

Tablet keyboard cases turn Android devices into netbooks

August 25 2011, By Victor Godinez

Tablets made netbooks obsolete almost overnight, and for the most part, it was a mercy killing.

But for road warriors who need to type more than the occasional email, the loss of physical keyboards is a step backward.

Any number of wireless Bluetooth keyboards are available for tablets, but that means you have to keep track of multiple pieces of hardware.

However, two new Android tablets allow you to physically connect a keyboard as a single unit, like a touch screen.

When you don't need the typing capability, you just detach the [tablet](#) and leave the keyboard behind.

ASUS EEE PAD TRANSFORMER

The [Asus Eee](#) Pad Transformer TF101 is designed from the ground up as a combo device.

While you can just use the tablet as a top-notch Android 3.2 device, with its [Nvidia](#) Tegra 2 processor and 10.1-inch screen, the Transformer comes into its own when you buy the separate mobile keyboard dock.

The tablet snaps into place on the keyboard dock, and suddenly you have

a full-fledged [netbook](#).

The keyboard has its own battery to extend the life of your tablet to about 16 hours at full charge.

There are also two USB ports; Android-specific hotkeys to open the Web browser, for example, or return to the home screen; and even a [trackpad](#) to control a [mouse cursor](#).

Yep, a tablet with a mouse.

And the dock is sturdy and easily adjustable, with responsive keys that are a bit too small for the biggest fingers, but still far more effective than a [touch screen](#) keyboard.

When you're done, the screen folds down and closes like any netbook, and you can slip the entire contraption into just about any briefcase, backpack or laptop bag.

However, the metal keyboard does weigh 1.4 pounds and costs \$149, adding substantially to the 1.5-pound, \$399 Transformer tablet (for the 16GB version; \$499 for 32GB).

BLUETOOTH KEYBOARD CASE

The Samsung [Galaxy Tab](#) 10.1 might be the best non-iPad tablet, and that praise is not as faint as it sounds.

The company's Bluetooth Keyboard Case adds to that capability, turning your super-slim tablet into a typing machine.

While the tablet snaps easily into the case, there's no physical connection between the keyboard and the tablet.

Connecting by Bluetooth is easy and fast, but the battery in the keyboard case can't be shared with the tablet.

Also, the case has a floppy cloth hinge.

So to prop up the screen while you type, you have to use a kickstand on the back of the case.

It's not a great solution, as you can only tilt the screen so far before it falls over, and you can't prop up the screen at all when there's no surface underneath, such as balancing on the edge of your lap.

Still, the minimalist construction does keep the \$149 case and keyboard light, barely adding to the already svelte 1.3-pound tablet.

BOTTOM LINE

- Transformer: When the tablet is snapped into the dock, the entire contraption feels as solid (and weighty) as any netbook.
- Galaxy Tab Bluetooth case: Light and portable, this case is a delightful travel companion, but it occasionally flops over.
- The winner: The Galaxy Tab is a great tablet, but the Transformer is the superior [keyboard](#) performer.

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