

# C omputers, Computers, Computers

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I'll bet that sometimes in this day and age you get tired of hearing about COMPUTERS. The fact is the introduction of the Personal Computer (PC) in 1980 began a revolution in our society that has yet to reach its peak. It is becoming virtually impossible to avoid dealing with a computer on a frequent basis. They control our cars, our telephones (and all of the accessories that now go with a phone), and many other household and office equipment. We often do our banking with a computer; nearly every purchase we make is tied to a computer one way or another. In fact, the age of computers has and continues to transform the way we live and work.

## Power to the People

What is the true significance of all of this? Certainly one of the biggest is that no matter where you live or what your social or economic situation is, you have the same access to information as everyone else. Computers may turn out to be the true equalizers in our world. True, how we use this information or even whether we use it is up to us. But, if information is power, as the saying goes, then we have all been given that power through computers.

We now can purchase, at a very low cost, a small community library stored on a few CD-ROM disks. For a fee of \$20 per month we can access, via the Internet, all of the information in all of the major libraries in the world and a whole lot of misinformation provided by just about anybody. We all have the power to access information from and provide information to the world. We can bypass the post office and postage and send electronic mail with photographs, sound, or video attached around the world even as we pay our bills and do our taxes—all for the same \$20. This gives you and me power that

no average human being has ever had. It also sets us up to receive bad information from someone else. So there is some downside. But as long as we access reputable Internet sites, we can be pretty sure we are getting reliable information.

We can shop and buy items from around the world without leaving our homes; in so doing, we use the power of our computer to comparison shop and find the best product and best price. Computers allow us to communicate with people of similar interests all over the world. There is virtually no topic you can think of that you cannot find a site for on the Internet. People you would never think of as being interested in computers are heavily into using them for work, hobbies, research, and learning.

I recently talked with a friend of mine who runs a construction company. I knew he had purchased a new computer a few months earlier to keep his company's books. My friend is 6'5" and close to 300 pounds and is always covered with dirt when at work. He is just not the kind of person one pictures huddled in front a computer monitor late at night. But he told me about his exploration of the Internet and his corresponding with folks from around the world involving his hobby—buying and restoring antique tractors. He described the hundreds of Internet sites he had visited regarding his hobby and how he had investigated odd serial numbers or tracked down no longer manufactured parts. He had discovered a new world and people to share his interests with. He had helped folks in other countries and had even had people from other countries call him on the phone. I was fascinated by the fact that he and several other folks I had been talking to have found their hobby, business, art, etc., on the Internet. The Internet is so huge that it is nearly

incomprehensible. Yet everyone I know has found a niche for themselves that they are thrilled with and understand really well. None of these folks is a computer expert. They simply use the computer as a tool to accomplish, learn, or communicate something. They have become proficient in using this relatively new technology.

## **Fear of Computers**

Folks who have not been exposed to computers or automatically think they are too complicated or see no reason to use or own one, often are simply afraid of this new world. They fear they cannot learn to use a computer and are bewildered by all of the strange terms people use when talking about computers. What is the difference between the Internet and the World Wide Web? What is RAM, ROM, a hard drive, memory, a motherboard, a floppy, a CDROM drive, expansion slot, parallel port, serial port, boot, etc., etc.?

Essentially that is all there is to be afraid of—terminology. A lot of folks are afraid to ask questions fearing they will seem dumb. Computer people who are worth their salt will tell you that they learned by asking a lot of (what they considered) dumb questions and that their desire and interest to learn about something this fascinating overcame

their worries about appearing foolish or less than smart. If you have a real computer person in the family he or she probably will love to show you how much they know. Just be sure to slow him or her down when you don't understand something or have the person to repeat the description or show you what to do.

By sitting at the keyboard of a computer you cannot under any circumstances "hurt" a computer. Stay away from commands like MOVE, ERASE, and DELETE until you are experienced and know what you are doing, but otherwise you cannot HURT a computer. YOU may become lost operating a piece of software, but in the windows world there is always a command on the screen right in front of you that lets you exit or quit or close a program. If all else fails, turn the machine off and then back on, and you will be back at your opening screen.

Like any other learning experience, you have to try things out, explore, and experiment in order to learn how to use a computer. The rewards are worth it. You will open up new windows, indeed doors, to the world around you. Just remember to sleep and eat.

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