The CVC Circuit Riders project provides friendly and informal workshops
on a range of information and communication technologies.
The aim of the **123-communcate** programme, one of the Circuit Rider activities,
is to assist voluntary groups and community organisations to communicate more effectively.

Considerations when buying ICT Equipment

Like many large purchases in life, a house, a car or a new TV, buying a computer does not have a simple one size fits all solution. Before you even begin to consider gigabytes and hard drives (if at all) you need to have a very clear idea about why your group wants a computer, and what exactly it will be used for.

Your group will need to do some background reading and learn some of the jargon and terms surrounding computers to enable you to make your own decision based on your requirements and future plans. The local newsagents will have half a dozen different magazines – PC Advisor, What PC? etc which will contain glossaries and basic information, usually at the back. This time will not be wasted as buying your computer is just the start of the process. It is an on-going commitment that will need your attention at various times as events occur, such as when you need an upgrade or if you have a hardware failure.

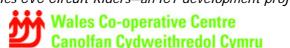## *Who is going to use it and what are they going to use it for?*

There is a huge variety of equipment and services available to you – the key is to clearly define who is going to use the computer and what they will they be using it for. 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, buy some magazines like What PC? 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 or PC World and ask for advice as well. If you have internet access some sites will give the latest specifications, for example, www.lasa.org.uk if you want detailed information.

If you wish to benefit from the programme please contact
the Circuit Rider team on 01437 771197
or email us on contact@walescvccircuitriders.org.uk

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**Wales Co-operative Centre
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Buying ICT Equipment

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 size, 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 (2007 – Windows XP Home) 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 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!

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 prove difficult but could be an option. For more information on Open Source see www.opensource.org

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.

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Buying ICT Equipment

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. There are numerous packages and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) so do some homework, ask around.
Questions to ask: Can we get broadband? How much will we use?

Internet access is provided free at all Public Libraries.

If younger people are going to use the internet access you may want to seek advice on keeping them safe. See http:/www.getsafeonline.org/

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.

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, get to know what it is all about before you purchase – your time will not be wasted. These are just some of the things you need to consider – every group is different so invest some time and make sure you get what you need!

Good Luck

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