

My Dying Computer

My laptop computer is dying. It has cancer of the hard drive, while an acute--but rare--form of arthritis has taken root in the hinges that hold on the screen. For those of you not familiar with these diagnosis. My hard drive limps along, but will no longer play movies. I blame this malady on the half dozen back up DVD's I burn every week, and my gaming addiction, which requires a disc to be in the drive whenever I play, so on that score, I am likely to blame, but as to the monitor, I plead innocence. It would appear that the wiring that connects to laptop's screen is loose or poorly connected. I get this scattershot image whenever I boot up my computer. It's not catastrophic, and it goes away after I fiddle with the screen, but I fear it will only grow worse, and someday the screen will simply go black, and no matter how much I jiggle the screen, my efforts will come to naught.

The question at hand is whether I should buy a new computer. If money were no object, I would, but I will plead poverty.

Bear with me while I do the math. If I buy a computer every 2 years for \$1,200 (let's keep these numbers simple), then the computer costs me \$50/month. If I simply extend the life of my computer by an extra 6 months, then that \$50/month goes down to \$40/month. Better yet, if I can extend the life of my computer a whole extra year, the cost of owning a computer drops to \$33.33/month. Such a beautiful, even number. It's just a dollar a day. Why for that price you could own a half-dozen computers for the price of one super extra latte a day, but I digress.

A dollar a day may not sound like much, but I'm 45, give or take a year, and I expect to own computers (or something similar) until I'm at least 75. If we assume by prudence, I can shave the cost of owning a computer from \$2/day to only \$1/day (and I admit I'm not being altogether fair) the lifetime savings comes to a little over \$10,000 (or \$1/day for 30 years). For that kind of money you can go on a nice long vacation to the South of France, so basically

by buying a new computer at the first sign of trouble, I'm giving away the dream vacation of a lifetime.

Of course, we need to go back to that dollar a day. I can only expect that my computer will become harder and harder to start every day. According to formal economic theory, at some point it will make sense for me to buy a new computer, simply because I could have earned more than a dollar in the time it will take me to convince the screen to work. In my particular situation this will occur when it takes me more than 30 seconds to get the screen to work. Not because I make \$120/hour, but because after I exceed that 30 second mark once or twice, I have every confidence I will throw my computer against the wall and thereby settle the entire matter once and for all. For those not afflicted with my sense of emotional urgency, it may well make sense to put up with an extended 5 minute launch time, this being the break even point for someone who makes \$12/hr take home after tax. You will forgive me if I don't show my work.

You will be happy to note that I am almost done with my analysis, but there is one more point to consider. I live on my computer. I telecommute, and most of my free time is spent writing and editing. If I lose my computer, I will not wait a day, a week, or even a month to buy a new one. I will immediately go to the store. It will literally be the next thing that I do. In this there are two things to consider. First of all, I live just down the street from the middle of nowhere. I know it's not as fashionable an address *{as the middle of nowhere}*, but trust me, it has all the benefits with none of the hassles of the better known locale. The point is, buying a computer for me is not a trifling thing, but a day long affair, and as such the cost of buying a computer today--like right now--would include approximately \$50 for gas and wear and tear on the car, and the rest of my day shot for transit to and from a store. Of course, the big hit--the really big hit if my computer failed--is that I would have to buy a computer today, or if not today, tomorrow, or certainly the next day. Literally, I think that's as long as I could string it out. No computer equals no work. It's a

situation that won't last long, so I'm going to end up buying whatever computer the store has in stock. I'm not going to wait for a sale, and if they're out of stock of the good one, I'm going to end up buying the crappy one. Basically, if my computer fails, the downside is pretty significant. I simply wouldn't have the luxury of shopping on line, and it would be a rush purchase. And so, it could get very expensive very quickly.

In fact, if you assume I could buy a computer for \$800 on sale that would normally cost me \$1000, I am far better off buying a new computer today, rather than accruing the \$1/day I save by putting the purchase off (assuming I'll need to buy a computer anyhow sometime in the next four months).

No doubt you know my decision. The next opportunity I get, I'm going to buy a computer... or at least go shopping for one... but you know, not today. I mean, the one I've got still works. What's the hurry?

And as with all these things a little post mortem is in order. Two weeks, going on three weeks later and I haven't done a blessed thing. The problem with the screen has gone into spontaneous remission and although the DVD drive gets worse by the day, I've purchased a handful of flash drives for \$30. With any luck, that'll keep me limping along for... well, for a while, at least until that screen problem looks like its coming back or something else goes into failure mode.

{The screen finally died. I was lucky to get my data off the hard drive. Six years later and I travel -- yes, I travel -- with two laptops, just to make sure. Granted, I only use the one. The other is a glorified secondary hard-drive. But if the first dies, I already have the replacement at hand.

Long term, I'd like to travel with a stand to convert it all into a standing workstation.}

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