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With this urgency in mind, an increasing number of 128 owners are asking me these questions:

1. *Is it wise to invest any more money in 128 hardware, or should I begin saving for a new computer system?*

2. *Regardless of my future computer purchase plans, I want to make use of my 128 for a couple more years; what products should I consider purchasing while they are still available?*

These are valid questions. And when you consider that for most of you the purchase of your 128 was a major investment, they have serious financial ramifications. While I cannot provide a single set of answers which will apply to all of you, over the years I have gotten to know a lot about TC128 readers and C128 owners in general, and therefore I feel very confident about offering the following advice:

First, evaluate what you do with your current 128 system. Identify what you feel are the honest strengths and weaknesses of your computer setup. If you are like most 128 owners your list of positive will include the versatility of the 128's low cost software base, and the ease at which beginning and intermediate programmers can become proficient. Typically 128 complaints will focus on the relative slow speed and low capacity of the system, particularly when it comes to data storage. Also, many 128 owners, despite their appreciation for the quality and affordability of the 128's software base, find themselves wanting to utilize software which is available for mainstream platforms such as the Macintosh and MSDOS computers. After getting a handle on what you feel are your likes and dislikes about the 128, you have the basis for making some decisions about your future.

If you decide the purchase of a new computer system is in order, I suggest that you address your perceived 128 deficiencies with your new system. With the experience you have gained with at least one computer system, you should be able to make better informed judgements as to what is important as far as your computer usage is concerned. But be forewarned, replacing your 128 will not be cheap, especially since many of your desires may take quite a bit of computer. In addition, the trend in computer sales and packaging today has definitely moved away from the component or modular approach (like the 128) to more of a system approach. Items such as hard disks, monitors, and memory are sold in bundles immediately with the system rather than later as add-ons.

Naturally, this adds to the upfront costs of a new computer system. Additionally, unlike the upgrade from the C64 to 128, the dissimilar nature of many upgrade options to the 128 will preclude the use of most 128 peripherals directly with a new computer. Both of these factors mean that while the price of some extremely powerful computing power is eminently more affordable now as opposed to several years ago, it is a sure bet that you will spend quite a bit more to replace your 128 than you did to purchase it initially. With this in mind

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my recommendation is that you take your time and do a good deal of research concerning your next computer purchase. Especially since you already have a perfectly functional computer, and the time-honored tradition of today's technology being priced lower tomorrow shows no sign of disappearing. (As an example, the HP compatible laser printer which cost \$2500 two years ago, now retails for less than \$1000). After all, the most inexpensive computer you will ever own is the one that is already paid for.

For those of you who are not ready (or may never be ready) to make any major decisions concerning a new computer, you have lots of choices as well. First, while there are plenty of 128 products available today, that may not be the case next year. Therefore, you should definitely consider buying those items which will significantly enhance the productivity and pleasure you derive from your 128 during the next few months. In addition, with a number of 128ers considering the purchase of new computers, the used hardware and software market will be ripe with all sorts of attractively priced goodies. So in many respects the so-called decline of the 128 marketplace could be a great boon for 128 bargain hunter.

It is our feeling that most of you will be using your 128s for some time to come, even if you have bought (or are planning to buy) another computer. Regardless of the status of your "upgrade" plans, TC128 will continue to be your source of 128 information. In our view dedicated 128 journalism in the 1990s needs to address techniques for using the 128 in conjunction with other (and multiple) computer systems.

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telecommunications networks. These network-exclusive dedicated terminal programs allow you to bypass obtuse menu structures and to play in special gaming environments. While most networks are concentrating their development on the Macintosh and MSDOS computers, one system now has a custom front designed for the C128, called "Wizard". Written by Bill Coleman of GEOS programming fame, Wizard has a mouse menuing system which automates getting on GENie and then aids with online activities such as checking EMail, downloading files, and reading messages in various areas of the system. Wizard is now available for download in GENie's Commodore Roundtable section, which is at Page 625 for you GENie shortcut fans. Look for file number 7919 in Library 40. If you're not a GENie member and would like to be, you can write to GE Information Services, 401 North Washington St. Rockville, MD 20850 or sign up on-line with your credit card by setting your modem to half-duplex, 300 or 1200 baud, and dialing 1-800-638-8369. At connect, enter HHH and then when asked for a U# put in XTX99656, GENie and hit RETURN again. Tell'em you heard about it in TC128.

Why You May Want to Plug Your Modem Into the "Wrong" Port

One more C-128 wall has been pulverized lately with the issuance of the newest hardware product from Dr. Evil Labs (of Stereo SID fame). It's called Swiftlink 232 and its job is to allow the 128 (or the 64 for that matter) to transfer data reliably at greater than 2400 bps speeds. With this little hummer plugged into your cartridge port you can at last use that 9600 baud modem which you chucked into the closet when it wouldn't work the 128. What, you say that your closet is so full of old 300 baud modems that you can't find that high speed model? Well what if we told you that an inexpensive null-modem adaptor attached to the 128 makes porting files between unlike systems possible, and that at the high transfer speeds Swiftlink makes possible, this method can beat disk format transfer to the finish? Furthermore, RS232 transfer works with any machine that has a serial port, even those chic little portables without disk drives.

Price for the Swiftlink is \$29.95. It plugs into the cartridge port (not the user port which one normally thinks of as the "modem" port of the 128) and then terminates in a 9 pin "IBM AT" style connector, a type that is increasingly used by the better MSDOS clones and portables. If you already own a standard RS232 modem, an off-the-shelf 9-to-25 pin modem cable should work, but Dr. Evil Labs will sell you a perfectly good one for an attractive \$5.50 price if you order it with the Swiftlink. One way to look at this product is as a competitively priced way to get a Commodore-to-standard-RS232 interface with some very interesting extra capabilities, even if you are planning to use it today with a 2400 bps modem.

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