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Which Computer Should I Buy?

~ by Ben Glick, *Computer Technician*

Laptop computers are becoming increasingly popular and are replacing conventional desktop computers. This is largely due to their increasing performance and decreasing prices. The most compelling reason to purchase a laptop is because of its portability. If most of your work is away from the office, this becomes crucial. Even if it's not, nothing beats the convenience of being able to take your computer with you whenever the need arises.

If you choose a laptop over a desktop, what are you most likely to miss about a desktop?

Along with portability, a laptop comes with a smaller footprint on your desk. This is especially appealing to the college student who is sharing precious little space with other roommates.

If you choose a laptop over a desktop, what are you most likely to miss about a desktop?

Only the largest laptops have a separate numerical keypad. If you use the keypad extensively, you may want to consider buying a USB keypad. They are fairly small and will not take up much room in your laptop's case.

The touchpad mouse found on a laptop is another difference. It is a big improvement over yesterday's trackball or fingertip pointer. For some applications it still doesn't perform as well as a standard mouse. An easy fix is to plug in a USB mouse. You can even buy a compact mouse that will take up very little space in your travel bags.

Another adjustment may be getting accustomed to the feel of the keyboard. Since the laptop is more compact, the keys are closer together than the keys on a desktop keyboard. Just like the mouse, an external keyboard is an option. This works especially well if most of your work is done at

a desk. Carrying an external keyboard in your travels, may take up too much space.

Unless you're interested in a high-end model, cost is not usually an issue. You can buy an average laptop for about the same price as a typical desktop with an LCD monitor. Servicing a laptop is usually more expensive. Because laptop parts are much

more specialized than desktop PC parts, your local computer store will not be as

likely to have the parts you need in stock. Depending on the service needed, your laptop may also have to be sent back to the manufacturer for repair. This means the wait time for repairs will be longer than the wait for a desktop PC.

Data on a laptop is more vulnerable because your laptop can more easily be stolen and is more susceptible to physical damage because of its portability factor. You have several lines of defense against theft. If you're traveling with your laptop, keep it with you at all times. When it is at home, you may want to secure it to your desk by using a cable lock. If you have sensitive information on it, don't rely on your Windows password to prevent access to your data. It is trivial to either reset the Windows password or bypass the Windows boot process and access the data. If you're carrying sensitive data, consider encrypting it. Should your computer file system be accessed, the files will be unreadable unless the person reading it has your password or can break the encryption.

To protect against physical damage, the best thing you can do is buy a good padded laptop case and keep the computer in its case whenever you are moving it around. A good backup strategy will protect you from data loss. If you have access to a network, copy your important files to a network directory. A CD/RW drive allows you to

copy files to a CD. If your laptop doesn't have a CD/RW drive you can buy an external drive that plugs into a port. A USB pen drive works well for small amounts of data. Another option is an external hard drive.

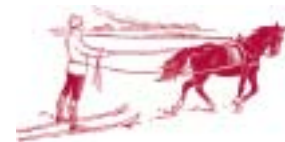
A common complaint about a laptop is battery life. If this is important to you, think smaller and slower. A 12.1 inch screen uses about half as much power as a 17 inch screen. A Pentium M processor uses about half as much power as a Pentium IV. A slower hard drive could also give you an extra 20 minutes of battery life. DVD and CD-ROM drives are power hogs. Don't use them any more than necessary.

For the first two charging cycles, let your battery drain completely before recharging it. Batteries perform best at room temperature. Don't leave your laptop in a hot car or outdoors in extremely cold weather. Remove the battery if you use your laptop primarily at a desk.

Another power-saving tip is to adjust the power settings. If you're using Windows XP Home or Pro, follow these steps: Go to Start > Control Panel > Performance And Maintenance > Power Options. Choose the option to turn the display off after several minutes of inactivity, and also the hard drive after 15-20 minutes of inactivity. Put the computer into standby mode after 30 minutes. If these settings are too restrictive, increase them to suit your needs. The LCD screen can be a major power drain. You may dim the display to where it is comfortable to view without squinting. The control setting is usually on the keypad and not in the power options. In this case, check the instructions that came with your machine.

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Some laptop models allow you to double up with a second battery. This second battery is usually interchangeable with the optical drive. A special high-capacity battery may also be available to purchase. If you're using more than one battery, develop a routine for keeping them all charged, either by switching the battery in your computer when it's fully charged or by using an external charger (not available for all battery models). When buying a battery, generally you get what you pay for. So if battery life is an issue, buy the best quality battery that's available.

Shutting down unnecessary programs can also add to your computing time. If you are not using the wireless connection, turn off the Wi-Fi hardware. Unplug any PC cards or USB peripherals that you're not using. Reduce the frequency of auto-saves in your word processor so the hard drive can stay idle longer.

Finally, the decision has to be made by you, the user. If you travel a lot and need a computer, the laptop is definitely your answer. It's light-weight and portability are a necessity. Should your computing needs be strictly in the home or office, the desktop may be your best choice. It's larger, separate screen and the option of a more powerful video card makes graphic work and gaming much more enjoyable.

Change . . . means welcoming new co-workers . . .

Eagle Solutions, the software division of Esh Computer Center, welcomes Brad Marshall to the programming team. Brad is using his degree and skills in custom programming.



Kristalyn Esh, daughter of Jake Esh, has come on board in the Eagle Solutions department this past summer. She is currently involved in web design and is our main receptionist. Welcome Kristalyn!



Julie is still with us, but has changed her titles in more ways than one! She is now the Eagle Solutions secretary and is known as Mrs. Julie Nolt. Julie married Wendell Nolt on October 30, 2004. Congratulations Julie and Wendell!



Eagle Solutions also says good bye to Chris Lapp and Kris Petersheim. Chris loves working with teenagers and left the customer support department to pursue a teaching career. Kris left not only the team, but also the country. She is now serving in an orphanage and enjoying it very much. We wish both of you the best!

Our service department is experiencing some changes too. Wes Mullis, one of our on-site network technicians of many years, has decided to leave to pursue other interests. Thank you Wes for your technical contribution to Esh Computer Center and our many business customers. Jeff Smith, a Microsoft Certified technician, has recently joined us. Jeff will be taking on Wes' former responsibilities. Welcome Jeff!



Ron Blanshine is another new member on our technical team. He is assisting Bill Holmes and Jason Henry with in-house computer repairs since Ben Glick moved to the Akron service department. Ron is also fielding many of the technical calls from you, our customer. Welcome to the team, Ron!



A new face has recently been added to our sales department. John Wiggins is now involved in general sales at our Gap location. He is taking Karen Keller's place. Karen moved to our new Akron store in July. John is also involved with inventory, shipping, and receiving. Welcome John!



... and saying good-bye to friends!

LCD vs. CRT monitors

~ by Ron Blanshine, Computer Technician

If you have been keeping up with computer technology or have been shopping around for computers or monitors lately, you have probably heard the terms LCD and CRT. Perhaps you are familiar with what these terms mean, but if you are a bit confused as to what the differences truly are, read on.

LCD stands for Liquid Crystal Display. Essentially, an LCD is a grid, or two dimensional array of dots that change in color and brightness to form a picture. Each dot is called a pixel (short for picture element).

CRT stands for Cathode Ray Tube. Never mind the details, but the picture tube in a common TV set is a CRT also. Computer CRT monitors, however, usually produce much higher resolution than a TV set CRT.

You know that an LCD is smaller and lighter than a CRT, but CRT monitors are cheaper,

right? What other differences should know about them? Here are a few points to keep in mind:



LCD monitors are more delicate than CRTs. The surface is not tolerant to being poked with fingers or pens or other objects. An LCD is more easily broken by being hit and more easily knocked off of a desk or table owing to its lighter weight and smaller footprint. The face of an LCD is plastic, not glass, and it does not like harsh chemical cleaners (NO AMMONIA)! It is usually best to dust the surface with a soft dry cloth. If grease marks remain, use a damp cloth. A 50/50 isopropyl alcohol solution is preferred if something more than water is necessary.

LCD monitors are more resistant to burn in or image persistence of an image that is constantly left on the screen. If image persistence is noted, it can usually be reversed on an LCD.

CRTs generally use more energy than a comparable LCD.

Size is measured differently for the two

options. If an LCD says it is a 17" display, the viewing area should be 17" from corner to corner. A CRT labeled as a 17" display usually has a viewable area of only 17" minus 1" from corner to corner. This is true since 17" is the size of the picture tube itself, not the viewing surface.

An LCD has an intrinsic resolution determined by the actual number of pixels which form the display grid. If the resolution is set to any value except this value or an even multiple of this value, the display will have to interpolate, or fill in the places where the pixels displayed don't fit into a physical pixel. This may make the display look a bit fuzzy, and lines and letters may look like they have thick and thin areas. This is normal and cannot be avoided except by setting the resolution to an even multiple of the intrinsic resolution of the display.

In conclusion, the performance trade off of LCDs has nearly disappeared, and the price gap is narrowing constantly. Even though LCDs have become popular, there are still situations where a CRT may be the best choice. The good news is you now know how to make the choice more intelligently.



~ by Karen Keller, Sales

Come with me as we take a scenic drive through the narrow Lancaster County country roads. We'll leave Route 30 behind and head for North Star Road. Nestled quietly amidst the farmland is our destination - a beautiful remodeled horse barn. This one hundred year old barn is now the location of an exquisite country store called Country Creations.

Country Creations began in June of 1984 in the home of Ken and Shirley Groff. At its beginning, it was just a small one-room store in their home. At this time, most of the items for sale were made by the Groff family. It wasn't long until the business had out-grown its small room. After three years, a move to the tobacco shed was a necessity. In 1995, the family no longer had a need to use the barn for horses, so the decision was made to remodel the barn to accommodate the ever-growing business. The old rustic look, along with the horse stalls still remain and accent its name — Country Creations.

From the store's beginnings, the family has been participating in craft shows. Each year they spend a week in Atlanta at a show and they also go to Philadelphia for four other shows. Most of their work for the whole year is done in January. This is the month that they need to order all of their Christmas trees for the following Christmas.

When you come for a visit, please be sure that you have lots of time for browsing. The store is filled with many items for decorating your home all year long. As Lori Bennett, part-owner, manager, and daughter of Ken and Shirley said, you'll find something you like even if your decorating taste isn't country. As you browse the large expanse of finished product, you'll find candles, potpourri, gourmet foods, lighting, furniture, and fabric to name just a few. Among the numerous furniture pieces for sale, entertainment centers have been the most popular this year. Their furniture comes not only from local craftsmen, but is also shipped in from out-of-state and Canadian businesses. Most of the furniture is made of pine and a large amount is upholstered as well.

This spring, a new product called a can-

dle warmer, made its appearance at Country Creations. The candle warmer resembles a small crock pot and comes with various designs specific for the holidays or an every day design that can be used all year long. This item became popular because of the many fires that break out in homes across the country from unattended candles. The problem with suit coating new paint from burning candles is another reason for the product's demand.

The candle warmers come in two different sizes. The large size will hold the 26oz. McCall's candles, and the smaller size will secure the votive candle. The crock warms and melts the candle to send off the fragrance instead of using an open flame. One candle will give off its wonderful fragrance every day for 10-12 weeks. Lori found that the high-quality McCall's jar candles will last the longest.



Country Creations shoppers are not just from Lancaster County and neither are they mostly tourists. Regular shoppers come to Pennsylvania for the weekend from Virginia, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, New York, and Connecticut. Country Creations keeps in touch with their customers through a mailing list as well as through their website. Visit them on-line at www.countrycreationspa.com to see their products and specials.

As the business grew, so did the need for more employees. Today there are 14 employees running the sales counter and arranging and stocking the store with beautiful displays. Four of these employees are family members. Ken and Shirley Groff, along with their daughter Lori and her husband Kenn Bennett, manage the store.

In 1992, the decision was made to use Quickbooks for the store's accounting needs. As the years went by, Lori found that this software was not adequate in allowing her to have the kind of inventory control that she desired. In 1999 Country Creations decided to implement the Eagle Business Management System Software (EBMS) which is developed and offered by Eagle Solutions, a subsidiary of Esh Computer Center. EBMS was implemented at their point of sale counter and, of course, is used heavily for inventory purposes. It has been a great asset in enabling Lori to look up the history of each item that they sell. She is able to see where she last ordered the item from and how much she ordered. She can

also look at the year tab to see how much was sold of a particular item for a given year. The month tabs are also important. She knows if she needs to order more heavily according to the sales from other years in any given month. Another asset is to have inventory reports readily at her fingertips. She may want to see how many seasonal items they have sold vs. how many every day items.

Lori eagerly awaits the unveiling of the wireless inventory scanner from the Eagle Solutions department. With this scanner, she will be able to scan in her bar-coded inventory items (this barcoding is done through the EBMS software), see how many items are in stock, and also make adjustments if necessary.

Maybe Lori's needs have sparked an interest in you since you have business accounting needs as well. If so, please call Eagle Solutions at (717) 442-3246 and ask for Jake Esh, extension 1111. He will be happy to meet with you for a free consultation to discuss how EBMS will enhance your bottom line.



Need help but don't know who to ask for when you call in? Following is a list of contacts here at Esh Computer Center.

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