

COMPUTER BRANDS

Our survey reveals the computer brands you can trust

DESKTOP
brands p46

LAPTOP
brands p48

NETBOOK
brands p49



When you're buying a new computer you want to know that the one you choose will give you a trouble-free experience. Our computer brands survey is here to help. We rate the most reliable desktop and laptop brands, and customers' preferred desktop, laptop and netbook brands (see 'Results you can trust').

BUYING WITH CONFIDENCE

The good news is that all desktop brands, except Mesh, received an above average reliability score. This year, British company Novatech jointly tops the table alongside Compaq and Apple. It's the first time we've had a large enough sample of Novatech customers to include the brand.

Those looking for a new laptop can also buy with confidence. All of the laptop brands we rated are reliable. Again, Apple shares the top slot but this time with Toshiba.

The two manufacturers are closely followed by Compaq, Acer, Samsung and Sony.

Netbooks haven't been around long enough for us to rate their reliability.

Dealing with repairs

Fewer than one in five computers have needed a repair, according to our survey. Of those who have needed help, the majority (84%) were satisfied with the service. For desktops and laptops it's more common for the manufacturer to carry out the work. However, 27% of desktop owners and 20% of laptop owners have used an independent repair company.

Six per cent of those surveyed have used recognised repair brands Tech Guys, Fixit

British company
Novatech jointly
tops the table
alongside Apple

Local and Geek Squad to fix their computers. PC World's Tech Guys came bottom of the table with a disappointing customer satisfaction score of 34%. GeekSquad was the best with a customer satisfaction score of 62%.

FAVOURITE BRANDS

When it comes to members' favourite brands, Apple is a clear winner with an impressive customer score of 94% for desktops, and 93% for laptops. Sony and Novatech also perform well for desktops with customer scores of 82% and 81% respectively.

At the other end of the scale, both Philips and eMachines have seen a decrease since last year and are at the bottom of the table with customer scores of 49% and 45%.

For laptops, Samsung and Sony take second place but with a customer score of 75%, still have a long way to go before they catch Apple. Fujitsu-Siemens has seen a dramatic decrease on last

year with its customer score dropping from 71% to 58%.

Netbook ownership has increased since last year's survey with 12% buying a netbook compared to just 7% last year. Samsung is members' favourite brand, here, with a customer score of 80%. Dell and Advent have seen decreases since last year (73% down from 81%, and 56% down from 68%)

RESULTS YOU CAN TRUST

We asked our online panel of members to complete our survey; 10,198 people responded with their experiences of buying a computer (June 2010). We use these to create our Reliability and Customer Scores.

Reliability score

We asked our online panel whether their computer has needed repairing, as well as how old it is. These scores create the reliability score for each desktop and laptop brand. We don't give netbooks a reliability score as they haven't been around long enough.

Customer score

We asked how satisfied members are with the computer they've bought, and whether they'd recommend the brand to a friend. We use these results to calculate a customer score.

Average
amount our
members
spend on
a new PC

£712
DESKTOP

£671
LAPTOP

£294
NETBOOK

WHERE TO SHOP *for your computer*



There's plenty of choice of where to buy your computer: from a high street retailer, an online retailer or from the manufacturer.

Over half of you bought your computer from a high street retailer (and this figure is higher still for laptop and netbook purchases), most commonly from a local independent or an internet retailer.

The single biggest retailer is PC World. Once again, our customer satisfaction score

for this retailer puts it near the bottom of the table with a disappointing customer score of 41%. However, PC World performed well in our undercover investigation into high street buying advice (see p8), so it isn't all bad news for the company. Currys is our lowest rated retailer with a customer score of just 39%.

The Apple Store tops the table yet again when it comes to our customer satisfaction score (89%) – it's proven enduringly popular with its

customers. However, an honourable mention also goes to John Lewis, which achieves a respectable second place with a customer score of 81%.

Local independent dealers also fare well for customer satisfaction.

Over a third of you bought your computer direct from the manufacturer – most commonly Dell, which accounts for around a third of all computer purchases, according to our survey.

DESKTOP brands

MOST RELIABLE DESKTOP BRANDS

Apple 85%

Only 9% of members use an Apple Mac computer (up from 7% last year). However, those who bought Apple, rate it highly.

Once again, Apple's reliability score is above average – one of the only three brands to achieve that distinction this year.

The percentage of Mac users is slightly higher suggesting that some are prepared to pay a premium for Apple's classy products – the high reliability and customer score comes with a higher price tag than a Windows machine with similar computing power.

Apple also continues to build its high street presence: there are now 27 Apple stores across the UK, compared with 20 last year. These stores topped the table for retailer customer score (see p45) although it didn't perform as well as others in our undercover investigation (see p8).

VERDICT Apple scores well for reliability as well as customer score, and its market share is higher than previous years



Compaq 85%

Although Compaq merged with fellow PC manufacturer Hewlett-Packard in 2001, the Compaq brand is still used on a range of desktop computers such as the Presario. Our survey found that this brand was above average in terms of reliability.

When compared to computing giant Dell, Compaq's desktop computers account for only a small fraction of our survey results, with just 3% of respondents owning this brand.

Despite the brand's high reliability score, Compaq falls down on its customer score with (62%); fewer of you said you were satisfied with Compaq-branded computers, or would recommend them to your friends.

When combined with its sister brand Hewlett-Packard, these two brands account for around 12% of the desktop computers, putting HP-Compaq second to Dell in terms of market share.

VERDICT Compaq's desktop computers tend to be more utilitarian than Apple's stylish machines, but are as reliable



Novatech 85%

Although Novatech was founded in the 1980s, the Portsmouth-based company is a less familiar brand than multinationals such as Dell or Apple. In the past it's achieved a high customer score, but there had always been too few Novatech machines in the hands of our survey respondents for us to be able to accurately assess its reliability.

However, the increasing number of Novatech owners who replied to our survey means that we can now put it alongside Apple and Compaq at the top of our reliability table.

With just one per cent of our survey replies, Novatech is a long way behind market-leader Dell, but this is a similar percentage to the one Sony receives in our survey. Although Novatech offers less customisation options than Dell, it has a wide range of models. As well as selling online, the company also has stores in Reading, Cardiff, Bristol and Portsmouth.

VERDICT A smaller, home-grown brand that's beating giants like Dell in both reliability and customer score



Dell 84%

Although Dell receives an above average rating for reliability it continues to dominate the market, accounting for a third of all desktop computers owned by our survey respondents.

Although you can now buy Dell PCs in some high street stores, such as PC World, Dell has a well-established website for selling its computers. This lets you choose a basic model that roughly matches your specifications, but then also allows you to tweak details (such as the processor speeds, or the amount of Ram in the PC) in order to come up with a computer that aims to suit any need and pocket.

Dell scores a 72% customer score, based on how satisfied owners were with their desktop PCs, and if they'd recommend the brand. But, it doesn't inspire the same loyalty as Apple.

VERDICT Dell dominates the market with its flexible approach to buying, but falls behind the top three for reliability



THE REST

Beneath the top three in the table, alongside Dell, the majority of the other major brands that appeared in our survey were also rated as average in terms of their reliability score. Our analysis showed Dell, Packard-Bell, Acer, Medion, Hewlett-Packard and Sony all performed similarly, earning an average rating.

Once again Mesh earns a below average rating – however, it's encouraging to see that it's closing the gap on the other companies, and earns a higher score than it did last year. Its customer score was also average, 62%, showing that despite below-average reliability, Mesh customers are reasonably happy with the brand.



WINDOWS
XP
49%

WINDOWS
VISTA
25%

WINDOWS
7
14%

MAC
OSX
10%





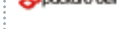





OTHER/
DON'T
KNOW
3%

OPERATING systems

As with last year, around nine out of 10 of all the respondents to our survey are using a version of Microsoft Windows. Windows XP still has a strong following, with almost half of you using this older operating system – but it's gradually being displaced, judging from the fall since last year.

Last year, Windows Vista users accounted for 27% of all replies, an increase over the previous year. However, this has dropped slightly (25% of respondents use Vista) of you reported this as your main operating system. Microsoft's latest operating system, Windows 7, now accounts for 14% of users. Mac users account for around one in ten who replied to our survey and show a high level of satisfaction with their machines.

DESKTOP BRANDS in depth

	 Apple	 Compaq	 Novatech	 Dell	 Packard-Bell	 Acer	 HP	 Medion	 Sony	 Mesh
Reliability score	85%	85%	85%	84%	84%	82%	82%	82%	82%	80%
Problem solving	★★★★	n/a	n/a	★★★★	n/a	★★	★★	★★★★	★★	★
Friendly and helpful	★★★★★	n/a	n/a	★★★★★	n/a	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★
Time taken	★★★★	n/a	n/a	★★★★	n/a	★★	★★★★	★★★★	★★	★
After-sales support	★★★★	n/a	n/a	★★★★	n/a	★★	★★	★★★★	★★	★
Customer score	94%	62%	81%	72%	53%	66%	68%	75%	82%	62%
Website	www.apple.com/uk	www.compaq.com	www.novatech.co.uk	www.dell.co.uk	www.packardbell.co.uk	www.acer.co.uk	www.hp.com/uk	www.medion.com/gb	www.sony.co.uk	www.meshcomputers.com
Sample size	651	189	87	2391	193	233	615	169	103	234

USING THE TABLE

Reliability score Based on the proportion of machines needing repair

Problem solving/Friendly and helpful/Time taken/After-sales support How members rated the manufacturers response to problems

Customer score Based on customer satisfaction and likelihood to recommend