

Discovering the Laptop Advantage

Laptop computers started as very expensive options for those who travelled on business and were willing to carry almost ten pounds of machine to be able to use a computer on the road.

Move forward in time, and you'll find that laptops have become a much more affordable, portable, and ubiquitous option that many are choosing as their only computer, whether they travel much or not. If you're thinking about joining the laptop revolution, it's time you understand the advantages a laptop can offer.

In this chapter, I introduce you to the key differences between a desktop computer and a laptop, the computing opportunities your laptop offers, and the different styles of laptops available.

Understand the Difference between a Desktop and Laptop

The fact is that when it comes to performing computing tasks, a desktop and laptop are pretty much identical. They both have an operating system such as Windows 7 or Mac OS X. They both contain a hard drive where you store data and computer chips that process data, and they both run software and access the Internet.

Chapter 1

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Part I: First Steps with Your Laptop

Where a desktop and laptop differ is their physical appearance, size, and weight. Here's a rundown of the key differences:

- ➡ **Appearance:** A desktop computer is typically encased in a tower into which you plug a separate monitor, keyboard, and mouse. (Though some newer models have the brains of the computer incorporated into a monitor base.) A laptop has all its parts in one unit, as shown in **Figure 1-1**. The central processing unit (CPU), chips, monitor, keyboard, and touchpad (a laptop version of a mouse) all fit in one compact package including ports for plugging in peripherals such as a transmitter for a wireless mouse or printer.

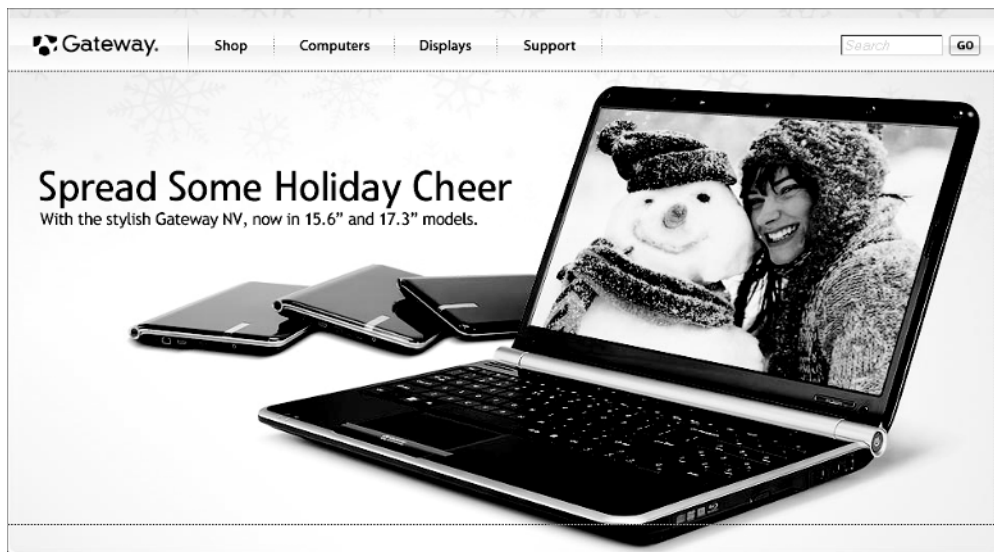


Figure 1-1

- ➡ **Power source:** A desktop computer is powered by plugging it into a wall outlet. A laptop contains a battery; you can run the laptop off of a charged battery, or plug the laptop into a wall outlet.
- ➡ **Portability:** Having a battery and coming in a more compact package makes a laptop more portable

(though some larger models are a bit hefty to tote around); a desktop stays put on a desktop as a rule.

- ➡ **Extras:** Very small laptops might not include a CD/DVD drive and therefore require an external drive, like the one shown in Figure 1-2, to be attached.

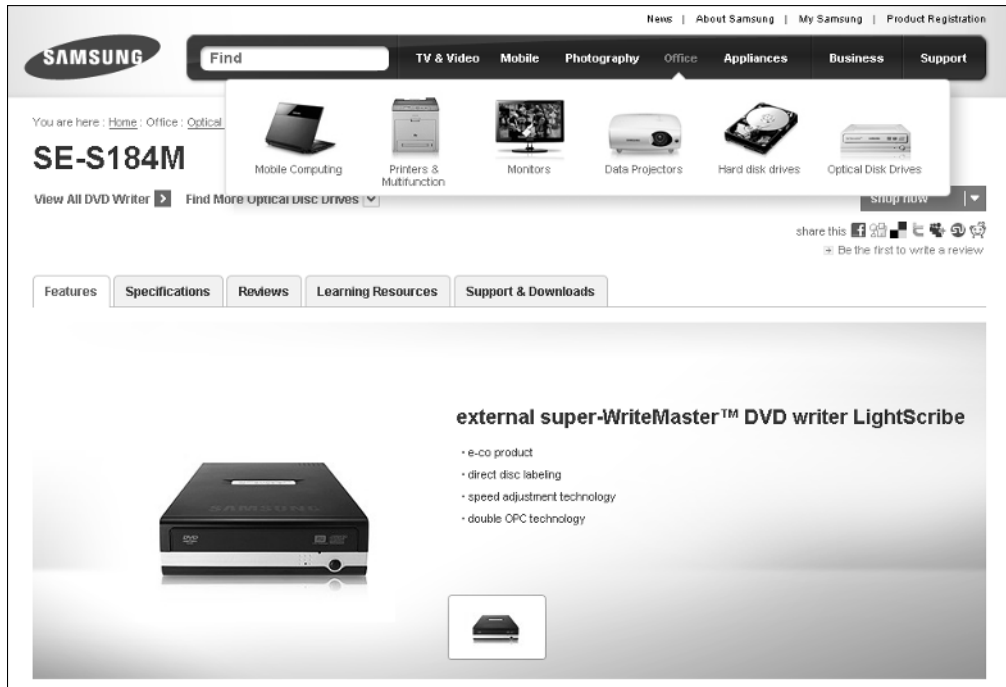


Figure 1-2

Explore All You Can Do with Your Laptop

Your laptop is a computer in a smaller package, so you can perform all the typical computing tasks with it. If you've never owned a computer of any type, your laptop purchase will open up a world of activities. Even if you're buying your laptop just to do e-mail (I hear this a lot from seniors!), do yourself a favor and explore a few other computing tasks that your laptop will allow you to do, such as:

- ➡ Running software programs such as word processors to write letters or create flyers, spreadsheet software

to organize your finances or household inventory, or photo-imaging software to work with your snapshots.

- ➡ Working with financial activities, from keeping your checkbook and credit card records in software databases and doing your taxes to investing, banking, and shopping online. These types of activities can be very safe to perform online, and they are incredibly convenient, with your accounts available 24/7.
- ➡ **Keep in touch with friends and family.** The Internet makes it possible to communicate with other people via e-mail; share video images using *Webcams* (tiny, inexpensive video cameras that capture and send your images to another computer); and make phone calls using a technology called VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) that uses your laptop and Internet connection to place calls. You can also chat with others by typing and sending messages using a technology called *instant messaging*. These messages are exchanged in real time so that you and your grandchild, for example, can see and reply to text immediately. Part V of this book explains these topics in more detail.
- ➡ **Research any topic from the comfort of your home.** Online, you can find many reputable Web sites that give you information on anything from expert medical advice to the best travel deals. You can read news from around the corner or around the world. You can visit government Web sites to find out information about your taxes, social security, and more, or even go to entertainment sites to look up your local television listings.
- ➡ **Create greeting cards, letters, or home inventories.** Whether you're organizing your holiday card list or figuring out a monthly budget, computer programs can help. For example, **Figure 1-3** shows a graph that the Excel program creates from data in a spreadsheet.

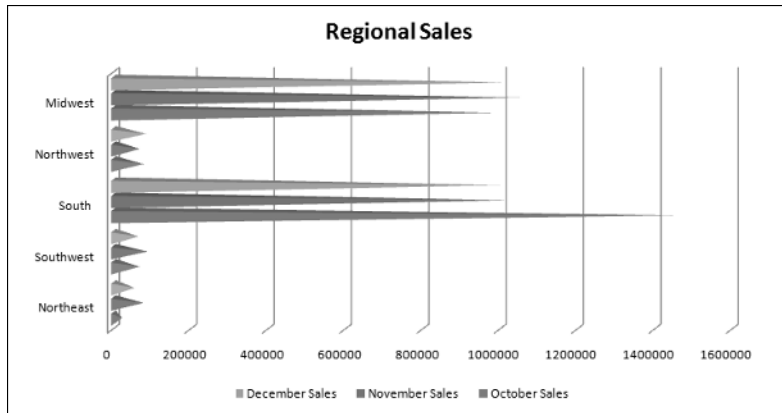


Figure 1-3

- ➡ **Pursue hobbies such as genealogy or sports.** You can research your favorite teams online or connect with people who have the same interests. The online world is full of special-interest chat groups where you can discuss these interests with others.
- ➡ **Play interactive games with others over the Internet.** You can play everything from shuffleboard to poker or action games in virtual worlds.
- ➡ **Share and create photos, drawings, and videos.** If you have a digital camera, you can transfer photos to your laptop (doing this is called *uploading*) or copy photos off the Internet and share them in e-mails or use them to create your own greeting cards. If you're artistically inclined, you can create digital drawings. Many popular Web sites make sharing digital movies easy, too. If you have a digital video camera and editing software, you can use editing tools to make a movie and share it with others. Steven Spielberg, look out!
- ➡ **Shop online and compare products easily, day or night.** You can shop for anything from a garden shed to travel deals or a new camera. Using handy

online features, you can easily compare prices from several stores or read customer product reviews. Web sites such as www.nextag.com list product prices from a variety of vendors on one Web page, so you can find the best deals. Beyond the convenience, all this information can help you save money.

Appreciate the Portability Factor

Because your laptop is portable, you can move it around your house or around town with relative ease. What does this portability allow you to do?

- ➡ You can access your e-mail account from anywhere to stay in touch with others or get work done away from home or the office. You can also store documents online so that you can access them from anywhere.
- ➡ Use public *hotspots* — locations that provide access to the Internet, such as airports and Internet cafés — to go online. For example, most hotels today provide Wi-Fi access free of charge, so you can work on your laptop from the lobby or your room.
- ➡ Even if you're staying in town, it might be fun to take your laptop to a local café and putter while sipping a latte.



Check your laptop battery-life specifications.

Recently, laptops are coming out that provide as much as 9 hours of battery life, but many still offer only about 2 hours. If you plan to use your laptop for an extended time, be sure you've charged your battery (find out more about this in Chapter 3), and keep an eye on it. You could lose some work if you haven't saved it and the battery power runs out.

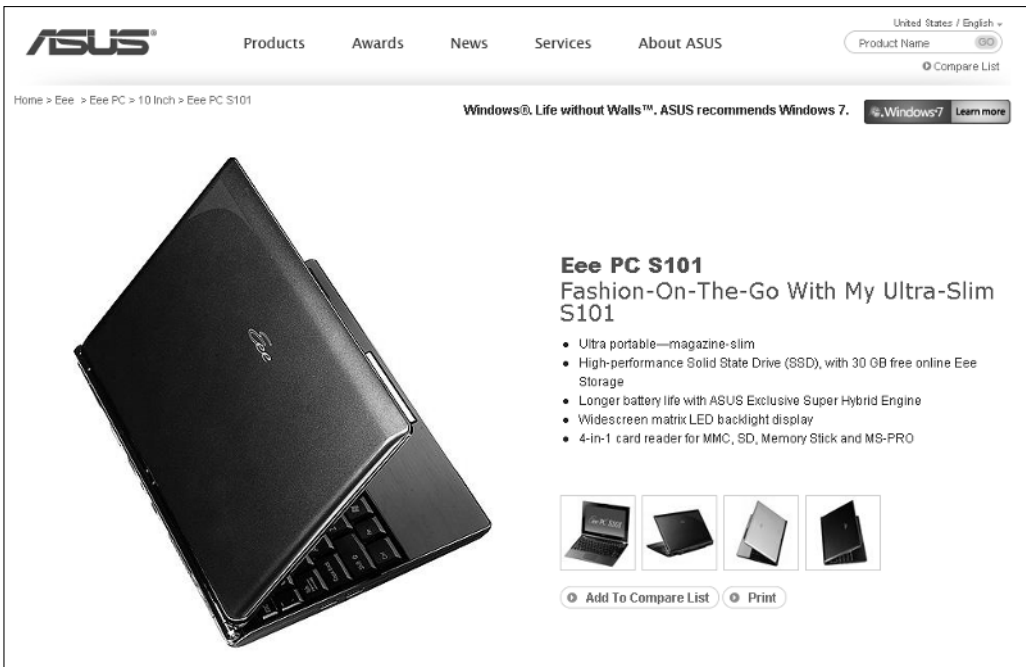
Understand Types of Laptops

Today, there are several types of laptop that vary by size and weight, functionality, and the way you enter information into them. Here are some options available to you:

- ➡ The garden-variety laptop (also referred to as a *notebook computer*) runs around 5–8 pounds and has a monitor size ranging from about 13 inches to 16 or so. It's portable and can handle most computing tasks. *Multimedia/gaming laptops* are laptops that have more sophisticated graphics and sound cards.
- ➡ *Desktop replacements* are laptops with more heft. They might weigh more than 10 pounds and have larger monitors (perhaps 18 inches). Their keyboards are roomier as well. However, though they aren't too difficult to move around your home, they aren't meant to be as portable as other types of laptops.
- ➡ *Netbooks* (see **Figure 1-4**) were first introduced for those who mainly wanted to use a computer to access the Internet. They lack CD/DVD drives and weigh only about 2–3 pounds. They have less-powerful and slower processors, and less *memory* (space to store documents). Still, if you mainly want to check e-mail from anywhere, a netbook might fit the bill.
- ➡ *Tablet PCs* (see **Figure 1-5**) are a type of laptop with a screen that allows you to write on it using a special type of stylus. Software in a tablet PC can convert what you write or draw into an electronic document. Some tablet PCs are similar to a writing pad without a lid; others have a lid like traditional laptops, but you can turn the lid around to make the computer more "pad-like."
- ➡ *Mobile Internet Devices* (MIDs) are the latest addition to the laptop lineup. A MID falls somewhere between your cellphone and a netbook in size. It's super portable, but for all but the most eager

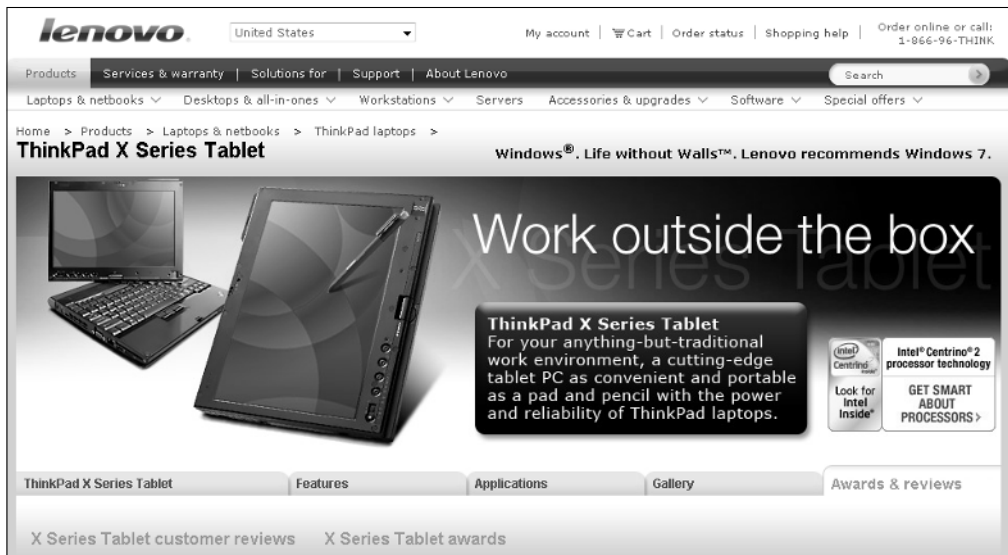
Part I: First Steps with Your Laptop

cellphone texters, a MID probably sports too small a keyboard for everyday computing tasks.



The screenshot shows the ASUS website for the Eee PC S101. The navigation bar includes 'Products', 'Awards', 'News', 'Services', and 'About ASUS'. A search bar is on the right. The breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > Eee > Eee PC > 10 Inch > Eee PC S101'. A Windows 7 banner is present. The main content features a large image of the laptop, the title 'Eee PC S101 Fashion-On-The-Go With My Ultra-Slim S101', and a list of features: 'Ultra portable—magazine-slim', 'High-performance Solid State Drive (SSD), with 30 GB free online Eee Storage', 'Longer battery life with ASUS Exclusive Super Hybrid Engine', 'Widescreen matrix LED backlight display', and '4-in-1 card reader for MMC, SD, Memory Stick and MS-PRO'. Below the features are four small images of the laptop in different states and two buttons: 'Add To Compare List' and 'Print'.

Figure 1-4



The screenshot shows the Lenovo website for the ThinkPad X Series Tablet. The navigation bar includes 'Products', 'Services & warranty', 'Solutions for', 'Support', and 'About Lenovo'. A search bar is on the right. The breadcrumb trail reads 'Home > Products > Laptops & netbooks > ThinkPad laptops > ThinkPad X Series Tablet'. A Windows 7 banner is present. The main content features a large image of the tablet, the title 'ThinkPad X Series Tablet', and the headline 'Work outside the box'. A text box describes the tablet as a 'cutting-edge tablet PC as convenient and portable as a pad and pencil with the power and reliability of ThinkPad laptops'. Below this are two Intel logos: 'Intel Centrino' and 'Intel Centrino 2 processor technology'. At the bottom, there are navigation tabs for 'ThinkPad X Series Tablet', 'Features', 'Applications', 'Gallery', and 'Awards & reviews'. A footer link reads 'X Series Tablet customer reviews X Series Tablet awards'.

Figure 1-5