**Think Big, Stay Small**

Prices start around the R21 000.00 mark. For more information, contact the IBM’s help desk.

**Do not forget the software**

Any machine you buy will come with some version of Microsoft Windows, but you must purchase the application software you intend to run. Many first-time buyers are surprised that they have to pay extra for software at some vendors, so be sure to allow for this in your budget. Ideally, Microsoft Office will be bundled with your machine, but if not, look to purchase it through your university bookstore as it offers a substantial educational discount.

**Don't skimp on memory**

The more memory a system has the better its overall performance. 256 MB of RAM is the minimum you should consider in today's environment, but 1024 MB is better. You should also be sure that your system is able to accommodate additional memory easily and cheaply.

Let your fingers do the walking

A single issue of a computer magazine contains advertisements from many vendors, making it possible to comparison-shop from multiple mail-order vendors from the convenience of home. You can also shop online and visit the web site to obtain the latest information. ~~You can generally get to a vendor by using a Web address of the form, www.company.com~~.

**Do not forget the extras**

A modem and/or a network card is an absolute must, but it is not necessarily included in the basic price at certain vendors. The standard PC comes with a simple speaker that is capable of little more than a beep, but true sound requires the installation of a sound card and the availability of speakers.

You are in for a pleasant surprise when you lift the lid on clever ThinkPad. A full size keyboard slides out. A discreet little pointing device, Track Point III, is embedded in the keyboard so you do not have to pack a mouse everywhere you go.

A microphone is required if you want to record your own sound. Vendors will gladly sell you these components. Just remember to ask.