

Review: Google laptop impresses, but don't try it offline

March 11 2015, by Anick Jesdanun



This Tuesday, March 10, 2015 photo shows the Google Chromebook Pixel laptop, in San Jose, Calif. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

There's a lot to love about Google's new high-end Chromebook Pixel laptop: a vivid, high-resolution touch screen, powerful speakers and next-generation USB ports meant to standardize power chargers. All for \$300 cheaper than the original model.

But the Pixel's limitations became clear during a cross-country flight.

Machines running Google's Chrome operating system are meant primarily for online use. Although the Pixel promises offline access to [files](#) stored on Google's online Drive service, it was hit or miss with files that weren't in Google's own formats. Fortunately, I had my Mac laptop to turn to.

The Pixel goes on sale Wednesday for \$999, while \$1,299 gets you a version with more storage and a faster processor.

CHROMEBOOK BASICS

On machines running Chrome just about everything works through the Web browser. Many apps, in fact, are simply bookmarks to a service's regular website.

Google figures you'll store most of your files in the cloud, so Chromebooks have limited storage. The basic Pixel has just 32 gigabytes, compared with the minimum 128 gigabytes on a MacBook Air. The pricier Pixel has 64 gigabytes.

USING IT WITHOUT INTERNET ACCESS

Some apps do have limited offline capabilities, and they have improved since I tested the original Pixel in 2013. Some of these functions are now automatically enabled, and the Pixel stores your most recently opened files automatically for offline use.

But that doesn't apply to files you merely copied to Google Drive, as I learned the hard way. All Google-format files are stored automatically,

but what I needed were Word and PDF documents. Next time, I'll need to open or download those files individually ahead of time. I couldn't find a way to enable entire folders at once.



This Tuesday, March 10, 2015 photo shows the Google Chromebook Pixel laptop, in San Jose, Calif. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

AS AN ONLINE DEVICE

Chromebooks are typically budget devices costing a few hundred dollars. The Pixel is the exception, with premium performance and a premium price tag.

Still, the Pixel offers a 13-inch touch screen and sharp display at 239 pixels per inch for less than \$1,000. Windows laptops with that

performance typically cost a few hundred dollars more. Apple doesn't make touch-screen laptops at all. (That said, comparable Windows and Mac laptops have more storage for the money. And many are lighter than the Pixel's 3.3 pounds.)

The slower model I tested was speedy—more than adequate for Web surfing, text documents and even video. Sound came through nice and clear. Google promises up to 12 hours of use on a single battery charge. With the battery nearly drained, I got a 50 percent charge in about a half-hour—enough for a day of meetings Tuesday in Silicon Valley.

POWER POTENTIAL

What I like most is the Pixel's use of the emerging Type-C standard for USB. In English, that means faster and more flexible charging. Android phones have long used USB for charging, but the current USB technology limits how much power the phone can draw. That's one reason laptops, with greater power needs, come with their own chargers.

Type-C is meant to standardize those chargers, so you might one day need just one for all your phones, tablets and laptops. Type-C draws more power and transfers data faster than current USB.



This Tuesday, March 10, 2015 photo shows, from left, the USB Type-C port, two standard USB ports, and headphone jack on a Google Chromebook Pixel laptop, in San Jose, Calif. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

You might have heard of Type-C when Apple announced a new MacBook on Monday. Apple ditched regular USB ports in favor of USB-C, but in addition to Type-C, the Pixel has two regular ports and an SD slot for camera memory.

With Type-C, cords can be inserted in either direction, much like the iPhone's Lightning connector, so you don't have to figure out which side is up. The Pixel goes further in having ports on both sides, so you're not left with tangled cords if the outlet is on the wrong side.

The port also works for display output, though you'll need a \$40 adapter until TVs and monitors start getting Type-C. I watched "The Simpsons" on my TV that way.



This Tuesday, March 10, 2015 photo shows the power adapter and USB inputs on a Google Chromebook Pixel laptop in San Jose, Calif. (AP Photo/Jeff Chiu)

APPS

Google gives Android developers an easy way to make their apps also work on Chrome. Google says about 30 apps have been converted, including the video-sharing app Vine.

Microsoft's Office isn't one of them, but Google does make it easy to work with Office files. They open in a Web browser just like Google-format files and get saved automatically in the Microsoft formats for sharing.

The Pixel is impressive, but consider your needs away from Wi-Fi. Many other laptops, including the new MacBook, offer more flexibility for a few hundred dollars more.

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Citation: Review: Google laptop impresses, but don't try it offline (2015, March 11) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-03-google-laptop-dont-offline.html>

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