

9. Assets

9.4 Information Technology

The use of information technology by the voluntary sector has changed rapidly in recent years. Most voluntary organisations now use all manner of Information Technology equipment (IT) from computers to scanners to digital cameras. A large number are also promoting their organisations via the internet (world wide web).

What is it being used for and who is going to use it?

There is a huge variety of equipment and services available to you – the key is to clearly define what it is the equipment being used for and who is going to use it. Do a survey – ask other groups – have a clear plan of what will happen to the computer once it is purchased. This will help to narrow down the picture and will give you a focus for further research.

Getting up-to-date information

Now you know what you need it for, consider buying some magazines as they will have lots of adverts to read and usually some reviews of the latest models. This will give you some idea of what you can get for a certain price. Visit your local computer shop and ask for advice as well. If you have internet access some sites will give the latest specifications.

Hardware

Depending upon your circumstances you need to investigate the different types of computers. A laptop may be useful and more practical to pass around a group if you are working on a newsletter. Or a desktop might be easier if you have a hall or office to site it in.

Nowadays the capacity of computers far outweighs the usage by the normal user so you do not need to worry about processor, memory or hard disk size etc as you did in the early days.

Maintenance of hardware

Your computer will go wrong at some stage – this is a fact, be it accidental damage or a component going wrong. Look at the various options for warranty/on-site maintenance. Is it included and for how long? Is it on-site or return to base? This may influence your decision to buy on-line or locally, if you think you may get better service from a local computer shop.

Software Licences

Your computer will normally come with the operating system such as Microsoft Windows 7 installed, so you don't need to worry about this. You may get a package that bundles in lots of software of varying use to you. You may need to buy other specific software licenses for word processing, databases etc. To be legal you will normally have to buy a licence for each PC – you cannot buy one licence and install on several PC's! You may be able to access heavily discounted charity licences from

Alternatively you can download Open Source software for free which has the same features as main stream packages such as Microsoft. However, finding local training and support for this would may difficult but could be an option.

If you are going to use the Internet you will need security software (anti-virus, firewall etc) – again some are free but you may decide to use one of the well known packages such as Norton, McAfee etc to give you all-round supported protection. Don't forget these will need to be updated yearly so include the cost in your running costs.

Internet access

If you require Internet access you will need to investigate both start-up costs and on-going costs for a telephone line and internet service. Again, there are numerous Broadband packages and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) so do some homework, ask around, go to review sites to get the service that suits your requirements. If younger people are going to use the Internet access you may want to purchase child protection software.

What extras do you require?

Buying a medium priced colour printer that can scan and photocopy could be a good addition to your group facilities. Bear in mind colour cartridges are expensive, again adding to running costs but if you want to produce good quality material this might be worth the cost. Cheaper, less robust printers might not stand up to volume usage. Digital cameras are relatively inexpensive and come with some software for editing etc. They can also be useful for taking simple videos.

Where will the computer live?

The computer needs to be sited in a sound and safe environment with a computer desk and chair to make it comfortable to use. You will accumulate a small box of CDs and licenses etc. that need to be kept safe and accessible by the group.

Is one enough?

If you have a large room and plan to run courses or do group activities you will need to consider networking the computers so that you can share resources such as a printer. Networking is where all the computers are joined via cabling or a wireless connection. Again there are many questions and solutions – use the same principles as before you purchase and understand your needs – your time will not be wasted.

Backup

This is the most important aspect to consider but there are numerous products available for this such as tape drives, external drives and CD/DVD media. You can also use free and low cost online backup solutions'. Backup any critical data daily and ensure that any backups are verified and tested.

Further information

Open Source

www.osalt.com

London Advice Services Alliance

www.lasa.org.uk

Pugh Computers (Software)

www.pugh.co.uk

Broadband Checker

www.broadbandchecker.co.uk

'How to Cost and Fund ICT' booklet

www.ictclub.org.uk

Charities Technology Exchange

www.ctxchange.org.uk

Lasa ICT Knowledgebase

www.ictknowledgebase.org.uk

Wales CVC Circuit Riders

www.walescvccircuitriders.org.uk

ICT Champion

www.ictchampions.org.uk/

IT Volunteers

www.it4communities.org.uk

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