



Notebook or Netbook?

by Sandra D. Coburn

Marvin was my first. He wasn't tall, dark, or handsome, but he was strong, talented, and versatile. Marvin was an Atari 800 personal computer affectionately named for the paranoid android in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, by Douglas Adams. He came standard with 16K RAM and cost \$899.



My husband-to-be lavished Marvin with all the latest peripherals. For storage, he added a cassette drive, which looked exactly like a cassette tape recorder. A program would be stored on a 30-minute cassette tape and would take 30 minutes to load. He also bought Marvin a 300-baud acoustic modem in which you physically placed the telephone receiver – back when

telephones had cords. He used the modem to dial up CompuServe, where, for only \$8.00 an hour, he could view and download text that bored me to tears.

This Internet idea, I insisted, would never catch on.

Okay, I admit it. I was wrong. The Internet did catch on, and there are mobile computers designed specifically for use on the Internet.

Should I buy a notebook or a netbook?

The terms "notebook" and "netbook" are really marketing terms. There is no hard and fast definition of either, but here are some generalizations.

Notebook	Netbook
Heavier – 6-9 pounds	Lighter – 2-4 pounds
Larger Screen Size – 14-17 inches	Smaller Screen Size – 9-11 inches
Shorter battery life – 2-4 hours	Longer battery life -- 5-9 hours
Optical (DVD/CD) Drive	No optical drive
Larger, more powerful processor	Smaller, more efficient processor

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Notebook	Netbook
Full-size or near full-size keyboard	Smaller keyboard
Superior graphics	Reduced graphics capabilities
Higher Pricetag	Lower pricetag
Runs a variety of programs well	Designed for surfing the 'Net and light computing

Most notebooks and netbooks come standard with webcams, Wi-Fi, and a selection of USB and other ports.

Which is right for you? If your mobile computer is your primary computer, I would recommend a notebook. Some notebook PCs are smaller and lighter than others, so if you want computing power that doesn't send you to physical therapy, look for one of these. If you want to take a walk on the Mac side, the Apple MacBook Air is a nice compromise between notebook and netbook. The MacBook Air weighs only 3 pounds but sports a 13-inch screen, plenty of computing power, and excellent graphics. (The Air does not have a built-in optical drive, and costs about triple what you would pay for a netbook.)

If you have a desktop or a heavy notebook as your primary computer and want an additional computer that is easy to carry and easy on the pocketbook, consider a netbook. Their small size and longer battery life make them ideal for travel and long meetings.

The face of mobile computing is always changing. Phones surf the Web. Netbooks are becoming more powerful, and notebooks are becoming smaller. Apple is poised to release a tablet computer with a 10-inch screen and a \$1000 price tag in the next few months. If you are planning to buy a new computer, first consider how you will use it, and then research. Buy the computer that best fits your needs and budget. Once you do, stop looking at the ads and your neighbors' computers. Buyer's remorse is almost a given with a product that becomes obsolete every other day.

Oh, and name your computer -- something other than That Piece of Junk. It is harder to hate a computer you have named.

My current notebook is Janus, named for the god of doors and gateways. (Yes, it's a Gateway.) Janus has 65,536 times more RAM than Marvin, but Marvin has a soft spot in my heart. I guess it's true what they say – you never forget your first.

Sandra D. Coburn is an old geek -- just young enough to have missed punch cards, but old enough to have programmed in BASIC, FORTRAN, and PL/I on her college's mainframe. She currently shares her home with a husband, four children, a variety of animals, and several computers, including her notebook named Janus and her netbook named Sidhe (pronounced "shee"). Sandra loves Janus and Sidhe, because they are helping her finish her first novel in 2010.