

This is the first part in a two-part series.

Mini Notebooks? No, they are Netbooks.

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As a computer consultant in the field, I see just about everything. Sure, I get calls on the regular stuff, such as the viruses and spyware that has slowed a computer to a crawl and the more than occasional over heated computer with all this hot and humid weather.

More recently, I have started receiving many calls on products new to the market and one not even out yet. I would like to talk about those products out there in the stores in this first part and help inform people with a little bit of information before making their purchases.

Netbooks: These are those small laptop lookalikes going for as low as \$299.99. Some are even cheaper! At first glance, they look like a great deal if you can deal with their tiny LCD screens. They are small to medium sized, lightweight, low-cost, energy-efficient, Internet-centric laptops, optimized for Web surfing and e-mailing. Netbooks have no optical CD/DVD disc drive, and their keyboards are usually 80 percent of a normal size laptop keyboard. They are Internet capable via a wireless connection and although they do have USB ports, extended use of them drains the battery quickly.

They are great for someone on the go that checks their email on the web and does some light to moderate web surfing but that's it. If you are planning on doing some word processing or doing your finances via QuickBooks on it think again. Want to run the latest cool games or get access to the corporate network via one of these? It's just not going to happen. The "Net" in Netbook stands for Internet. That is where these units are designed to be. In addition, the choices of operating systems are very limited and not interchangeable. The ones on the market today run Windows XP HOME, Linux, or Windows Vista Home Basic. Making them clearly a consumer based toy and not something for small businesses or college bound students.

If you are looking to do “anything more” than surf the web with them then spend a few hundred more and get a full-fledged notebook/laptop that you can do everything on.

Too many people look to purchase the cheapest unit only to find out they cannot do what they want with it. Make a list of your wants, needs and even the software you plan on running and bring that to the store. An educated purchase is the best purchase you can make.

There is also a recent surge in what are known as Tablet PCs. Tablet PCs are identical to and function just like a notebook/laptop with the added feature of having a touch screen. Tablet screens swivel and close with the screen facing up concealing the keyboard. You can use them like a regular laptop with its standard keyboard but now you can close the lid, touch the screen, drag, and drop items with your finger or a stylus pen. Great for wowing your friends or doing a presentation but other than that you will spend more of your time cleaning your screen of fingerprints.

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