

Buying a Computer? Desktops versus Laptops

By Tina Nerat

Getting a new computer? Tech devices have a limited lifespan so everyone faces this decision every few years. Recently, a lot of people have asked what to buy. Here's some food for thought to help make the decision: desktop or laptop.

Desktop computer advantages are: larger screen, keyboard choices (ergonomic/normal), and less expensive than laptops. Disadvantages of desktop computers are: they "live" in a fixed location therefore won't hook up to TV or Zoom in another room, may (or may not) have camera/speakers/microphone, heavy and hard to grab to take in our seemingly yearly evacuations, and no battery to operate during a PSPS.

Laptop computer advantages are: portability (travel, evacuations, Zoom location, connect to TV), built-in camera/speakers/microphone, can add external keyboard or monitor, battery-operated during PSPS using smartphone Internet connection, and some are touchscreen. Disadvantages of laptops are: more costly than desktops, smaller screen, smaller keyboard, and easier to steal if burglarized.

The Mac versus PC debate is never-ending, and everyone has a preference on "ecosystem". When buying a new computer, most replace their computer with the same type (Mac or PC) since they are already familiar with it. Surprisingly, there are THREE laptop choices these days: Mac, PC, and Chromebook.

For those who have never heard of Chrombooks, CNET's definition: "Chromebooks are laptops running on Google's Chrome operating system. The hardware might look like any other laptop but the minimalistic web-browser-based Chrome OS is a different experience from the Windows and MacOS laptops you're likely used to." According to Arstechnica, in 2021 Chromebooks became the second most popular OS (10.8%) after PC/Windows (80.5%) and MacOS (7.5%).

Chromebook users live in the Google "ecosystem" with files stored in the Google Cloud. Chromebooks are very inexpensive, and setup takes only a few minutes - log into a Google/gmail account, connect to WiFi and your existing Chrome browser or gmail settings you have on your PC or Mac are there for you. Most touchscreen Chromebooks can operate in "tablet" mode similar to an iPad or Android tablet. Google's web site posts how many years of support every Chrombook will have. The key thing to know is that almost everything is browser-based, so if usage is e-mail and browsing, a Chromebook can work well. Some apps are supported, such as Zoom, along with all the free Google apps and the Google Play Store apps. In non-Covid times, OTLC teaches Google Apps classes. Along with Chromebooks, Google's apps also run on Mac and PC.

For more information, an electronic copy of this article, links to articles referenced here, info about Google's "ecosystem", and how to contact OTLC to discuss computer choices, visit www.oakmont-learning.org.