

MEMORY squeeze

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PICTURE this: Your computer starts lagging.

Programs take longer to load, and switching between tasks feels more laborious than ever. Perhaps it's time for an upgrade, you think – maybe adding more RAM (random access memory) to give it a performance boost.

It's a simple upgrade, so it shouldn't cost much, you think to yourself.

But consumers in Malaysia should be prepared for sticker shock when they visit their local computer store for an upgrade.

According to the National Tech Association of Malaysia (Pikom), the "RAM crunch" is driving up the price of memory components, which are essential for laptops, smartphones and tablets.

"Pikom members across the device ecosystem, including global brands, distributors and system integrators, are already seeing clear signals of rising memory component prices," says chairman Alex Liew in a statement to *StarLifestyle*.

He explains that when RAM and SSD (solid-state drive) prices increase globally, manufacturers face higher production costs, which often lead to higher device prices or fewer configuration options for consumers.

"These increases are largely driven by strong global demand from artificial intelligence infrastructure and hyperscale data centres. A significant portion of the available memory supply is now being directed towards these high-growth sectors," he adds.

Liew says the supply available for consumer electronics has tightened, pushing up component prices. For consumers, the impact is likely to appear through higher device prices or adjustments in memory and storage configurations.

"Industry forecasts suggest these pricing pressures could persist into 2027 if global demand continues to outpace supply," he adds.

During a visit to a mall in Petaling Jaya, Selangor, on a recent Sunday afternoon, retail staff disclosed that customers were shocked when informed of the latest RAM pricing.

"I told one customer that it's going to cost a minimum of RM800 for 16GB DDR4 RAM for laptops. It used to cost about RM200 to RM400 at this time last year. The customer said it's too expensive," says a sales representative who only wanted to be known as Majid, adding that DDR5 RAM would cost at least RM1,000.

He adds that in his 10 years of experience, it's his first time seeing RAM prices go up significantly.

Another retailer, M. Wasim, says: "Nobody is upgrading now. I told a customer that a 16GB DDR5 RAM upgrade is going to cost at least RM900 and he walked away."

DDR5, the latest generation of memory, promises faster speeds and better efficiency than older DDR4 modules, which makes it particularly desirable and thus more expensive.

In a popular chain store, a sales assistant who asked to be known as Lun says a desktop 32GB DDR5 RAM now costs at least RM2,000, compared to about RM700 last year.

A customer who overheard him talk about the pricing exclaimed, "That's crazy."

Even if customers can afford the upgrade, they may face longer waits for new stock, as Lun explains that suppliers for popular brands can only provide limited quantities.

"RAM prices are updated according to the supplier's list. It's like gold as the rates change every week," he explains.

The Malaysia Cyber Consumer Association (MCCA) deputy president Azrul Zafri Azmi says the group has received enquiries from consumers on the recent increase in gadget pricing, noting growing concerns.

"This is particularly significant because computers and smartphones are no longer luxury items. They have become essential tools for education, employment, business operations and access to digital services," he says.

Consumers pinched

Some, like Kuala Lumpur-based software engineer Wong Qi Lun, have already begun to feel the pinch of the spike in computer hardware prices. He experienced a sudden hard drive failure in his computer, necessitating a replacement.

While he managed to find a replacement, he says that it "seemed that a lot of the shops either sold out of consumer models, and only had surveillance models (which tend to have slower performance) or were entirely out of stock at the time", recalling that he only paid around RM450 for a 4TB hard drive just a few years ago.

IT operations engineer Navin Gunna spent RM2,000 on 16GB of DDR4 RAM last year. Based on current market pricing for RAM, he estimates it would cost more

than double for the same amount of RAM today.

"It felt like I dodged a bullet and saved quite a bit. It feels like prices shot up the moment I completed my build, and some stuff is just unavailable now," he says.

Wong, on the other hand, was not as lucky. He originally wanted to buy a laptop for personal projects and some light gaming, but was surprised to see prices much higher than he expected.

Wong had hoped to get a laptop with a mid-range processor and around 16GB DDR5 RAM for between RM2,000 to RM3,000, but found most new options are now starting from RM4,000 onwards.

Apart from components, Liew says consumers should also expect some upward movement in device prices compared with previous years, particularly for models with higher memory and storage configurations.

Change in plans

For now, Wong says he's putting his plans for a new laptop on hold and may consider buying a second-hand device instead. Even though it may be older and less powerful, he's willing to compromise for affordability.



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"The laptop would have enabled me to work on my things on the go, away from my home workstation. I'll be able to weather the storm, so to speak, but I do feel bad for the folks going to school or who have a critical need for these devices," he says.

Based in Muar, Johor, computer technician Muhammad Riduwan Masrom says his store mostly sees customers who are students from the Pagoh Education Hub, an integrated higher education centre.

"When students come in saying they need more RAM because their current setup can't handle graphics-rendering software or other university projects that require more computing power, I have to break it to them that even an 8GB upgrade now costs at least RM400. Last year before October, it would only cost around RM200," he says, adding that the price for RAM compo-

nents have been increasing since then.

Most, he says, would prefer a 16GB upgrade. Upon hearing the price, the students tell him that they can't afford it, so Muhammad Riduwan would advise them to try the secondary market.

"They can come back with the RAM once they have it and I'll just charge them for installation," he adds.

Need for upgrade

According to Lun, most customers seeking an upgrade say they need it for rendering, editing, gaming, or live streaming – all activities that can demand as much as 32GB RAM.

"Even if you're not looking to do extensive work on your computer, a minimum 16GB is recommended to run the latest Windows 11 smoothly. We find younger consumers are willing to pay more to upgrade for improved performance while older users say they can wait," adds Lun.

The International Data Corporation (IDC), a global market research firm that provides data and insights on technology trends, reported in December last year that tightening global memory supply is bringing an end to the era of cheap, abundant memory and storage for consumers and enterprises.

In a new report on Feb 28, IDC says: "The current situation is now more negative than even our most pessimistic scenarios suggested just a few months ago."

Memory price surges are also

