

## Home Again

It's impossible to miss the explosion of tablet computers, tablet-hybrids and ultrabooks within the technology market. And with these portable devices dominating media coverage, many now believe that the desktop computer is as good as dead. Intel's latest model of the Next Unit of Computing (NUC) challenges recent judgment with its roughly 4-inch square extent, scalability potential, and nearly unrivaled versatility.

Inside, Intel has noticeably gone the extra mile to develop an accessible design intended to optimize space. As a 'barebone' device, the NUC requires the purchase and installation of a miniPCIE wireless card, an SSD mSATA drive, and DDR3L memory sticks. Assembly times differ depending on hardware familiarity. And although the mere principle of consumer construction may piss some people off, the actual process requires little more than sliding and securing proper components into their modules.

The latest version of NUC released three options containing either: an i3, i5, or i7 generation 4 Haswell processor, however other variants quickly followed online. These include a 'cheaper' model with a Celeron processor that doesn't come with a power cord, only an adapter; as well as editions with a marginally taller enclosures to accommodate a 2.5" HDD. What really sets the NUC i5 and i7 apart are their ability to accommodate the latest Ultra High Definition 4k video playback. To have such a small machine reach that far is quite the accomplishment. Unfortunately, 4k capable monitors and television sets can still get expensive with prices that vary between \$1,000 and \$80,000.

Nevertheless, the internal customizability offered by the NUC causes some dispute regarding an ideal cost. While the (street) price ranges from \$165 (Celeron) to around \$400 (i5/i7), taking memory, wireless, and storage into account adds an extra few

hundred. As the price fluctuates, it raises a question many have suspected for some time: is Intel aiming to compete against the behemoth of mini PCs, the MacMini? Or perhaps the cost effective Android Arm processor devices that have mushroomed lately, starting at around \$75 and fulfilling many of the same functions sought after by the NUC, could put a dent in Intel's strategy?

All things considered, the NUC is not meant for everyone. It has a very specific niche in the market due to its size, OS system adaptability, and top-notch video processing. Ultimately, despite the awkward price bracket, the NUC works because Intel created a fun gadget with loads of choices. For those who care, the NUC is worth every penny the moment it's assembled.