



able to do a deal at a high street chain store — their prices are generally quite low anyway — but you might be able to persuade the salesperson to throw in a game or two. Don't neglect the secondhand market. Millions of people have bought home computers. Many of them want to upgrade their computing power to the point where it is more sensible to buy a new machine completely, and while trading-in is not unheard of, it is still far from normal. Look in the 'For Sale' pages in the computer press and in your local newspaper.

When you start to think about upgrading your computer, or buying peripherals, it is even more important to study the market carefully. If you are a Spectrum owner, for example, you will be restricted to Sinclair's own peripherals which, while quite effective, are rather limited in their scope. Or you might want to increase the memory capacity of your Commodore Vic-20, when you will be faced with the choice of Commodore's own units, or very similar ones from independent manufacturers, which either offer the same for less, or perhaps slightly enhanced power for the same price.

Perhaps the area of widest choice is printers. Not only is there a huge selection of printer manufacturers, but also some half a dozen different types — dot matrix, daisy wheel and ink jet being the most common. If you are interested in word processing, then you will probably want a letter-quality daisy wheel printer, which produces work that looks like copy from a superior electric typewriter. If you are producing budgets by means of a spreadsheet program, then the maximum line length will be your first criterion.

Next in terms of width of choice comes mass storage. Does one invest in the higher-priced floppy disk drives, or compromise with a stringy-floppy (see page 224)? Once again, the more you spend, the better you are likely to be served.



One question that seems to haunt the would-be purchaser is: 'What if I buy now, and then the price drops by ten per cent next week?' All the signs are that this situation will continue for the foreseeable future. By judicious reading of the computer press it is often possible to anticipate price cuts, but in any event, that is no good reason to put off buying a computer. It is much more important to be quite sure that you are buying the right machine for your needs and, as we observed before, the surest way to achieve that end is by thinking carefully about your application first. Always remember that your computer system is much more than the box with a keyboard that connects to your television set. It is more, even, than your software and peripherals. Your computer is a tool that when used to its full capacity can provide hours of entertainment, solve problems and keep concise and easily accessible records.

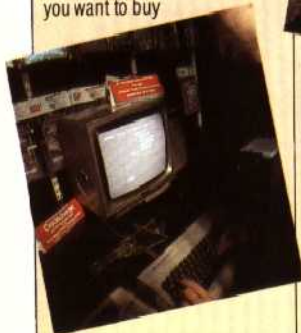
Software First

Unless you intend to use your computer solely for learning to program, the availability of good applications software will be as important as the computer's specifications, if not more so. The better a computer has sold, the more likely it is that software will be developed for it, and the more software it has, the better it will sell — a true chicken-and-egg situation

Window Shopping

Discount Store

Shops that trade in discount hi-fi and video can usually offer a good price on microcomputers — if you already know which model you want to buy



High-Street Chain

More and more people now buy their computers from the larger high street department stores, which offer the advantages of bulk buying. At one time the sales staff's computer knowledge was minimal; now many are setting up dedicated computer departments

Computer Dealer

If you buy your computer from a professional dealer, you can be sure of decent after-sales service, and knowledgeable recommendations on software, though you may not be getting the best price



Mail Order

This used to be a popular way of selling microcomputers, and by far the most profitable method for new manufacturers. Long delivery times on promised new computers, however, was the main cause of its demise