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Notebook Computer Purchase Guide

Due to the overwhelming enquiries from people wanting advice in the purchase of a new notebook computer, I have provided this document as a supportive guide.

➤ *Warranty*

The most important factor is warranty, so that goes to the top of the list. If your notebook hardware fails out of warranty, it will usually be much more expensive to repair than a standard desktop computer. Most notebooks will come with a minimum of 12 months warranty and you will need to purchase at least a *2 year extension* on that. This typically will *cost between \$170 - \$290*. It is better to get extended warranty provided by the manufacturer of the notebook, not through a third party business.

➤ *Manufacturer*

There are few 'bad' manufacturers of notebook computers these days and the easiest choice is to go for a recognised brand name such as ~ *Toshiba, Dell, Hewlett Packard (which is also known as Compaq) Acer, Asus, IBM (aka Lenovo), Sony and Samsung* etc. Purchasing a known brand name does help a lot with warranty and support as these companies have country and nationwide service centres. If you are travelling, it is important to check if the manufacturer has service centres close to where you are going or passing through. Most service centres can be found in capital cities.

➤ *Operating system*

Windows XP is no longer an available option on the majority of new computers and notebooks. Microsoft 'Vista' is the replacement and the latest mainstream operating system from Microsoft. It comes in four versions and I would highly suggest getting the *Microsoft Vista 'Home Premium'* version installed on a new notebook computer, unless you are purchasing a cheap underpowered computer which may not be capable of running it.

➤ Specifications

Due to the release of the Windows 'Vista' series of operating systems (*replacing Windows XP*), the performance requirements for a new computer are a lot higher than systems of the past. My recommended specifications shown below are for a decently performing notebook computer that will have the ability to run all of the current 'Vista Home Premium' options and should be able to deal with anything you ask of it for the next 5 years or so.

The example shown below is of the latest notebook computer I have been supplying to my customers for all round use. The shown cost does not include mouse, carry case, programs or installation etc. These are all negotiated depending on each customer's needs.

Note: If you are only planning to be running business accounting, emailing, and word processing type tasks, you can of course purchase a much less powerful system than the one shown below. The example system shown below is for doing everything a modern family will likely want to do for the next 5 or so years. Very basic computing needs can get away with running an underpowered computer using 'Microsoft Vista Basic'. You will find many notebooks marketed at the \$899 price point to suit extremely basic needs. However, be very wary of purchasing underpowered computer systems. They have extreme limitations and you must qualify and understand those limitations.

Example of a 'mid to high range' notebook computer system

Acer Aspire 9425WSMi Notebook

- ACER Aspire notebook
- Model 9425WSMi
- **Intel Core2 Duo 2.0GHz**
- **CPU Series T7200 4MB L2 Cache**
- **2GB DDR2 667 RAM**
- **160GIG Hard Disk Drive**
- DVD-RW D/L multi Burning system
- On-Board Sound & 1.3MP webcam
- **256MB Nvidia Go7300 Video**
- 10/100/1000 LAN, 56K Modem
- **17" WXGA 'CrystalBrite' Wide Screen**
- Full sized keyboard with numeric keypad
- 802.11a/b/g Wireless, 4 x USB 2.0 ports
- Bluetooth 2.0+EDR
- **Windows Vista Home Premium**



\$ 2495.00

I would not recommend purchasing less than any of these specifications unless you fully understand the limitations and ramifications involved in doing so.

Note that these are personal opinions only!

CPU ~ Intel, Core2 Duo, Must have 4MB L2 cache, and at least 2.0GHz
Anything over these specs is great, anything under I wouldn't consider.
The 4MB L2 cache is important! The cheaper range will not have this amount.

RAM ~ 2 Gigabyte minimum. DDR2 667 speed or faster, nothing slower
Ensure you can upgrade the RAM, you'll probably need to in 2 years or so.

Hard Disk Drive ~ 120 Gigabyte minimum, the larger the better.

Vista takes up more space than Windows XP, plus most new notebook systems have their hard drive partitioned 50% into C: & D: The D: partition is usually set aside for emergency system restoration files and fills quickly after your first system image backup. This will leave you around 50GB to play with on the Vista partition.

Video Card ~ 256MB Nvidia GPU GO7300 (or equivalent ATI) or better.

(A Dedicated Graphics Processing Unit , not sharing system RAM)

This is critical for using the new Windows Vista 'Aero' desktop system and of course for games and anything related to 3D such as Google Earth. It is also important for video editing and DVD creation etc. Cheaper notebooks use 'on-board' video systems that totally share the system RAM. These are underpowered and not suitable for Microsoft Vista Home Premium. Many 3D programs now and into the future will not operate without a high performing dedicated video card system without at least 256MB video RAM

DVD-RW (Burner) ~ As long as it has one

Any computer that you are considering purchasing that does not have a DVD-RW burner as standard will be unusual. Very basic models may only have a CD-RW DVD ROM installed. (These cannot write to DVD they can only read DVD)

LCD Screen ~ Totally up to you, the larger the better picture obviously.

These days the 17" Widescreen format has become the most popular, but of course it means a larger notebook. Best to look at some screen sizes in a shop to check for yourself. 15" screens suit more portable & lighter notebooks

Keyboard ~ Totally up to you, the larger the easier to type, obviously.

I like a full sized keyboard myself. The Acer Model shown above has a full sized keyboard with numeric keypad. Just ensure you know what's missing on a smaller keyboard.

Wireless ~ Totally depends on your needs.

Check with your internet service provider as per what type of wireless receiver you will need in your notebook. This isn't critical as most ISP's will provide USB or PCMCIA wireless receivers anyway.

USB, Blue Tooth, PCMCIA, CARD readers ~ Totally up to your needs

Most notebooks come with a flotilla of data ports. At least 4 x USB ports is a good sign, but you can always add more via extra HUBs so this isn't critical. Blue Tooth, PCMCIA, and various types of card readers are all up to individual requirements and you may never use them.

10/100/1000 LAN, & 56K Modem ~ Usually standard.

I have not seen a notebook for years that did not have these ports. Best check though, just in case. 10/100/1000 LAN port is for ADSL broadband connections. The 56K modem is handy for dialling up the internet when you cannot get ADSL or wireless.

VGA /TV output port ~ If you are planning on connecting to another monitor

Not all notebooks have these ports. Check this to suit your needs. One good advantage of this is that if your notebook LCD display ever gets damaged (out of warranty) you can always connect to another display screen. Replacing or repairing an LCD screen on a notebook out of warranty is usually very expensive.

Speakers, Webcams, Microphones ~ Totally up to your needs

All notebooks have speakers built in but they are usually basic. If you are in need of better sound consider an external speaker kit, headphones or finding a notebook with higher quality speakers (usually boasting a speaker brand name)

Webcams & microphones can be purchased separately so it's no problem if the notebook you like doesn't have them built in.

Battery life ~ Depends on your needs

Most notebooks will provide at least 2 hours of battery operation. But this will depend on what you are doing. Playing a DVD movie will deplete the battery much quicker than writing an email.

Carry Case & Mouse ~ Purchase a good quality carry bag if it doesn't come with one. Definitely purchase a notebook style mouse if you hate those touch pad thingies as much as I do. I highly recommend the Microsoft wireless Notebook mouse for around \$59.00

That about sums up the recommended computer

Programs ~ Must be Vista compatible!

Many people are not warned about the Vista incompatibility issues. Do not take for granted that you can install all your old software on a new Vista based computer system. Check first before you try to install!

Earlier versions of Microsoft Office have serious issues and I recommend purchasing the new Office 2007 suite to suit your needs. If you try to use earlier versions, be prepared for problems! You should consider purchasing the new Office 2007 suite of your choice with the computer under the OEM discount scheme.

OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer) is a scheme offered from Microsoft to provide generously discounted versions of their software (and some hardware) at the time of computer purchase. These OEM versions are exactly the same as their retail counterparts except for the packaging and some cases the media supplied. (some versions do not include CDs or DVD, and are pre-installed by the notebook supplier)

Accessories ~ Must be Vista compatible!

Many accessories you wish to use with Vista will require supportive drivers. Some printers, scanners, webcams etc designed for Windows XP are not Vista compatible and may never be. Again it is best to check first before you try to connect any hardware to a new Vista based computer. If an accessory does not have a 'Vista Certified' label on it, there is a chance that it will not work.

Having said that, many manufacturers are providing new updated 'Vista' compatible drivers for their older products. Microsoft has also included many built in drivers included with Vista, so some devices will need no drivers to operate. As an example, my 9 year old Hewlett Packard LaserJet 6P was auto detected under Vista, and works perfectly! But it pays to check first!

An easy way to check is to use Google. Type (product name and model), followed by (Vista compatible ?) will usually give you a quick idea. All new vista drivers for older products can be found on the manufacturers webs site if they are supported or planning to be in the future.

Anti-Virus & Internet security ~ Must be Vista compatible

I highly recommend the new '*Microsoft OneCare*' Security and Vista maintenance program for all your security and programmed data backup needs.

This product retails for \$99 (I supply this for \$85.00) It is a yearly subscription based product licence, so it must be renewed each year.

However since its license allows you to install it on 3 different computers in the same home, it can be quite cost effective. (*OneCare is Windows XP compatible so you could share its licence with an older computer*)

Microsoft '*OneCare*' includes:

- Antivirus protection
- Anti Phishing
- Antispyware protection
- Comprehensive 2 way managed firewall
- Automatic scheduled data backup & restore for external devices
- Scheduled Performance Tune-ups

There are of course many other 'Vista Compatible' security products available from other companies, I simply trust the Microsoft system. It works well and suits my needs.

I hope this document helped answer many questions you may have had regarding buying a new notebook computer. Please feel free to contact me for any further information.