



DO I REALLY NEED A LAPTOP COMPUTER?

Don Bridle writes about the advantages of a laptop.

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I am often asked which sort of laptop computer, or notebook, someone should buy for their business. Besides the fact that I haven't tested them all, there are other reasons why it is difficult to give a clear recommendation.

Why do you need a laptop? Is it because you need certain information with you all the time? Do you want to be able to jot down ideas wherever you are? Are you always in need of doing some more work and so you need your computer with you? There are lots of other reasons. But is a laptop always the answer?

To keep addresses, diary, lists etc it may be better to have a decent business mobile phone, like a Blackberry, iPhone, etc.

More and more people are discovering the disadvantages of laptop computers. Poor posture is standard, resulting in neck ache and painful wrists. The weight of a laptop plus mains supply and all the bits can be a real nuisance. Keeping a spare full-size keyboard to plug into the laptop can help, as can a proper mouse. However, why not just move between proper computers with a copy of the data you need on a USB memory stick? If the data is sensitive, do consider an encryption program such as Truecrypt (as it is easy to lose the memory stick!) Small, portable hard drives are now affordable and neat solutions, too.

Many people are now storing their data online with such "cloud computing" applications as Google Docs. This makes (password-protected) access easy from anywhere in the world – if a decent connection exists.

If you do go down the route of buying into the laptop/notebook world, ask some questions first. Cost is not the only important thing. Is this going to be the main working computer you use, or is it just for quick jobs? Maybe you should be looking for a small second-hand machine. Do you need to be able to connect to the Internet with it? If so, do you know that the wireless connections are secure? Does it have the ability to connect by cable (much faster access). If you don't need the Internet, perhaps a cheaper alternative machine is possible. Do you need to write to CDs or DVDs? Check that the right drives are included.

Lots to think about. Perhaps you need to talk to someone who can help you decide. Some ‘specialists’ are mostly interested in sales targets and may point you to an expensive or less useful option. However, there are business advisers who can help. Try to find one who is willing to give a free consultation, helping you to outline your priorities and think through the decisions.

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