

Review: Toshiba Chromebook 2 raises the bar

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Shopping for laptops can be maddening. There are hundreds of laptops from many different manufacturers, and they're mostly fine. But remember, you get what you pay for. It's pretty easy to find a Windows laptop that costs as little as \$400 or as much as \$2,500.

A few years back Google introduced a new operating system based on its

Chrome browser.

A few manufacturers introduced laptops running on the new Google operating system, also called Chromebooks.

Some of the main features of Chromebooks are an absence of internal hard drives, very few expansion ports and an (almost) constant need for an Internet connection. Oh, and very low prices.

I've been testing the Toshiba Chromebook 2 (\$329.99, toshiba.com), which is a nice step up from early Chromebooks.

Why choose a Chromebook over a Windows machine or a Mac?

For most people, choosing a Chromebook is about price, but as we know, lower-priced computers mean trading away some features for a few more dollars in your pocket.

Chromebooks tend to be aimed at specific tasks - Internet browsing, email, watching streaming video and working with documents in Google's suite of online apps.

Chromebooks are also dependent on a Wi-Fi connection, but in my week of testing, I was never out of Wi-Fi range between home, work and even my mother-in-law's house.

Chromebooks store the majority of your work in the cloud. The Toshiba Chromebook 2 has only 16 gigabytes of storage, the amount found in a low-end iPhone.

The Toshiba Chromebook 2 is a nice machine. Its standout feature is a vivid 13.3-inch IPS display with a resolution of 1,920 by 1,080 pixels (1080p). The display is gorgeous and a huge step up from the 720p

screen in Toshiba's original Chromebook.

It's powered by an Intel Celeron N2840 processor with four gigabytes of RAM and 16 GB of storage. The storage is enough for downloading some documents or even a movie or two, but it won't be holding your entire music library.

Toshiba does include 100 gigabytes of Google Drive cloud storage for two years.

The Chromebook 2 has the latest in wireless technology with 802.11AC WiFi and Bluetooth 4.0. There is a video-chat webcam above the screen.

Ports are scarce, as on any Chromebook, but the Toshiba has one USB 2 port, one USB 3 port, one HDMI video output, an SD card reader and a headphone jack.

Toshiba has partnered with the audio manufacturer Skullcandy to make sure the speakers in the Chromebook 2 sound good. I was really surprised by the sound, which radiates up through the keyboard.

I haven't heard music this good from a Chromebook before.

The 44Wh battery can provide up to nine hours of power.

There is a cheaper (\$249.99) version of the Chromebook 2 with two gigabytes of RAM and a 720p (1366 by 768 pixel) display.

The Chromebook 2 is made of plastic and weighs just under 3 pounds.

I found a lot to like about the Chromebook 2 and one thing that really bugged me.

The fit and feel of the all-plastic case were good. The screen hinge works smoothly, and typing on the full-size keyboard is quite comfortable.

The screen was good and made using the Chromebook 2 easy to use.

What worked against me, however, was the trackpad, which kept registering a right-click when I was only clicking with one finger.

This was vexing and happened often enough to make me dig in my bag for a Bluetooth mouse to use instead of the trackpad.

Perhaps my thumb is too big or perhaps I'm spoiled by the trackpad on my Macbook Pro. I let some others try the trackpad, and they didn't experience the same problems.

The Chromebook 2 can certainly be the only computer you'll need for most tasks.

For use at home, I found it a viable replacement for my Macbook Pro for the last week. I guess my home computing needs are getting simpler.

Besides surfing the Internet, reading emails and writing this review, I used the Chromebook for watching some Netflix videos and played a few games.

I could see this being a great laptop for a student or senior citizen or even as a computer for casual Internet use on the living room couch in the evenings.

As long as you know the limitations of the OS (stay in Wi-Fi range), are good with the features and ports available and can tame the [trackpad](#) better than I, the Toshiba Chromebook 2 is easily the standout among

Chromebooks.

Pros: Inexpensive, great screen, fast enough.

Cons: Trackpad could improve.

Bottom line: Best Chromebook so far.

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