

Re: Low end desktop for EE tasks?

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On Tue, 25 Sep 2007 16:14:14 -0700, mrdarrett@xxxxxxxxxx wrote:

Interesting. No I don't think I have it backwards, and at least two of my co-workers in my unit (there are about a dozen of us in my unit) had their mainboards replaced on failure to boot – problem I think was bad caps.

I've seen far too many machines with the low-ESR capacitors blown. I'm working on a Dell Optiplex GX270 (2.4GHz) as I type, replacing most of the capacitors. What a pain, but at least I have a Pace desoldering station to make it easy. Dell has had its share of capacitor problems, as have other manufacturers. Mostly, those ended with products made before about 2003. I haven't seen bad capacitors in the Optiplex E5xx or 3xx series of desktops, or later. Incidentally, I'm typing this on an old Dimension 8100, which is one of about 15 that has not given me any problems (other than finding cheap RAMBUS chips and the usual filth in the fans problem).

And at least one WD HDD replacement.

Sorry. I forgot to mumble something about the hard disks. Every few years, the various disk drive manufacturers take turns selling garbage for hard disks. The problem is that it often takes several years for the drives to fail. By that time, they're out of warranty. About 7 years ago, IBM drives were the hot ticket. They were fast, silent and cheap, so I used them everywhere. 3 years later, I was replacing them at my expense. IBM gave up and sold out to Hitachi, which initially shipped the remaining inventory, which again failed in about 3 years. It took the loss of a few OEM's before Hitachi got the clue and fixed the problems.

I won't rattle off my history of hard disk disasters. I've been burned by literally all the major manufacturers (Fujitsu, IBM, Hitachi, Maxtor, WD, and Seagate) at some time since I started fighting computers about 25 years ago. They just have bad lots, bad

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processes, bad design, or tiny screwups, which result in bad drives that take a while to self destruct. Recently, I've been using Seagate drives, with almost no failures or problems. However, I'm not holding my breath or assuming my good luck will continue forever. If history repeats itself, as it seems to always do, Seagate will eventually cut corners to save a few pennies, and introduce a problem.

As for Western Dismal, they are the worst. Most of their drives died within the warranty period and were replaced by nearly identical refurbished drives, that also died in a few months. The office next door went through several in their Sony desktops before they gave up and let me install a replacement Seagate. That was about a year ago, and I've sworn off WD since then. I have no idea if their current offerings are any better (or worse) and have no interest in finding out the hard way.

You can sorta get a clue by looking at the warranty lifetimes. The current retail Seagate Barracuda drives all show a 5 year warranty. WD Caviar offers a 1 year warranty. Only the WD Raptor has a 5 year warranty.

Our computer tech is one of three who help about 200 of us.

The usual ratio is 1 tech per 100 desktops. I know of some companies with 150 desktops per tech. If IT also supports the servers, the ratio is much less. If your organization needs 70 desktops to tech ratio, then there might be some kind of equipment, environmental, or organizational problem.

The SX260's all came with Hitachi 40GB Travelstar laptop drives. I've had VERY bad luck with the 3.5" Travelstar drives, but these 2.5" laptop drives seem to be surviving so far. Out of 14, I've had no failures of any type. I also monitor the S.M.A.R.T. statistics using SpeedFan:
<<http://www.almico.com/speedfan.php>>
which has been quite useful at predicting hard disk failures. No unusual problems so far.

Very strange! I've heard IBM/Hitachi is one of the most reliable available.

As I indicated, it depends on IBM drive type and model. It was bad enough that there was a class action suit against IBM for shipping junk:
<<http://www.ibmdeskstar75gxplitigation.com/>>

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I got the option of 25 blank cdrom's or a 15% discount on future purchases from IBM. Swell.

Yeah, I work off my C:, and then schedule a batch-file backup with 7zip and then transfer that big file to our network drive overnight.

You don't have a backup unless you've done a dry run and tried to restore it. 7zip is just a file compress/uncompress utility. It's not really suitable for backup and restore. Batch files and even some backup utilities have problems when they encounter open files, thus making file by file backups a crap shoot. That's another reason why I do image backups.

The most important part to backup is the bloated registry. I suggest ERUNT:

<http://www.larshederer.homepage.t-online.de/erunt/>

About 5 weeks ago, one of my customers had their hard disk go bad. It was an old 20GB IBM Deskstar that I should have replaced long ago. No warning with SpeedFan this time. I was recovering from surgery and really didn't need a major project. So, I dragged out the last image backup, which fortunately was only a month old at the time, crammed in a new (Seagate) disk drive, recreated the boot record, updated the BIOS (oops), used Norton Ghost 2003 to restore the image, and was back in full operation in about 4 hours (I was moving kinda slow at the time). All the bookkeeping data was backed up daily to USB flash, so restoring that was trivial. Try doing that with your file by file or incremental backup system.

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