

Laptop Buying Guide

A laptop is the ideal replacement for your desktop computer. The greatest advantage of a laptop is its portability. Unlike desktop computers, you can easily move a laptop around your home, carry it to work or class and take it with you when you travel. Laptops are a big investment, so before buying one, you should consider many factors like the manufacturer, performance and features.

What kind of laptop user are you?

A home user wants all the features of a desktop PC in the form of a notebook. If you are a home user, then choose a notebook which is easy to carry and comes with the most basic computer applications. Students should opt for an affordable laptop which is light and durable. Frequent fliers need slim notebook models with long-lasting batteries. A business user should purchase a laptop with plenty of hard disk space and advanced security features while a gamer needs a fast processor and the latest graphics card.

What are the different kinds of laptop computers available?

Laptops for Entertainment:

Multimedia laptops are always more expensive and heavier than your standard model. These laptops come with a powerful processor, abundant memory and a large hard drive. You can use these laptops as a mobile DVD player, MP3 jukebox and a digital photo album. If you buy a TV tuner card, you can even use your multimedia notebook as a television set. These notebooks are ideal for PC gaming.

Laptops for Business:

Laptops especially designed for business use are ultra portable. These laptops are durable and more secure than the basic laptop. They are best suited for consumers who are always on the move. A good business laptop should offer a fingerprint reader or SmartCard support to prevent data theft. These notebooks usually have advanced computer applications and wireless capabilities, so you can work even when you are away from your desk.

Laptops for Home:

The home user typically uses a laptop for checking mail and browsing the web. These laptops perform general tasks. A high speed processor is an unnecessary luxury and tends to be wasted on most home users. Opt for a notebook with at least a 14-inch screen and a comfortable keyboard. These laptops are generally heavy, weighing more than 4 kg at times. Their average battery life is less than three hours.

What constitutes a good laptop?

Ergonomics:

If you are going to use your laptop extensively, then you need to be comfortable with the keys. Try a laptop with slightly larger keys to avoid straining your fingers from typing. Most laptops come with a touch pad or a tracking pointer instead of a mouse. If you are a PC gamer, buy a separate mouse which can keep up with the fast-paced action on screen.

Operating Systems:

The Windows XP Media Center Edition is a good operating system for entertainment laptops. It makes optimal use of multimedia features like TV tuners, radio tuners and media players. If you are a professional who prefers Apple notebooks but are concerned about compatibility, check out the dual boot models by Apple that allow you to install and run Windows as well as Mac OS X. If you prefer PCs, Microsoft Vista is an ideal alternative to Windows XP. Vista comes in several editions, including Vista Home Basic and Vista Home Premium for the home user, Vista Business for the professional and Vista Ultimate for the best of both worlds.

Memory and Storage:

All data and applications are stored in the RAM (random access memory). Many laptops commonly use 256 MB of RAM. Most business laptops and entertainment laptops come with 512 MB or more of RAM. The more RAM you buy, the more data you can store.

The hard drive stores all programs and files. For the average home user, a 20 GB hard drive will more than suffice. If you buy a laptop for entertainment or business purposes, a 60 GB hard drive will better serve your needs. Some entertainment laptops even have multiple hard drives for better performance. Hard drives come with different speeds. Most laptop hard drives have a speed of 5,400 rpm. However, faster hard drives go up to 7,200 rpm.

Display:

The size of a laptop is based on the size of the screen. Screen size starts as small as 10.6 inches and goes up to 20 inches diagonally. Most laptops have an LCD monitor. However, if you are using your laptop for CAD, a CRT monitor will serve you just as well, if not better. The screen resolution determines the crispness of your image. A 12.1 inch display uses WXGA resolutions (1,280 by 800). A 14 or 15 inch display typically uses WSXGA+ (1680 by 1,050), although a small number of notebook computers use WUXGA (1,920 by 1,200) instead.

Processor:

It is more difficult to upgrade a notebooks processor than it is to upgrade a desktop computer. For this reason, you should buy a processor with a speed that will best suit your use. Also, it is wise to choose a processor with less battery consumption. Processors with 1.4 to 1.6 Ghz are preferred by most users.

Battery:

Lithium ion batteries are commonly used in laptops. The average battery life is about 3 hours. It takes around 75 minutes to fully recharge a lithium ion battery.

Graphics Card:

A graphics card, sometimes referred to as a video adapter, is responsible for generating the images you see on a laptops display. For businessmen who need to do lot of presentations, a graphics card containing 32 or 64 MB of dedicated memory is the right choice. There are also specially designed cards for gaming. These cards are expensive and should be avoided unless you require excellent graphics.

USB Ports:

Laptop computers come with at least one USB port so that you can connect peripherals to the notebook. Recent models have a FireWire connection that lets you transfer digital information from camcorders or MP3 players.

Optical Drives:

Most laptops come with either a CD-ROM (compact disc, read-only memory), a CD-RW (compact disc, re-writeable) or a DVD-ROM (digital versatile disc, read-only-memory). The DVD+RW/+R with CD-RW is a combination drive which will read a CD or a DVD and write data to a DVD as well.

Modem:

[Laptops](#) are available with integrated modems for dial-up connections, Ethernet ports for cable internet and DSL and wireless modems for Wi-Fi connections. Many business laptops also have a cellular wireless modem so you can browse at broadband speeds with just a mobile phone signal.

About the Author

Bob Shanty has been researching and writing articles that help shoppers make more educated buying decisions on [laptops and notebooks](#) for [online shopping](#) mega store BIGshop for years. For more articles by Bob please visit <http://www.bigshop.com.au>.