

Why Settling for Good Enough Is Just Not Good Enough

Making the Correct System Decisions from the Beginning Can Save Money and Sanity Long-Term



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I frequently have conversations with physicians all over the country about new computer hardware and network software purchases that they are considering for their offices. Eventually, the discussions always lead to cost. Many physicians wonder why the \$399 PC they see advertised on TV by some “dude” is not the best choice to use in their own medical practice.

Now, don't get me wrong. These \$399 PC specials would be great for some home computer users on a very tight budget, and the brand name on these particular PCs is truly excellent. We sell the same brand name to our own clients! The problem is that the hardware specifications, included software and warranty are simply not acceptable for a medical practice, or most businesses. This is not only true with those \$399 specials from those really funny TV ads, but also with many systems that so-called “computer experts” will try to get you to buy. Just keep in mind that though most of these people are well-intentioned; they are in the business to sell you computers, and sell as many as possible. They would much rather have you keep coming back every couple of years and replace or upgrade that “great deal” you got. Then there is the question of what to do when something breaks.

We have a client in Marietta that purchased some name brand computers from a local company before we took over their support. A major component failed, and we quickly found that the company that sold the computers saved my client about \$100 per computer by only getting the standard one-year on-site warranty. We could have reinstated the warranty for \$300 – \$500, depending on the options, but only after paying another \$500 to repair the current

problem. At that point, it was a no-brainer to just buy a new, faster computer with the full three-year, on-site warranty and have a burial at sea (dumpster) for our recently departed PC. Sad, but true, what a difference a \$100 warranty upgrade would have made in the beginning. This particular client ended up spending more than \$1,000 to replace a 14-month-old PC. We went ahead and reinstated the warranty on the others.

You have probably heard the saying that when you buy a new computer it is obsolete within six months. That might be true if you are the type to always get the \$399 computer specials, or if you are a hardcore gamer. The truth is if you are willing to spend a little more money up front on your overall computer system, you can start out with a much faster system that will last much longer, and keep you from having to upgrade or replace your computer systems every couple of years. A good office PC can last up to five years before you need to consider replacing it. A “thin client” device where you can run Windows and most programs off of a fast central server can last 10 years or more!

Here is a list of guidelines that we use when deciding on PC systems for our own clients:

- Always use a name brand PC such as Dell;
- Never purchase the absolute latest and greatest speed, but usually just one notch down;
- 256mb of RAM minimum;
- 30gb disk drive or greater;
- Space-saving small towers cases are best for most medical offices;
- Microsoft Windows XP Professional Operating System and never XP Home Edition;
- Microsoft Office Small Business or Pro-

fessional (Word, Excel, PowerPoint);

- LCD Flat Panel displays for space-savings and longer life with a better picture;
- UPS Battery Backup for power surges, brownouts and blackouts;
- A minimum three-year, next-day, on-site parts and labor warranty.

Most medical practices use these types of systems with Practice Management Software for Billing and Scheduling. More and more are also purchasing Electronic Medical Records (EMR) software for a paperless office. If you take the standpoint that your office computer system is essentially your “Point of Sale” system, then you will more easily consider purchasing only quality hardware and software with a good warranty to stand behind it. Doing so in the beginning will sometimes seem to cost more money, but in the long run, you will be saving thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of dollars in system replacements, and having minimum downtime thanks to a long-term, on-site warranty.

Our clients that have been running systems reliably for many years, can tell you for sure that purchasing systems that are just “good enough” are never good enough for them anymore. If you will seriously consider some of these simple guidelines, just watch as your future system purchases become long-term successes, instead of a short-term nightmares.

Now what do you think about those \$399 PC TV specials? Are you getting it? Dude? ■