

'Living In a Tech World' Column

For Release 3.22.2009

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### **Making Sense of Computer Descriptions (Part Two)**

Last week we took on the first part of the puzzle used as a computer description.

This was the example.

**Desktop PC - Intel Pentium Dual-Core E5200 2.5GHz 64bit, 6 GB DDR2 SDRAM, NVIDIA GeForce 9500 GS 512, SATA 500GB 7200 DVDRW-LS, 10/100/1000, Vista Home Premium 64-bit SP1**

Last week (<http://vccdigital.com/columns/column five.html>) we discussed the CPU and ram descriptions so this week we will pick up with the graphics card.

#### **NVIDIA GeForce 9500 GS 512**

This refers to the video card or chip in the computer. It is the manufacturer name and model number. Each model is based on a different configuration of chips and to find out about the speed of this card you need to research it separately. 512 is the amount of ram (random access memory) on the video card. It can also be 256 or 1 GB. If there is a separate video card in the system the memory on that card needs to be calculated into the amount of general ram to determine if the total ram memory is in the range limitation of your operating system (see last week's column). In low and mid range computers you will generally not have a separate video card. Instead video is handled by a chip on the motherboard. In that case the chip model may be noted and often uses an 'express' designation. Integrated video uses your general ram memory for video so it decreases the amount available for running programs so it is important to have as much memory as possible if your video is integrated.

#### **SATA 500GB 7200**

This denotes the hard drive. A SATA drive has greater throughput than the older ATA versions. The first number is amount of storage space and second number the disk speed. 500 GB (gigabyte) has become an average sized drive. But you will see a range of 160 to 1000GB or 1TB (terabyte). Your use of the computer will determine the optimum drive size. As to speed, 7200 is the norm but you will still be offered 5400 drives in lower end systems. The numbers refer to revolutions per second of the disks and the faster the better for improving the amount of time it takes to read or write a file to your drive.

(more)

### **DVDRW-LS**

This describes the optical drive. In days past you might choose between a CD or DVD but today the norm is a DVD. The RW designates that you can write to the drive and you can use rewriteable disks, that is, disks that can be erased and reused. The LS indicates that this is a Light Scribe device. Light Scribe allows you to label your disk in the drive in a monotone label if you are using special disks. These drives also handle CD disks in both read and write mode.

### **10/100/1000**

These numbers refer to the network card (NIC) and amount of data that it can pass across the network or to and from the Internet. 10/100 is the norm but you should look for a 1000MB card if you think the computer may be used to pass video or large files across your home network or the Internet.

### **Vista Home Premium 64-bit SP1**

Finally we know the operating system (OS) that is included in the purchase. In this case it is one of the four primary versions of Vista. You can compare the versions at <http://www.microsoft.com/windows/windows-vista/compare-editions/default.aspx>. Home Premium is the minimum OS that you should be looking for. From there you graduate to a Business edition which has some benefits even for the home user. Having the 64-bit version (and the SP1 update) wraps up the information. In this example we had a 64-bit processor and 6GB of memory. In order to take advantage of this power you will need the 64-bit OS. If the version description does not specify 64-bit it can be presumed to be 32-bit. Either way your current software will run as it has in the past. But to take advantage of the more powerful configuration you may have to upgrade some programs to versions written specifically for the 64-bit system.

See, it is not so complicated. Well, it is but now when you are shopping you can make comparisons of configurations against price and hopefully have some idea of what you need. Check our website for more information on what which of these elements are important based on your use.

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