

How do you know if something is expensive?

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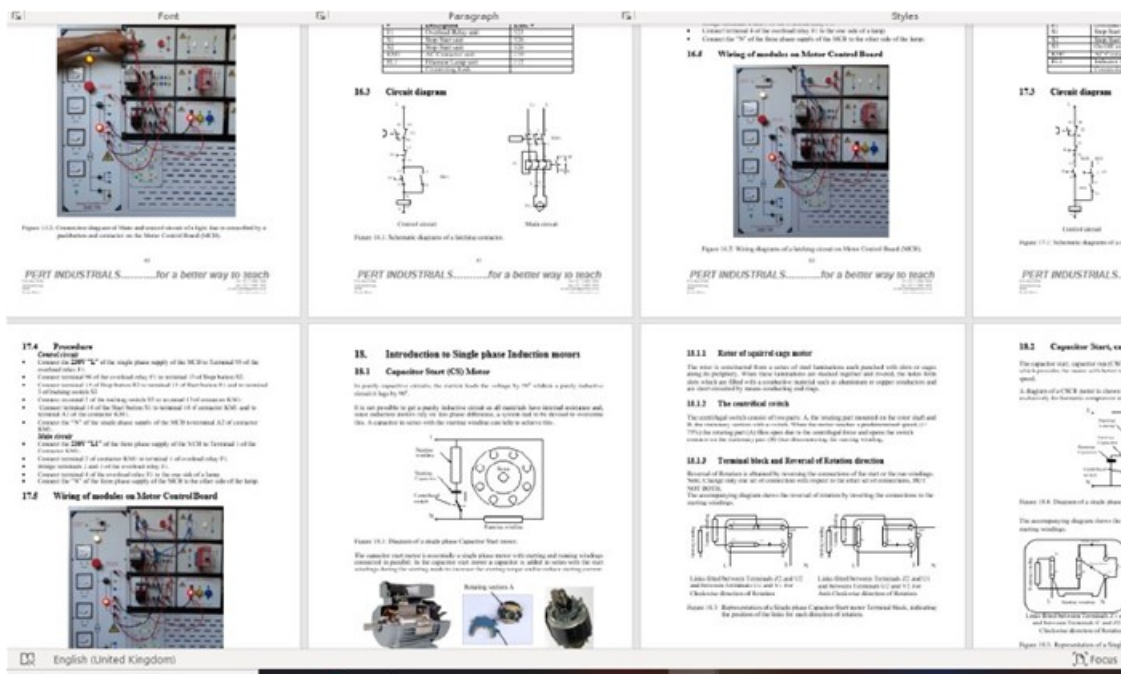
Some of our Pert brand of electrical education trainers are expensive. Well, more expensive than the competition. Pert reps often use the old VW versus Mercedes analogy, which is somewhat helpful, but can be rather misleading. Yes, two similarly specified items may differ in performance and durability. But think about it: driving in traffic to work in a Merc or else a VW, your activity, your function, is pretty much the same. (I daresay your experience is pretty much the same, as well, regardless of the marketing!)

I prefer to think of cost comparison in a different way.

In 2019, I ran a big training course in Durban and bought a cheap tablet device for one extra teacher station. It cost just under R1,000. I thought: "My goodness! What a bargain!" Not so much. It was excruciatingly slow, couldn't load a proper OS, crashed in the middle of an experiment and refused to take input from basic app controls. Half an hour of hell and I have not touched it since.

In 2013, I bought an iPad 3. I have used it almost daily since then, for both work and leisure. So has my family. That is four people, over eight years. So it is not just a question of performance and durability. It is really use and function. Which is the more expensive tablet? The iPad was about seven times more expensive, if you only look only at the raw cost of the units. But I used the cheap tablet once, for half an hour of anguish. In terms of cost per use, it is one of the most expensive things I have ever bought.

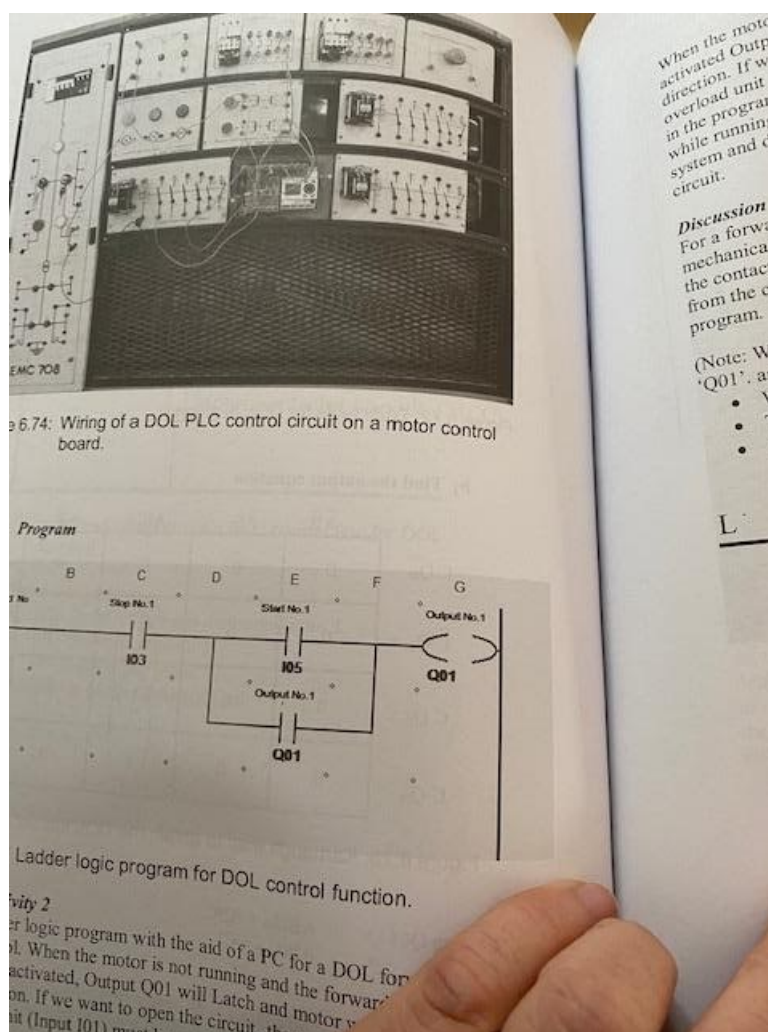
Have a look at this snap-shot from part two of a four part experiment manual:



[click to enlarge](#)

Normally, I talk about the quality of the *Pert Experiment Manual*: text, diagrams, photos, schematics, cross sections, etc. – and I have not missed this opportunity for a shameless plug. But, here, I would just like you to consider the *number* of labs. There are four such manuals, with over 60 documented experiments, so that the Pert unit can be used every week, for years and years.

And that is in fact what happens. Have a look at this picture:



It is from a recent grade 12 textbook showing a 1990s Pert Workstation with a 2010 Pert PLC module. The Pert workstation was not the cheapest, 30 years ago either, but if you think how many learners have used it, and that very same unit can still be upgraded with the newest tech, then ask yourself: Is it really more expensive?

Ultimately, you are not buying an item, you are buying its function. Raw cost per unit is never how you should decide. We have all experienced this in our personal purchases, but it is a truth that is sometimes hard to transmit to procurement departments, especially big procurement departments. My Grandfather used to repeat an annoying truth, in a slow, sententious way. It was annoying because he was rather smug and actually well off. Nevertheless, very true. Simply this: "I am too poor to buy cheap."



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