



Purchasing a Laptop or Notebook: a buyers guide.

In this buying guide I will attempt to answer some of the questions I am regularly asked by my customers. Below you will find information on the main points to consider.

Windows XP or Vista?

Microsoft Windows Vista is here and if I were looking for a new notebook that is what I would choose. Unless you want to run software that you know will not run with Vista (check for updates from the software manufacturer) then why go for the older technology? Do not neglect a good internet security suite such as McAfee VirusScan Plus, or MessageLabs.

Vista Home Premium has all the features a home user could want including Media Centre, Windows Aero desktop, DVD and Movie Makers. If you do not need those extra facilities then save a few pounds with Vista Business or Basic.

The [Microsoft's Windows Vista Editions overview](#) web page outlines the features available in each version.

Cheaper notebooks (£300 or below) may not be powerful enough for Vista, so XP will suffice.

Which Processor?

I recommend Intel, preferably an Intel QuadCore or Turion DualCore.

How Much Memory Do I Need?

Most laptops are now sold with 1GB of RAM (random-access memory). Personally I would insist on 2GB for a Vista machine. The minimum for an XP machine should be 1GB, but preferably 2GB.

It staggers me when I see Vista laptops for sale with just 512MB of RAM, it is not enough and in my opinion these laptops are being miss-sold. If you have found yourself in the unfortunate position of owning such a machine then you need to upgrade your memory.

Hard Drive Size

Hard drives these days are massive and cheap so 80GB is the minimum you should expect.

What Screen Size and Should I Go Widescreen?

A lot of laptops are now being sold with 17" widescreens and although these are BIG, they are great as desktop replacements if you do not intend to take them out of the house. If you actually want a portable laptop then I would not go above 15.4" widescreen.

Should you choose an ordinary screen or a widescreen? Widescreen would be my choice, they are lovely and they do make it easier to have multiple windows visible on the desktop at the same time. Obviously watching movies will be a better experience as well. Having said that, don't be put off if you find a good machine with an ordinary screen at a great price.

Maximum Screen Resolution

Screen resolution refers to the pixel density of the LCD. The higher the resolution the more pixels are crammed in and because there are more pixels they have to be smaller, which means you can fit more on you desktop and the picture will be sharper. In short, a higher resolution is good.

Do I Need Wireless?

Even if you don't most modern laptops are supplied with wireless network capability built in. If you are not going to use it, there should be a button or a function key combination to turn it off and I recommend that you use it.

What Else Should I Consider?

Run Time.

The amount of time the laptop will run on a fully charged battery. This can be anything from 2 to 4 hours and obviously a longer run time is more desirable.

Dimensions and Weight.

The dimensions and weight generally depend on screen size, the larger the screen the larger the laptop and the more it will weigh.

Having said that there can be large differences in weight even in machines with the same size screen so this is a specification you should pay close attention to. Lighter machines do tend to be more expensive.

Ultra lightweight laptops with screen sizes of 12" and below tend to be considerably more expensive than a larger machine with the same specifications. Probably because the screens are top quality with a very small pixel size.

Optional extras

These are features that are not standard but their inclusion may sway your decision.

- Webcam.
- Memory Card Reader.
- Finger Print Reader.
- TV Out.
- Microphone.
- Analogue Modem (who uses dialup these days?).

Whoopee It's Here! What Now?

The first thing you need to do when you get your shiny new laptop in you grubby mitts is to **update it**.

As new as it looks it could have been sitting on a shelf for months and there is no guarantee the manufacturer will have installed all the [Microsoft Updates](#). The supplied security suite, or the one you have purchased will certainly be in need of updating.

[Electronic Business Systems](#) offers a free price-search service across all major manufacturers, so you get the best computers at the lowest price. For a quick, free quote ring **0121 384 2513**.