

Hardware Picks

By Nick Nicholaou

AS A TEAM OF CONSULTANTS that work on church and ministry networks nationwide, we've wrestled through many hardware issues. Having worked on so many hundreds of ministry networks, we've seen firsthand which hardware improves system reliability and which hardware hurts it. In this article, I'll share with you the hardware we currently spec for our clients—specs that help ministries build the Kingdom.

Locally Built vs. Name Brand

Our clients have found that locally built hardware has a higher failure rate and is thus not well-suited for the church computing environment. Although sometimes less expensive to purchase, the cost in lost productivity and support can easily—and usually does—outweigh any possible advantages.

Locally built systems are usually built with the best of intentions. In fact, the builder may have meticulously searched out the best in each component category to put together in a box. But few local builders have research and development budgets large enough to ensure that all components work well together.

We often see intermittent problems in locally built computers whose causes are hard to identify and resolve. There's a general rule in computer troubleshooting that we often go back to: If the problem is 100 percent predictable and reproducible, then it's software or configuration. If the problem is intermittent, it's hardware.

The Right Name Brands

Not all name brands are created equal. As the saying goes, some are a little more equal than others.

Some name brands haven't any more research and development in them than locally built systems. Thus some are little more than locally built systems with national distribution. An example of this is Gateway Computers.

Desktop Computers

For the sixth year in a row, Dell has won our preferred desktop hardware provider status. Most of our clients this year are purchasing Dell Optiplex desktop computers. These reliable systems come in a number of configura-

tions. Our basic church desktop spec is an Optiplex GX620 (3Ghz Pentium 4 processor, 512Mb RAM, 80Gb hard drive, 10/100/1000 NIC, 17" flat panel monitor, keyboard, and mouse), running Windows XP Pro SP2.

Dell includes a three-year, next-day on-site warranty, taking our clients out of the hardware support business. This desktop spec is under \$1300 (December 2005).

Notebook Computers

PowerNotebooks have earned a solid reputation for high quality and customer satisfaction. They recently added three-year next-day warranty coverage to their Crown notebook line. We brought three Crown models into our lab and put them to the test. We found them to be nicely engineered, very capable and terrifically supported.

We've moved our notebook spec to the PowerNotebooks Crown line. Our current minimum spec is the Crown 10:7, Pentium M 2.0ghz, 512MB RAM, 40gb hard drive, 15.4" WXGA monitor, NIC, Fax/Modem, WiFi, FireWire, WinXP Pro, CD RW / DVD, Spare A/C Adapter, Three-Year Next-Day On-Site Warranty, including Accident Coverage, for about \$1900 (January 2006).



For more of Nick's picks, go to CMAonline.org/mrc and click on "Christian Management Report." Then click on "April 2006" and you'll find Nicholaou's article.

2 THINGS TO DO

TRAINING PROGRAMS can go a long way in helping productivity and reducing tech support.

1 Talk with leadership about this important need. Acquire the commitment at the executive level that all support staff (including theirs!) must attend monthly training sessions.

2 Identify good users in your various software solutions (database, word processing, calendar, email, etc). Tie a good user (or two) to each solution, and commit a training budget to help them grow and learn training techniques. Then set a monthly training schedule and rotation in which they will train your team.

ONLINE HELP

CMA Management Resource Center
CMAonline.org/mrc



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Information Technology Section Resource Commission. For more resources on information technology, go to CMA's Management Resource Center at CMAonline.org/mrc. Email or call the volunteer members of this Section Resource Commission, or contact:

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