

Samsung Google Chromebook loves life online

February 8 2013, by Jim Rossman



This week we're looking at a close relative to a laptop: the Samsung Google Chromebook.

It's a Samsung [netbook](#) running [Google's Chrome operating system](#). Netbooks are often legacy-free, meaning they lack older technology-compatible ports and drives. Indeed, the Chromebook (\$250) has no [hard drive](#), [optical drive](#) or Ethernet and no VGA or DVI port.

Wait, no hard drive?

That's right. The Chromebook is designed to be used while the user is online. Included with the purchase of a Chromebook are 12 coupons for in-flight Internet on airlines that use Gogo Wi-Fi.

Google's operating system is designed to stay out of your way. Most of the time you are in Chrome, so the experience is a familiar one. Google takes care of operating system updates and virus-malware protection with automatic system updates that download every few weeks.

The OS lives on a 16-[gigabyte flash drive](#) that boots in about 10 seconds. Like other laptops, closing it puts it to sleep, and by the time you've opened the screen, the OS is awake and ready.

Users access and save all their documents to the cloud - specifically Google's online offerings. Instead of loading up an Office suite, Chromebook users access Google Docs for [word processing](#) and spreadsheets. Obviously Web browsing and email are done online, as are Internet chatting and even storing your [digital photos](#).

Google includes 100 gigabytes of online storage for two years.

You are limited with what tasks you can do when you're not online. Google Docs has a pretty decent presence offline, which means you can create and edit documents that will sync the next time you connect to the Internet.

The OS also supports multiple users, so you can let your kids or a houseguest borrow it and know that if they log in with their own Google account, your documents and media are safe from snooping or accidental deletion.

So you need to be clear about what you want to accomplish with the Chromebook and if you'll be able to be online when you need to do anything but write or edit Office documents.

The Chromebook is a nice piece of hardware. Samsung has done a great job of making a quality netbook while keeping the cost down. At \$250, the Chromebook is a perfect second computer.

From across a room, it would be easy to mistake the Chromebook for a Macbook Air. Instead of the aluminum found on the Macbook Air, the Chromebook is plastic, but it feels very solid. The keyboard is Macbook-like with black keys protruding from a flat surface. The trackpad is large, and the entire surface is a button if you press down.

The ports include USB 2.0, USB 3.0, HDMI, SD card slot and a headphone-microphone combo jack. You can get [VGA](#) with an optional dongle.

Inside, you'll find an 11.6-inch screen that won't win any prizes for looks, but it gets the job done. The screen resolution is 1366 x 768 pixels, but the contrast is not too great. I would not want to edit photos on the Chromebook.

Networking is via Wi-Fi or Bluetooth, although a 3G version is available for \$330. The Chromebook has a webcam for Google+ or Skype video chats.

It weighs 2.4 pounds and is measures 8.1 by 11.4 inches and is just 0.7 inches thick (or is it thin?).

Since the Chromebook doesn't have a hard drive and uses an ARM processor, which is optimized for portable use, the battery will run for more than six hours between charges.

If you know the Chromebook's limitations, and you're confident you'll be online the vast majority of the time, you'll find a lot to like here. The OS is beautiful and useful when connected to the Internet, but offline it's significantly less useful.

Have your kids been bugging you for their own computer? Get them a Chromebook. They can do all their school research, email and document creation. Plus, as a bonus, you won't have to wipe it every other month because they downloaded the latest virus.

If you'd like to put your hands on one, head to your nearest Best Buy.

SAMSUNG GOOGLE CHROMEBOOK:

-Pros: Inexpensive, good build quality, no need for virus protection, all documents saved to the cloud.

-Cons: Limited functionality when not online.

-Bottom line: At half the cost of an iPad, the Chromebook is a perfect second computer for most users.

-Price: \$250, or \$330 with 3G

-On the Web: samsung.com, bestbuy.com

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