

## ***Laptop, Notebook, Netbook***

Laptops and notebooks are two names for similar devices: a computer with some degree of portability, with a screen that covers the keyboard when the computer is closed. "Laptop" is the name that will be used in this discussion.

### ***Netbook vs. Laptop***

Laptops usually are larger, heavier, more expensive, and have more features and computing power than netbooks. The netbook is generally a stripped down, small laptop with a small screen, designed primarily for the mobile user that needs to access the internet, respond to some email and write a few documents. A netbook specializes in mobility and the Web, so it's great for travel or as a supplement to your main PC.

#### **Points to consider before purchasing:**

**Size.** Netbook's display usually ranges from 7 to 10 inches whereas laptops normally start from 14 inches. This makes netbooks much smaller and lighter than laptops. They are so portable that you may carry them in a purse or small backpack. The netbook 10" screen is the minimum size for enjoyable internet browsing. Laptops with 13" to 15" screens can be used for traveling, while laptops with 17" to 20" screens are for replacing desktop computers with separate monitors.

**Resolution.** Most of netbooks currently allow for maximum screen resolution at 1024x600. A lower resolution may not let you view the whole width of web pages at one time, thus the user has to scroll the page back and forth to read a full line of text. Most recent netbooks allow 1024x600 which is okay for comfortable surfing over the majority of websites, but the text and graphics will be small, so you may want a smaller resolution. This is something to consider for older eyes.

**Power.** The smaller size of netbooks makes them much more power efficient. You can use a netbook for 5-8 hours without recharging batteries, which is about 2-3 times longer than a laptop. This feature together with an increased portability makes netbooks nice for long distant travelers.

**Performance.** The main shortage of netbooks relates to their weaker performance specifications, as netbooks have lower hard drive speed, processor speed and graphics memory. The presumption is that you are just using a netbook for E-Mail, web surfing and routine, non-intensive Office applications, so running processor-intensive jobs like graphics, footage or video modifying wouldn't be as fast or smooth as it is on laptops.

**Keyboard.** A major complaint about netbooks is the dimension of the keyboards. Netbooks generally carry small keyboards that can be uncomfortable to type on.

**Optical drives and connectivity.** Netbooks usually do not have an optical disc drives - so that means no CDs or DVDs. Connectivity is a central focus for netbooks. All of them come with Wi-Fi built in and an increasingly have Bluetooth, so they can be connected wirelessly to a 3G mobile phone for internet access on the move.

**Price.** Netbooks cost between \$200-\$500, while the laptops start at around \$400. With a netbook, you can get on the internet, type and edit documents, and play some games that don't need a lot of graphics to run smoothly.

**Battery life.** Many laptops, including netbooks, are sold with multiple battery options. Apple laptops, on the other hand, have non-removable batteries. Think about how important long battery time is important for your usage. For instance, netbooks, last between 5 to 8 hours on a single charge. Laptops have a battery that lasts about 3-4 hours. A bigger battery, for longer battery time, may fit beneath the palm rest in the front of the laptop, but it significantly increases the thickness of the laptop.

## **Summary**

Internet browsing and email seem to be the primary functions that netbooks are going to be used for, but some word processing and other simple tasks are possible but may not be enjoyable.

Is it possible that you will be happy with a netbook only if the need for smaller size and less weight is so important that it outweighs the other ergonomic and performance considerations. If you use a laptop for word processing, you might find that a netbook keyboard is an even bigger issue than the size of the screen.

Netbooks are here to stay, and they could even come to dominate the laptop landscape in a couple of years. Their low price and portability are wonderful, but their limitations, such as screen and keyboard size, and lack of a built-in optical drive. But perhaps the biggest differentiator between netbooks and laptops is the lower performance of netbooks.

With their long battery lives and low cost, netbooks are made for those who are always on the go. However, those who want to do anything more than simple web surfing and basic word processing; a laptop is a more versatile pick.

## **How will you use the computer?**

Use for air travel or car travel or just at home?

One place or several places in your house?

On AC power or battery power?

Email, news, weather or editing large photos?

## **What features are important to you?**

Portability and lightweight or large screen?

Playing and recording CDs and DVDs?

Operating system may affect compatibility with software and hardware.

Full size keyboard?

## What to Look for in a Laptop

1. USB ports (3 to 4 minimum) are standard. Some laptops may have one of the USB ports doubling as an eSATA port, for faster data transfer speed to an external drive.
2. Minimum of 2GB RAM.
3. Most laptops now come with at least 250GB of storage (Netbooks are averaging 160GB). Upgrading to a 500GB hard drive is usually unnecessary. Small-size external USB hard drives of 500GB capacity are relatively inexpensive (\$100).
4. A 14" screen for traveling by air or a 17" screen for traveling by car and for use at home.
5. Operating system: Windows XP Home Edition, Windows XP Pro, Windows 7 Starter Edition, or Windows 7 Home Premium (not Vista).

## What to Look for in a Netbook

1. USB ports.
2. Minimum of 1GB RAM, with 2GB preferred.
3. Most netbooks now come with at least 160GB of storage Small-size external USB hard drives of 500GB capacity are relatively inexpensive (\$100).
4. A 10" screen minimum, with 12" preferred.
5. The Intel Atom processor (N280 or N270 CPUs) is the most energy-efficient chip you can get on a netbook.
6. Operating system: Windows XP Home Edition, Windows 7 Starter Edition, or Windows 7 Home Premium.
7. A 6-cell battery is preferred, for long running time.
8. You may need to purchase an external USB CD drive to install any extra software or to reinstall the operating system if you ever needed to.

On laptops and netbooks, download and install Open Office Suite. It is free and is compatible with Microsoft Office.

## Buying an Extended Warranty

Most laptops are backed by a complimentary 1 year parts and labor warranty. The standard warranty is a limited one, so it won't cover accidents that stem from a spilled drink, a key that was scraped off by a finger nail, or a drop to a hard surface. Extended warranties are also available, but often are not for accidents.

Most laptop manufacturers also sell accidental coverage as a separate plan, on top of extended warranties that work on top of a standard one, so you might end up spending close to \$300 for three years of comprehensive coverage.

Our rule of thumb is that if the warranty costs more than 15% of the laptop, you're better off spending the money on backup drives or backup services that minimizes downtime. Faulty components usually break down during the first year (within the warranty period); anything after that is probably your fault.

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Some of the information for this presentation was presented in a Pcmag.com web article, How to Buy a Laptop, dated 12.09.09, as well as numerous other internet sources.