# Multimedia Computer Buyer's Checklists

*After completing this chapter, you will be able to:*

- **Use multimedia computer buyer checklists that clarify what you need to buy and why**

- **Assess the multimedia PC you are using now and decide what upgrade(s) it needs next**

- **Realize how rapidly prices are falling and how to get the best buys**

- **Know where to find comparison-shopping advice for buying hardware on the Internet**

● This chapter contains three checklists. The first one lists the equipment in an affordable, low-budget system that will get you started without a large cash outlay. The second checklist describes a midrange system that is the most strategic buy if you can afford it. The third list is for a multimedia dream machine with all the bells and whistles. Though few readers will ever buy all the components that this chapter enumerates, a checklist is useful because it shows you all the options and lets you consider which items you really need.

## Low-Budget System

### System Unit

- ☐ 400 MHz central processor
- ☐ 64 MB RAM
- ☐ 15- to 17-inch color display
- ☐ 800 600 pixel resolution
- ☐ 24-bit color depth
- ☐ USB port
- ☐ Mouse or other pointing device
- ☐ Surge protector

### Multimedia Accessories

- ☐ CD-ROM or DVD
- ☐ 16-bit waveform digital audio
- ☐ 2 self-powered speakers

### Read/Write Storage

☐ 4 GB hard disk

### Communication Options

☐ 36,600 baud modem

### Printer

☐ Inkjet printer

## Midrange System

### System Unit

☐ 600 MHz central processor

☐ 128 MB RAM

☐ 19-inch color display

☐ 1024 × 768 pixel resolution

☐ 24-bit color depth

☐ 2 USB ports

☐ 2 empty expansion slots

☐ Mouse or other pointing device

☐ Surge protector with 5-minute battery backup

### Multimedia Accessories

☐ DVD

☐ 16-bit waveform digital audio

☐ Stereo speakers with subwoofer

☐ 16 MB graphics accelerator

☐ Video overlay with:

    ☐ TV tuner

    ☐ Full-motion video capture

### Read/Write Storage

☐ 10 GB hard disk

☐ Zip disk (USB port version)

☐ CD-ROM recorder (CD-R)

### Communication Options

☐  56 Kbps baud modem

    *or*

☐  Network card with ISDN, DSL, or cable modem

### Auxiliary Input

☐  WebCam

☐  Flatbed scanner

☐  Digital camera

☐  DV camcorder

### Printer

☐  Laser printer

# High-End System

### System Unit

☐  800 MHz central processor

☐  256 MB RAM

☐  21-inch color display

☐  $1600 \times 1200$ pixel resolution

☐  32-bit color depth

☐  2 USB ports

☐  USB splitter hub

☐  4 empty expansion slots

☐  Mouse or other pointing device

☐  Surge protector with 10-minute battery backup

### Multimedia Accessories

☐  DVD

☐  16-bit waveform digital audio

☐  5.1 digital surround sound speakers

☐  32 MB graphics accelerator

☐  Video overlay with:

    ☐  TV tuner

    ☐  Full-motion video capture

☐ MIDI IN and MIDI OUT

☐ MIDI keyboard

☐ MPEG capture board

### Read/Write Storage

☐ 30 GB hard disk

☐ External SCSI connector

☐ Jaz disk

☐ CD-ROM Read/Write (CD-RW)

### Communication Options

☐ 56 Kbps baud modem

*or*

☐ Network card with ISDN, DSL, or cable modem

### Auxiliary Input

☐ WebCam

☐ Flatbed scanner

☐ Hi-Res digital camera
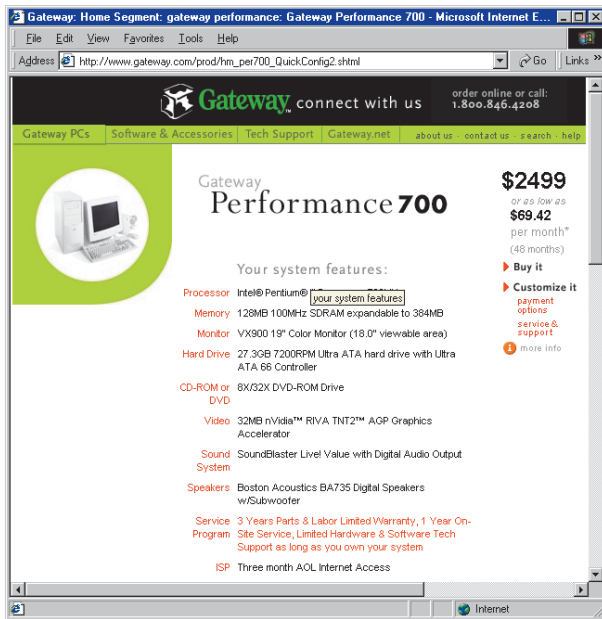
☐ DV camcorder

### Printer

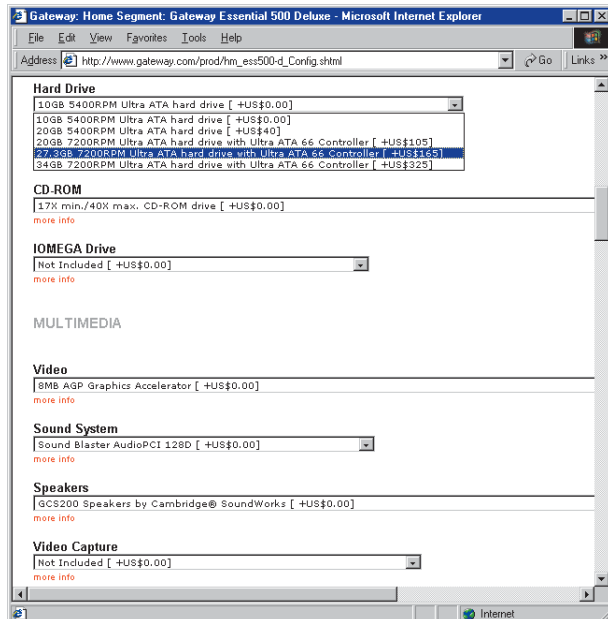☐ Color laser printer

## How to Get the Best Buy

Anyone purchasing a multimedia computer should realize how fast costs are declining and where to get the best buy. Prices are falling due to advances in technology and because the multimedia PC has become a mass-market consumer item. Major retailers such as CompUSA, Best Buy, Staples, Sears, Radio Shack, and Circuit City sell multimedia computers in a broad range of prices.

When you purchase a multimedia PC, use the checklists in this chapter to help decide what features you want, then visit the retailers and find the best buy you can on the computer that comes closest to having these features. Make sure it is possible to buy and install any peripherals you may want in addition to those that come with the machine. For example, if you want more RAM than what comes with the machine, make sure the extra RAM is available at a reasonable price, and find out how difficult it will be to install. Check the number of slots and make sure there are empty slots of the type you need for installing extra hardware such as a SCSI board.

Online stores let you configure and purchase computers over the Web. The major retailers and manufacturers have Web sites where you can compare prices, specifications,

**Figure 12-1** The Gateway site lets you configure your own PC when you click the option to customize it. By the time you read this, the prices will be lower, and the computers will be faster.



**Figure 12-2** The strategic buy is the hard drive before the one that jumps too far in price. By the time you read this, the drives will be larger, and the prices will be lower.

and technical support. The author likes to shop online at Gateway, for example. Figure 12-1 shows how the Gateway site gives you the option to configure your own PC. To get the most strategic buy, you pull down the menus and see where the price breaks are. In Figure 12-2, for example, the author pulled down the hard drive menu to find the most economical buy. Notice how the 27.3 GB hard drive costs $165, while a 34 GB drive costs almost twice as much. The most economical buy is the 27.3 GB drive, because it falls right before the price jump. By the time you read this, the drives will be larger and the prices will be lower, but the principle is the same: To get the most strategic buy, choose the option right before the one that jumps a lot in price.

For more information about configuring and purchasing computers online, follow the *Multilit* Web site links to multimedia PC manufacturers and online computer stores.

# e x e r c i s e s

1. What brand and model of multimedia computer do you use? Which one of the three checklists provided in this chapter most closely matches your multimedia PC? What features does your multimedia computer have in addition to those listed? What features does it lack?

2. Do you think any of the items listed in the high-end checklist are not needed in a multimedia computer? If so, list the items and explain why they are unnecessary.

3. Take the three checklists to your local computer store and price the equipment. Create an itemized list that shows what each component costs, and compute the total cost of each system.

4. Does your local computer store sell any multimedia peripherals not listed in the high-end checklist? If so, what are they? Do you feel they should be added to the checklist? Why or why not?