The 30-Minute Challenge: *Buy, Budget, or Bin*

A companion worksheet to the Lighthouse Podcast

Part 1: Warm-up. Buy, Budget, or Bin?

Here is how we sorted ten realistic small business scenarios on the show.
Do you agree with our calls? A few are worth arguing about.

What you find	Our call	Why
The 5-year-old file server, out of warranty but still running fine	BUDGET	Servers typically reach end of life at 5 to 7 years. Not an emergency today, but plan to replace it within about 6 months.
A 2020 laptop that takes four minutes to open Outlook	BUY	A need now. It costs you time every single day, so replace it this month.
A 2014 network switch holding the building together	BUY	Far past its expected life and a single point of failure. A need now.
A firewall that is 4 years old, with the warranty ending next summer	BUDGET	You will need it within about 6 months. Get a quote now and plan the spend.
The CEO wants a new MacBook; the current laptop works fine	BIN	A want, not a need. If that laptop reaches the 4 to 5 year mark, it moves to Budget. (Expect a debate.)
An AI note-taker someone found online and nobody has tested	BIN	For now. An untested idea is not a need. Pilot it, check where the data goes, and it can earn a budget line later.
14 Microsoft 365 licenses nobody has used in months	BIN	You are paying for seats nobody uses. Cancel or reduce at the next renewal. Year-end is the best time to cut recurring costs.
A backup that has never been restore-tested	JUMPS THE QUEUE	A backup you have not tested is a hope, not a backup. A security gap goes first, whatever the calendar says.
A Windows 10 PC running the label printer, with no security updates	JUMPS THE QUEUE	A security gap. Replace it or enroll it in paid security updates, and do not wait for January.
Prepaying three years of a software subscription to chase the deduction	ASK YOUR CPA	Section 179 covers off-the-shelf software you own or license, not subscriptions like M365 or Zoom.

The test for every item:
Do you **need it now** (within about a month)? **BUY**
Will you **need it within about 6 months? BUDGET**
Is it a **want**, an untested idea, or something you pay for and do not use? **BIN**
A **security or compliance gap** **jumps the queue**, no matter the calendar.

Part 2: Your Hardware Audit

Set a timer for 30 minutes. Walk your office, or open your asset list, and write down every device that is **4 to 5 years old, out of warranty, or slowing people down**. As a rule of thumb, laptops & desktops last 4 to 5 years, while servers and network gear last 5 to 7. Rough ages & gut calls are fine. Then give each device a verdict using the test on page 1.

Device / description	Used by / location	Approx. age	Out of warranty? (Y/N)	Slowing people down? (Y/N)	Buy/Budget/Bin

Hardware Hall of Shame. The oldest thing I found in my office:

Mind the calendar. For 2026 tax purposes, equipment generally has to be placed in service, not just ordered, by December 31. If something marked Buy is not ordered by about December 1, plan on it being a January project. Financing and leasing can still count, so cash flow does not have to block the decision.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Reviewed with (CPA / IT partner): _____

This worksheet is general information, not tax, legal, or accounting advice.
We're IT people, not CPAs. Confirm Section 179 eligibility, timing, and limits with your tax professional before purchasing.
Want a second pair of eyes on your hardware list? Lighthouse IT Solutions is happy to review it with you at lighthousesol.com.