



New chips power high-performance PCs

By [John G. Spooner](#)

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PC manufacturers are prepping a new generation of higher-performance desktops that should sell at midrange prices.

The PCs, due later this month, will come courtesy of a new generation of processors and chipsets from chipmaker Intel and its rival Advanced Micro Devices.

The Intel and AMD silicon, including several higher-performance Intel Pentium 4s and an Athlon XP, promises to boost the performance of a broad range of PCs, priced from as little as \$800 on up to about \$1,500. Not only are the microprocessors faster, but the chipsets inside these PCs work to more rapidly shuttle data between components, too.

And the chips and chipsets are expected to sell for only a slight premium over existing hardware, not the larger increase that might have been seen in better times, said Toni Duboise, desktop analyst with ARS. That makes it easier for manufacturers to tout performance PCs to the low-price crowd.

However, even though the new chips promise a jump in performance for only a small increase in price, the transition isn't likely to create an immediate groundswell of new buyers, analysts said.

That's because, among those buying PCs right now, many are opting for notebooks or choosing desktops in the sub-\$800 range. And though a small number of people are purchasing desktops priced

over \$1,500, there's not a lot of activity in the middle, analysts said. Still, over time consumers and businesses may begin to gravitate toward these machines because of the disparity in performance between what they own now and what these new systems offer.

"The gap between what is sitting on your desktop now and what's available out there is getting bigger and bigger," said Dean McCarron, principal analyst at Mercury Research. "There have been some very significant jumps in what you would call a base PC. So, if you have any tendency toward upgrading at all, this is making it more tempting."

Intel will make the debut of its newest desktop chipset--the Intel 865 chipset, also known by the code-name Springdale--near the middle of May. Meanwhile, AMD is expected to [deliver its new flagship processor, the Athlon XP 3200+](#) at about the same time.

Intel baked several enhancements into the 865, including a faster 800MHz bus--which accelerates the speed at which data travels between the processor and system components such as memory--and dual channel [400MHz DDR SDRAM or Double Data Rate Synchronous Dynamic RAM](#). The chipset will also sport a faster built-in graphics processor. The 865 is similar to a performance chipset introduced by Intel in April, called the 875P.

As a result of the enhancements, the 865 could lead to a significant rise in performance for lower-priced PCs. A new PC could debut that offers a 2.4GHz Pentium 4 with Intel's hyperthreading technology, the 800MHz bus, 256MB of DDR SDRAM, at least a 40GB hard drive and a CD burner for between \$800 and \$900.

Right now, a PC fitted with a 2.53GHz Pentium 4, 256MB of DDR SDRAM, a 60GB hard drive, a CD burner and a DVD drive as well as a 17-inch monitor and a 1-year warranty costs about \$988 from Dell Computer. The price is before shipping, which is normally about \$99, and it excludes rebates or other special offers. The newer system promises to deliver more performance for about the same price.

Flexibility

The 865 chipset will spawn such a large number of desktops because of its flexibility. It will be available in a wide variety of configurations.

The most popular is likely to be dubbed the 865G, which will include built-in graphics, along with the 800MHz bus. It should also support Intel's current 533MHz bus and 400MHz bus speeds.

Most manufacturers will adopt this version of the chipset because it will let them build a wide range of different models from the same basic design. A single product family could include a low-price Celeron desktop, a midrange Pentium 4 machine and a top-of-the line model, for example.

Intel will also likely offer an 865PE, which supports the three bus speeds but does not include built-in graphics, making a separate graphics board necessary. Some manufacturers use this chipset in more expensive desktops, which typically offer separate, high-performance graphics boards and so don't need integrated graphics.

Still, many manufacturers will continue to use Intel's current 845 chipset for their lowest-price Celeron desktops for the time being. These PCs typically sell for between \$500 and \$800.

(Continued on page 4)

The Next Meeting

Place: Arnold R. Burton
Technology Center
1760 Roanoke Boulevard
Salem, Va. 24153
Date: Sat., May 10, 2003
Time: 9:15 AM - 12:30 PM
Room 105

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Upcoming Presentations:

May 10
USB RAM Device

June 14
To be announced

From The President's Desk

by Tim Johnson
president@rvpcc.org



What's new in the PC world? A few new things include faster PC's still heading down the assembly line as expected, USB RAM devices make for easy portable storage, and Microsoft has released their Office 2003 beta CD for evaluation purposes. My copy arrived the other day and was installed in less than 24 hours after it got here. New stuff

is always exciting to check out! This version of Office, at first glance, looks and feels the same as Office XP. I always look for the bells and whistles right out of the box and delve deeper into the changes as I work with it more. I will keep you posted on anything discovered while evaluating Office 2003.

Presentations seem to be getting harder and harder to come by these days. Please keep your eyes and ears open and your thinking caps on for presenters. The lack luster economy has everyone just hanging on waiting for the good times to return. Let's hope that will happen soon so that things will pick up again everywhere.

This month we will take a look a USB RAM device. The nifty tools fit in your pocket and allow for easy document and file storage and transfer. No external power source is needed since it is powered from the USB port. Several sizes are available from 8 megs to 1 gig and larger.

By the time you read this I may be working again! I am waiting for a phone call letting me know the time of my third interview with the City of Roanoke's Department of Technology. They have roughly 1000 PC's so there should always be plenty of exciting work to do! The interview process has narrowed it down to the final three candidates of which I am one. The results of the last interview should be known by Friday so I can possibly let you know how it turned out at the Saturday meeting. Here's hoping! ☺

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Secretary's Report

By Margaret Hoag
secretary@rvpcc.org



Tim Johnson called the meeting to order.

Opening Remarks: David Smith, former member, died Tuesday April 8th.

Memorial Service, April 14th. at Our Lady of Nazareth Church.

Del Kirschner was honored by the LOA.

Newsletter was sent to the mailer on Tuesday.

Officer Update:

Secretary - Margaret Ann Hoag - Minutes were approved as printed in the newsletter.

Membership Chairperson - Del Kirschner - Absent doing Tax Aid.

Treasurer - Azella Tingler - Solvent - She is absent today due to a rotator cuff operation. She is recovering well.

Public Relations - Lionel Melancon - Had two presentations in the works but both were unable to attend this meeting.

Public Relations - Bill Scott - Asked if members would be interested in a program on converting old vinyl records to CD's.

Roanoke County Schools - Homer Duff - Absent with a student field trip.

Webmaster - John Yates - Website is there for our use and benefit

Editor - Kathy Keoughan - Busy with personal affairs - Tim Johnson did the newsletter this month. Help is needed in doing the newsletter.

Please volunteer.

Vice-President - Ernie Arnett - Christmas Dinner - Azella has secured The Roanoker Restaurant for December 10th. Cost: \$10.00 per person plus tip. Minimum of 65 persons. A contract has still to be signed. If that doesn't work out, then they are considering the Salem Civic Center or the Roanoke Civic Center.

There was an extended Q & A period because of the lack of a program.

Door Prizes:

1. Mike Morris - paper
2. Jim Ruble - CD
3. Ron Zoll - CD
4. Lionel Melancon - special paper
5. Bill Scott - fan
6. Calvin Aliff - CD
7. Ernie Arnett - CD
8. John Yates - CD
9. Tim Johnson - floppy disks
10. Don Starkweather - floppy disks

More Q & A followed.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
 Margaret Ann Hoag
 Secretary ☺

TO ERR IS HUMAN, BUT... (COMPUTER ERROR)??

Sometimes all you can do is laugh.

A man living in Newton, Massachusetts received a bill on his as yet unused credit card stating that he owed \$0.00. He threw it away. In April he received another and tossed that one, too. The following month the credit card company sent him a nasty note stating they were going to cancel his card if he didn't send them \$0.00.

In retrospect, he probably should have

let them do that. Instead he called the company and was informed that (are you ready for this?) the problem was the result of a computer error. They told him they'd take care of it.

The following month he reasoned that, if other charges appeared on the card, then it would put an end to his ridiculous predicament.

Besides, they assured him the problem would be resolved. So he presented his card for a purchase. It was declined.

Once again he called. He learned that the credit card had been canceled for lack of payment. They apologized for (here it is again) another computer error and promised they would rectify the situation.

The next day he got a bill for \$0.00 stating that payment was now overdue. Assuming that this bill was yet another mistake, he ignored it. But the following month he received yet another bill for \$0.00 stating that he had ten days to pay his account in full or the company would take necessary steps to recover the debt.

He gave in. He mailed in a check for \$0.00. The computer duly processed it and returned a statement to the effect that his account was paid in full.

A week later, the man's bank called him asking him why he wrote a check for \$0.00. He explained the problem at length. The bank replied that the \$0.00 check had caused their check processing software to fail. The bank could not now process ANY checks from ANY of their customers that day because the check for \$0.00 caused a computer crash.

The following month the man received a letter from the credit card company claiming that his check had bounced, that he still owed \$0.00 and, unless payment was sent immediately, they would institute procedures to collect his debt.

This man, who had been considering buying his wife a computer for her

(Continued on page 4)



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(Continued from page 1)

Because the new chipsets offer a faster bus, Intel will also issue new Pentium 4 processors. The chipmaker is expected to deliver them at speeds of 2.8GHz, 2.6GHz and 2.4GHz. The chips will incorporate the 800MHz bus and [Intel's hyperthreading technology](#). A 3.2GHz Pentium 4 is expected at a later date.

Hyperthreading grants a performance increase to desktop users who perform multiple tasks at once, or for applications that are tuned to take advantage of the technology, which lets a single processor do more things at the same time.

Meanwhile, AMD's new Athlon XP 3200+ will come with a 400MHz bus for the first time. It will require some chipset re-engineering. But the real change will come in September when AMD launches its next-generation desktop chip, the Athlon 64.

Who's in?

The first few new desktops will hit shelves as the summer "Dads and Grads" retail-buying season kicks off. Most every manufacturer should have theirs in place for back to school.

Although the new machines promise big performance gains, analysts are somewhat skeptical that PC buyers will flock to get a new PC just because it has the latest components.

Chances are they won't, said Stephen Baker, analyst with NPD Techworld.

"I still think that, if you look at what people are buying right now, those (new processors and chipsets) aren't the kind of features that are going to get people buying again," Baker said. "The fact is that people are buying Celerons and Athlon XP processors at entry-level prices right now."

NPD Techworld tracks sales at retail in the United States. U.S. retail, which is a sizeable chunk of the overall PC market, saw the average selling price for a desktop, sans monitor, [decline over the past several months, to a low of \\$717 in February](#).

Meanwhile, only low-price and very-high-end PCs are selling much, creating a soft spot at the midpoint of the market, where sales have been slow. The new generation of desktops could bring some life back to the midrange of the market, Baker said. But he expects that average selling prices are still likely to stay fairly low.

Ultimately, customers buying the brand of their choice and the processor of their choice will be hard pressed to find a new PC that doesn't perform well for their intended application, the analysts said.

"All in all, it's going to be a pretty substantial performance improvement," McCarron said. ☺

(Continued from page 3)

birthday, bought her a typewriter instead.

Who said, "To err is human, but to really mess things up it takes a computer..."? Computers may not be the root of all evil, but some days I'm convinced they come close. ☺

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