



Making The Right Connections: *how to find a reputable computer reseller*

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Introduction

Consumers (whether in a home office or a small business) need to choose their resellers wisely if they wish to purchase a computer system that will serve them now and be capable of serving them in the near future.

If you are in the market to buy a desktop or personal computer for your business, it is important that you find a reputable reseller to meet your needs. You should first establish what it is you want the reseller to do for you, and then shop for the reseller who can best meet those requirements.

It may be useful to create a list of “expectations” you have for the reseller you are considering. For example, will you need training, service and support assistance? If so, then you need to consider a reseller who can guarantee that assistance. What kind of warranty service will your require? Determine what warranty service is available from the reseller you are considering, as well as what service will be available after the warranty expires. How important is price? If it is a very important consideration, then you may have to eliminate service from your expectations list to lower the cost. Once you have completed your list, you should have a better idea of the reseller who may be right for you.

What Is A Computer Reseller?

Like computers, there are different types of computer resellers. The computer reseller from which you purchase your computer, peripherals and software may be known by a variety of labels, including; dealer, VAD (value added dealer), VAR (value added reseller), system integrator, computer superstore, and retailer. One type may suit your needs better than another, since the service and support for your computer system and its components may vary from reseller to reseller.

Due to the rapid pace of change in the computer industry, most reseller organizations tend to be a blend of several of the types listed below:

System Integrators (SI) provide the highest level of integration support and service. They understand what terms such as technical assessments, requirement analysis, and data modeling mean, and have the resources to integrate different types of computer environments. They generally do not resell hardware. If they do, they only deal with hardware components for very large accounts.

Network Systems Integrators (NSI) usually provide hardware integration products and services—frequently across multiple platforms such as DOS, Windows, Macintosh, UNIX, without applications support.

Network Consulting Organizations fit in between SI’s and NSI’s. They generally do not resell products, but provide consulting services such as network design, product testing, and system requirements analysis. These kinds of companies usually do not get involved with applications development, but can provide a high level of impartial information.

Value-Added Resellers (VAR) usually provide a large variety of products with a certain level of support to their customers. They often serve as the defacto “systems integrator” for small business.

Value-Added Dealers (VAD) resell hardware, software and peripherals, and also provide a minimum level of telephone or on-site support.

Retailers and computer superstores are organizations that sell computers and computer-related products in stores.

Mail order companies sell computer systems, software and components through catalogs.

Selecting A Reseller

There are a myriad of resellers from which to choose, ranging from mega-stores carrying dozens of brands of computer hardware and software, to smaller dealers that carry only one or two brands.

When shopping from a reseller be sure to obtain the salesperson’s name and make note of the date that you talked to this person, in case there is a difference in the equipment and service that you actually received from the reseller and what you expected to receive. Most resellers are willing to listen to meaningful complaints and address them directly to your satisfaction. Being able to articulate what you expected to receive from the reseller, and when, may help you in getting a satisfactory resolution of your claim.

Following is a “checklist” to help you in selecting a reputable reseller:

Longevity in the Marketplace. If a reseller is well-established in the business community, it is more likely that the company will be around to handle your future questions, service needs, and upgrade plans. Ask how long the company has been in business.

Reference Checks. Can the reseller provide a list of satisfied customer references? Contact your local Better Business Bureau for a reliability report on the company.

Quality of Service. Do the firm’s stated marketing mottoes match the services they actually provide? Matching the reseller’s specialties to your business needs is important in developing a good working relationship. For example, all companies specializing in local area network-related services are not the same. Will you require a lot of assistance and support or a little? Look for pre-sales support (consultation), implementation (installation) support, and after sales support.

Be sure that you can obtain service for the software and hardware equipment you are purchasing both when it is under warranty and when the warranty expires.

Remember, some companies, like superstores, concentrate on sales volume, while others focus on being service providers. Be aware of the differences and the consequences.

Manufacturer Authorizations. Has the reseller installed and/or does it use the specific kinds of equipment that are being proposed to you? Does the reseller have training on the equipment being

proposed? Does the VAR/SI have specific vendor authorizations, certifications or designations? Remember that certifications and/or authorizations are merely one of many indicators of capability when selecting a reseller to meet your needs. Before authorizing resellers to distribute their products, major manufacturers have generally checked the reseller out and the authorization medallions are a sign of confidence in the reseller. Resellers have dealer numbers authorizing them to sell specific products. If you do not see decals or certificates for these vendor authorizations, certifications or designations being displayed, ask the reseller.

Certification. A reseller who has certified computer service technicians on staff is showing his/her commitment to computer service quality. A+ Certification is a widely-recognized identification that is received from the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) after successfully passing a comprehensive testing battery that covers configuring, installing, diagnosing, repairing, upgrading, and maintaining microcomputers and associated technologies, as well as interaction with customers and safety practices.

Support Questions. How much of the system being configured do you want the reseller to support? Can they support this platform with in-house personnel or by outsourcing? If outsourcing, what is the reseller's relationship to the outside source? What is your recourse if there is a problem with the part of the system or network being outsourced?

In the area of technical support, it is important to remember there is no such thing as "free" technical support. Technical support is invariably tied to the cost of the computer. Therefore, computer experts agree, if you are choosing a reseller on price alone, be aware that the trade-off may likely be reduced service.

Level of Rapport. What will be the rapport level between the reseller's support personnel and the employees in your organization who will be dealing with each other? As adversarial posture can cause problems within your company. What kind of operator training will be available for your staff, and at what cost?

Service. Does the reseller service equipment in-house or do they send it out? Does the reseller come to you or must you take the computer in?

Training. Can the reseller train you on the equipment or software on their premises? Or do they contract with an independent training facility?

Resources. Can the reseller commit the resources necessary to bring about the proposed solution in the time frame agreed upon?

Extended manufacturer warranties. Many warranties are only for a one year period. Can the reseller extend them?

Outside Help. Can the reseller bring in vendor resources if necessary to complete the projects in the same timely fashion?

Industry Commitment. Does the reseller actively participate in computer technology societies or associations, demonstrating the company's familiarity with developments in the computing and information technologies community at large? Look for evidence of participation and membership in computer industry organizations in the form of prominently displayed certificates, plaques and/or decals.

Establish A Relationship

The computer you buy today will be replaced by a smaller, faster one tomorrow. However, it does not necessarily mean your computer has to be replaced. By establishing a relationship with your reseller, you can be assured the firm will help you select a computer that has the functionality you need so that the equipment can easily be updated in the future.

Be aware that buying the most up-to-date computer today is not the same as buying a computer with the functionality you may need for the future. A reputable reseller can foresee future problems and help you choose the system that will serve you the best now and in the years to come.

When selecting or evaluating a computer reseller, remember to consider the following factors:

- service levels and quality
- technical expertise in advanced technology
- knowledge of application or network operating system software
- depth of after-sale support

Searching for help to solve your computing and information technology problems can be both expensive and time consuming. Computer technology associations can be instrumental in finding technically competent and savvy computer reseller professionals who can provide solutions to your specific information system and integration problems. For more information on selecting a computer reseller or for a list of A+ Authorized Service Centers near you, call the Computing Technology Industry Association at (630) 268-1818, or fax your request to (630) 268-1384. Contact your local Better Business Bureau to check on the reputability of a reseller that you are considering. Also call any local associations you are a member of to see who they recommend to their membership.

Computer Buyer's Checklist

1. Does the computer self-configure when first started?
2. Does someone on your staff have to configure any of the elements of the system?
3. What added software is bundled with the computer? Are the version numbers of the bundled software current?
4. Are all accessories easily labeled for connection?
5. Do you have adequate space in which to set up your computer?
6. Do you have a 3-wire "grounded" electrical outlet nearby to plug the PC into?
7. If you are purchasing a modem with a computer, do you have a telephone outlet nearby? Will the modem's telephone cord reach the outlet?

8. Is there enough room to place the components on the designated work surface- with enough space for keyboards, mouse pads and monitor- or will extension cords be needed?
9. Is there a (toll-free) telephone support line available for user assistance during and after normal business hours?
10. Will additional electrical outlets be necessary?

Computer Service Checklist

1. Should the machine be sent to the location where it was purchased for warranty service? If not, to what location should the machine be shipped?
2. If warranty service is performed on-site, for what duration or what warranty period is it performed? Does this cover all of the components that are being purchased?
3. After the warranty has expired, where can service be obtained?
4. How much does the service policy cost, what does it cover, and what is the average response time for service?
5. Are there any additional fees for emergency service?
6. Can service- either warranty or non-warranty- be obtained from other service providers?
7. Is the warranty void if the components are services in-house?
8. Is the warranty void if additional components are added to the computer?
9. Are any of the warranties transferable to other people if the computer is sold or given away?
10. Does the reseller have loss insurance for all of the components of the computer?

Sponsored

This publication is sponsored by the Computing Technology Industry Association as a public service to assist prospective buyers of a computer system to have a better understanding of the computer industry.