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There are two ways to approach this;

One is to consider the laptop a disposable commodity that will be replaced fairly often.

The other is to attempt to utilize productively for 3 or 4 years.

Note that, if one is using a “Cloud” concept of BIM production, considerably less horsepower (and investment) is required. The following assumes that the user will be authoring BIM files directly on the laptop.

Disposable (“home user” grade – cost factor of 1x):

i3 or i5 processor

Win7 64-bit Professional

6GB RAM

256GB Solid State Drive (SSD)

(if larger capacity is desired, consider the “hybrid” drives, with SSD boot partition and conventional storage partition)

Discrete Graphics Card

Standard depot warranty, extended to 2 years

Pros: Lighter weight, less expensive, easily replaced

Cons: Durability, range of options

Extended Life Span (“desktop replacement” – cost factor of 3x):

i5 or i7 processor (choose faster clock speed over additional cores)

Win8 64-bit Pro with “downgrade rights” to Win7 64-bit Professional (run Win7 until further notice)

8GB RAM

256GB Solid State Drive (or hybrid, as mentioned above)

Discrete Graphics Card

Consider “Convertible” format with Touch Screen display to leverage Win8 features in the future

“The dog ate my homework” warranty, extended to 4 years

Pros: Powerful, Reliable

Cons: Heavy, Expensive