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[Home](#) > [Magazines](#) > [Archives](#) > [2003](#) > [Healthy Child](#)

Healthy Child

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48 x CD-RW/DVD and a side of fries, please

By Dave Jaffe

Despite shopping hassles and staggering costs, no consumer purchase offers that intoxicating new leather smell, responsive handling sensation and satisfying powerful engine purr that comes with buying a computer.

"Now boys, I know you're anxious to get this computer set up, but consider this: The best way to ensure many years of trouble-free computing is to leave everything sealed in boxes."

"Uh Dad? Does it matter that I opened the packing slip?"

"Damn it, Russ. Well, we might as well flush the warranty down the toilet."

"Who cares? Get me on the Internet now, Now, NOW!"

"Take it easy, Brian. Russ, check his ropes."

"They're holding, Dad."

"Good. OK, first we probably should read the Computer Set-up Manual, but it's almost six pages long."

"Forget that, Dad."

"Righto, Russ. Instead let's refer to this one-page Short Attention Quick Set-up Guide that features a tiny man with a monitor for his head pointing to important sockets and shouting simple instructions in 19 languages."

"INTERRRNEHHHT!"

"We're hurrying, Brian. Russ, take this cable and look for a socket that's shaped sort of like a Quaker."

Home computers have, of course, come a long way since the first models appeared on store shelves back during the Crusades. At that time the average owner couldn't hope to hook up the device without the help of at least two technical support staff, an alchemist and leeches.

The simplicity of today's computer design, however, makes set-up no more difficult than, say, taking over the controls of a small jet fighter and landing it at night on a carrier deck.

The average American family will replace their computer every 4.2 years, according to some statistics I just pulled out of my behind.

Typical reasons for upgrading include the need for expanded memory, enhanced operating systems and because someone, through no fault of his own, tipped the old computer off the edge of a desk while frantically mopping up spilled coffee, a common problem known in the software industry as a Little Glitch.

Replacing a broken computer is a simple matter of ordering one off the Internet, unless, of course, you can't access the Internet because your computer is, as I mentioned at the beginning of this sentence, broken.

However, once you've overcome that Little Glitch, the Internet is your gateway to computer bargains galore. To find them, however, it is important to execute a well-defined Internet search in order to reduce the number of Web site "hits" from an overwhelming 18 billion to an easily manageable 164 million.

To accomplish this, enter a string of words that best describe what you're looking for. For example, Computer, Home, Buy, Broken, Coffee, Spilled, Dropped It, Not My Fault, Sorry. Such a search will return 26 Web sites for computer dealers and another 47,000 sites where you can Meet Hot Ecuadorian Girlfriends.

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COME TO YOUR SENSES

Because all members of the family will have access to the home computer, it is important to determine how each plans to use it before you buy.

For instance, will little Janey be illegally downloading the copyrighted music of big name recording artists, a practice that the kids like to call "stealing?"

How about scholarly young Tommy?

Is the Internet his most valuable tool for researching exactly where to Meet Hot Ecuadorian Girlfriends?

And what about Good Old Dad? Will he just continue to putter along using the new computer as a coaster for his coffee mug?

Questions such as these are best addressed at a family meeting:

DAVE: "All right everyone, let's get this out of the way so we can all get out of here."

MOM: "Dave, we're eating dinner. You don't like it?"

DAVE: "No, no! It's delicious. I meant let's talk about a new computer."

BRIAN: "Somebody move Dad's coffee!"

DAVE: "I've found a very nice deal on a 2.4 gig, 533 meg front side bus CPU that features a 64 meg dual channel flip flop slam jam. Now, does anyone have any idea what that means?"

RUSS: "I think a 'gig' is a whole lot of little computer ... thingies."

DAVE: "Good, Russ. Sounds like we're on the right track. Now it also offers a 48 x CD-RW/DVD combo, which seems like a lot of letters at a reasonable price. But again, any guesses what that could mean? Anyone?"

MOM: "Well, 'combo' would indicate that something is 'combined' with something else, like a Big Mac with fries and a large Coke."

DAVE: "Now it all makes sense. Let's recap: We're looking at a computer that offers a whole lot of little thingies and reasonably priced letters with a side of French fries."

RUSS: "And a large Coke."

DAVE: "A Coke, yes. Good, son. OK, before I give them my credit card is there anything else we want in a computer?"

BRIAN: "That's it, Dad. Except maybe a cup holder."

Dave Jaffe, who lives with his wife, two teenage sons and two dogs, cautiously welcomes your comments at thejaffes@earthlink.net.

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