live in Orange County CA there is a store in Tustin called the Microcenter that sells a large variety of PCs and their systems have very little annoying software on them. Why is it important to avoid all of this stuff? These programs will irritate you with various popup ads and will also slow your PC. Why buy a new speedy PC only to have this happen?

Another choice is to have your PC custom built. With this approach you will pay a little more and get a little more. You will have a clean machine without any extra software. A typical store for this purpose is XI Computers. You can visit www.xicomputer.com and configure a PC on line for free to see what the cost would be. I've used them several times and have been quite happy. They will also answer all of your "dumb" questions.

Don't forget to visit www.allmyapps.com to install any add-ons such as Adobe's Flash Player or Skype.

And finally, neither I nor Consumer Reports recommend purchasing an extended warranty. Use the money to buy additional hardware or software instead. ~Ed Schwartz, NOCCC member. View his Web site at www.edwardns.com.