

COMPUTER MEMORY LANE

This January marks 30 years since I went into the computer business. In that time computers have made huge advances, none less dramatic than the changes in pricing over the years.

The first computer that I worked on was the IBM System 23. In its original configuration it came with 64k of Ram, a built in ten inch green screen and keyboard and sported two 8 inch floppy drives, each of which held 1 megabyte of data. One of these diskettes typically held your programs and the second one was used for your data. This highly limited data storage was the primary cause of the year 2000 crisis that really did occur and managed to keep an army of programmers busy for several years.

This initial IBM computer cost \$15,000.00 and was later offered with a hard disk server option containing a massive 30mb drive. This hard drive also cost \$15,000.00 which translated into a cost of \$500.00 per megabyte. During the previous spring, a 1 Terabyte drive, which is 1 Trillion Bytes, sold for as little as \$50.00 or .005 cents per megabyte. More recently, that same drive has gone up in price to almost \$150.00 due to the rains in Thailand that flooded a number of computer part plants.

The next computers that I worked on were the initial PC's running at 4.6 Mega Hertz. By comparison modern PC's reached a threshold speed of just over 3000 Mega Hertz five or so years ago. They have continued to improve in performance however with the development of multi-core processors. Memory rose over the years up from thousands of bytes (kb) of Ram to the multiple billions of bytes (gb) of today.

In the days of the System 23 the basic Dot Matrix printer cost \$4000.00 and was surprisingly rugged. PC printers had trouble reaching the level of reliability of these old work horses but they were of course less expensive and up to 10 times as fast.

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Dot Matrix printers remain to this day and are usable tools where multi-part forms are employed, but most companies have switched to Laser printers along the way. Laser printers are far faster, quieter and less prone to jamming and the print quality is far clearer than the old dot matrix printers. Even if you have to print 5 copies of each invoice they will generally finish much more quickly than a single copy printed on a dot matrix printer.

My first laser printer cost \$1000.00 and printed about 3 pages per minute. Newer models can print 50 or more pages per minute and can cost from a hundred to thousands of dollars for high speed and advanced colour models.

Personal All in One models print, scan and fax in a single unit for as little as \$50.00 By comparison, the first fax unit I ever saw cost \$3000.00 and early model scanners and colour printers were equally expensive as well.

My first CD-Writer cost \$500.00 while a DVD-Writer I bought the other day was \$30.00 Rewriteable DVD's were \$20.00 each when they first came out and the other day I bought 50 of them for \$10.00, one benefit of mass production and cheap manufacturing in Asia.

Our first 17 inch colour monitor cost \$995.00 and couldn't hold a candle to the current 23 inch \$150.00 LED Flat Panel model I now use.

Oddly, software has both gone up and down in price over the years dependant on the level of sales. If a program costs millions of dollars to create but you can sell it to millions of people then the price does not need to be overly high. For specialty programs with smaller markets the prices can be quite high. Libra Accounting software sold for about \$1000.00 a module. When Accpac went over to Windows the equivalent product went up in price to ten times as much as the DOS version sold for.