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Laptop Buyer's Guide

QUICK TIP

Setup Word 2007
or 2010 to Store in
Old Format

If you have the newer version of Word and others in your office are still using Word 97 through 2003, you can set your Word to automatically save in the older format. Simply start Word, click on the "File" menu for 2010 or the "Office Button" in 2007, choose "options", click "save", and then under "Save files in this format" choose Word 97-2003.



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Laptop, Notebook, Portable Computer, Netbook, Tablet... whatever you call it, or whatever derivative of the luggable PC you choose, it is a personal device. It is typically more personal than the desktop PC because you take it with you. So how does one choose the appropriate laptop?

It really depends on how you intend to use the unit. Will it be a desktop replacement that you will use in the office and out? Is it simply an auxiliary device that you take with you when travelling. Is it mostly for work, or mostly for leisure? Are you heavy on graphics?

Choosing a portable computer that makes you or a member of your staff most productive is important. Here are my 10 Keys to Buying Portable.

1. **FORM FACTOR** – The first decision is whether a "standard" laptop is appropriate. Do you want a touchscreen? Do you want a tablet that allows standard handwriting and conversion to typewritten text? Will the slower processor and smaller form factor of an Internet geared netbook fit your needs? If

these spinoffs of the standard laptop make sense for you, they may take you down a separate path. However, many of the other key components will still apply, just in a little different way.

2. **DISPLAY & SIZE** – Display size is important. Actually, it is a fairly good place to start. Display often dictates the size of the laptop. The most common display is 15", but units come in all sizes. Netbooks are generally around 10". Tablets and laptops usually come in 14", 15", 16", 17" or some size in between. When you choose screen size, you are also choosing the overall size and weight of the unit. If weight is important, it makes sense to stick with the 14" size, as the 14" display is usually the lightest unit with a full size keyboard. If you won't be carrying the unit that much you may want to go with a larger screen that is easier on the eyes. The lighter notebooks are around 4 or 5 pounds. The heavier ones range up to around 10 pounds.

3. **THICKNESS** – Thickness is important. Nobody wants to carry a 2" thick notebook. Often the thickness is dictated by the screen size, but this is a specification to check out. The thinner notebooks tend





to be around 1-1.25 inches which is desirable.

4. **DOCKABLE** – A docking unit, allows you to plug in a standard keyboard, monitor, mouse, and any other peripherals, so that when you are in the office, your portable unit operates the same as if it were a desktop. Many people are fine with plugging in manually, but if you want the convenience of slipping your unit into a dock and being ready to go, you will want to make sure that you purchase a dockable unit, and pay the extra for the dock.
5. **VIDEO PERFORMANCE** – Most laptops use “shared memory” for video and graphics display. If you are heavy into photography or video editing, you may want to consider paying a little extra for a laptop that has its own discreet memory. This will make all of that graphics stuff faster.
6. **MEMORY** – Memory is what the laptop uses for active thinking. It holds whatever your laptop is working on at the moment, so if you open a lot of Windows, more memory helps. I would consider 2GB minimum, 4GB preferred, and 8GB or more is valuable if you are running a 64-bit operating system that will take advantage of the additional thinking space.
7. **PROCESSOR** – The current line of chips is the Intel i-series. You can choose from the i3, i5, or i7. Depending on which revision you choose, you must also look to see how many cores the chip has. For instance some i7 chips are dual core and some are quad core.
8. **OPERATING SYSTEM** – Windows 7 Professional is the way to go for your business computer. As long as your line

of business software will work with it, and it functions well with any key printers or scanners, Windows 7 should be the choice. The choice of 32-bit vs. 64-bit is also based on software and drivers. If you can go 64-bit it is to your advantage as it generally runs faster and supports more memory than the 32-bit version.

9. **HARD DRIVE** – The hard drive is still a fairly easy choice. More space is always better, but you can use a USB drive if needed. Most of the time the only way you will fill up a drive is if you do an unusual amount of music, photos, or video. It is good to pick a fast hard drive, 4800/5200 RPM is fairly standard. 7200 RPM will cost extra, but will give your system a real boost. If you want to pay a little extra, you can go for solid state. This gives you a significant speed boost, plus it is not as susceptible to temperature and vibration as a standard drive. The downside is the expense, and the size of these drives are still fairly small.
10. **APPLICATIONS** – The right programs are a must. You should be looking for the right version of Office 2010, plus the right Anti-Virus software. If you have corporate licensing for these, this decision may have already been made. If you are looking to purchase anti-virus, I would recommend one of Trend Micro’s retail packages. If your laptop is for home use, you may want to try Microsoft Office Home and Student.

There other things one may want to consider, like color, optical drives, non-glare display, and any number of peripheral type choices, but these are the subject of yet another newsletter.

For more information on portable computing, please contact Scott Hirschfeld at 262-789-8210 or scotth@ctaccess.com.

TECH TIPS

Breathe New Life Into Your PC

If you have computer equipment that is reasonably new and it just seems like it needs a boost, it could be that you should add RAM. RAM is the active memory that a computer uses to store things that it is “thinking” about. If it does not have enough RAM, it needs to write what it is “thinking” about to the disk, and then pick it back up again later, which slows things down. If you have less than 2GB in your machine and it is 3 years old or less, it could be that an extra \$50 to \$100 worth of memory will make a significant difference.

What else could be slowing you down? Spyware. Try <http://housecall.antivirus.com> for a free scan. You may also want to defrag your hard drive. This puts all of the files that may be split up and stored in multiple locations back in a line on the hard drive for faster access to your files. Go to “My Computer”, right-click on your C: drive, choose properties, choose the tools tab, and click the button to defrag. Be prepared to wait awhile, as a defrag can take hours.