

Review: \$279 Chromebook good as secondary computer

October 8 2013, by Anick Jesdanun



The new HP Chromebook 11, left, is displayed with a Chromebook 14 at a Google event, Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2013 in New York. The new \$279 laptop, based on Google's Internet-centric Chrome operating system, borrows many of the high-end features found in a model that costs about \$1,000 more. The new laptop has a plastic frame with no sharp edges or corners, or even screw holes. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

Hewlett-Packard's new Chromebook 11 is a laptop at heart, but it's light and portable enough to work well in places where you'd normally prefer

a tablet.

I'm thinking cramped buses and airplanes, the waiting area of a doctor's office or even the cushiony couch in your living room. The Chromebook is small enough to rest comfortably on your lap and easy to carry when you need to pick up and go.

The drawback is it relies heavily on the Internet to run various services, so you'll need to plan ahead if you're looking to write that great masterpiece without access to Wi-Fi. That's because the Chromebook doesn't run Windows or Mac OS, like the majority of laptops. Rather, it uses Google's Chrome OS system, which needs a steady Internet connection.

Although it's possible to use apps while offline, Chromebooks are really designed for online use. Many apps don't work fully—or at all—without the Internet connection, or they need to be configured while you still have the connection to work offline. It's not as simple as installing a program and expecting it to work wherever you are. In addition, Chromebooks have little storage on the devices; Google steers you toward its online storage service, Drive, for your documents, photos, music and movies.

Chromebooks aren't meant for graphic designers who use sophisticated software, such as Adobe's Photoshop, or business executives who rely on Microsoft's PowerPoint slides. These notebooks are for people who primarily use Google's online services, including search, Gmail, Google Docs, Google Maps and Google's players for music and video. That includes schoolchildren who need a computer for homework and merchants who want something small next to a cash register.

As Google reasons, if you're already using many of its services, why not use a device optimized for it? These devices can be fast because they get

their sophistication from powerful servers located elsewhere. The Chromebook 11 takes just a few seconds to power up, as Chrome OS doesn't have a lot to load on the device itself.

Chrome OS notebooks are also really cheap: The Chromebook 11 costs just \$279.



The HP Chromebook 11 is displayed at a Google event, Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2013 in New York. The new \$279 laptop, based on Google's Internet-centric Chrome operating system, borrows many of the high-end features found in a model that costs about \$1,000 more. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

That price is in line with most other Chromebooks, including a \$249 model from Samsung and a \$199 model from Acer. But the new Chromebook has many high-end features inspired by a much pricier model, the \$1,299 Chromebook Pixel designed and made by Google

through contract factories in Asia.

The new Chromebook's speakers are underneath the keyboard, so sound projects out at you. Its outer shell is sleek and smooth. It doesn't have the Pixel's metal exterior, but there's magnesium underneath the plastic to keep the laptop sturdy. The Chromebook 11 has no sharp edges or corners—or even screw holes. There's no fan either, which keeps the device quiet and light—at just 2.3 pounds (1 kilogram).

In fact, the Chromebook 11 isn't much heavier than Microsoft's upcoming Surface Pro 2 [tablet](#), which weighs 2 pounds (0.91 kilograms). The Chromebook's 11.6-inch (29.46-centimeter) screen, measured diagonally, isn't much larger than the screen of the typical full-size tablet. The new Chromebook even uses the same Micro-USB charger that non-Apple tablets and smartphones use. No longer do you have to keep track of which charger goes with which device or pack an extra charger for a vacation.

The Chromebook 11 could pass for a tablet if it weren't for the fact that it unfolds to reveal a physical keyboard. It also lacks a touch screen. You move the cursor on the screen the traditional way, using the laptop's touchpad.

The new Chromebook has a low-resolution camera for videoconferencing, and it promises battery life of up to six hours. There are some perks, too: 100 gigabytes of storage through Google Drive for two years, rather than the standard 15 gigabytes, and 12 free sessions of Wi-Fi access on airplanes through Gogo.

There's a lot to like with the Chromebook 11.

But just like tablets, Chromebooks aren't ready to replace traditional Windows and Mac computers. Even if most of your life is online, there'll

be the occasional program that will run only on a Windows or Mac machine. Photo editing is one task that comes to mind. Internet-based editing tools on the Chromebook and elsewhere aren't as sophisticated as stand-alone programs such as Photoshop, Google's Picasa and Apple's iPhoto.



A dozen HP Chromebook 11's, are displayed at a Google event, Tuesday, Oct. 8, 2013 in New York. The new \$279 laptop, based on Google's Internet-centric Chrome operating system, borrows many of the high-end features found in a model that costs about \$1,000 more. Speakers are tucked under the keyboard so that sound comes out toward the user, even when the laptop is used on the lap. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

And while the Chromebook has apps for word processing and spreadsheets, there's no replacement for Microsoft's Office package. I don't like the fact that Google's Docs package isn't configured

automatically to work offline. And even after I configured it manually, the switch between online and offline use isn't very smooth and often requires refreshing the page.

That's not an issue if you're online most of the time. The days of one device per person, let alone per household, have long passed in much of the U.S. I can see the Chromebook 11 being a great secondary computer for many people, especially for those with ready access to Wi-Fi.

ABOUT THE HP CHROMEBOOK 11

The new HP Chromebook 11 from Hewlett-Packard Co. is the latest laptop to use Google's Chrome OS operating system. The Chromebook line is known for its budget pricing, and the Chromebook 11 costs just \$279. It's available starting Tuesday at Google's online Play store and selected retailers, including Best Buy and Amazon.

The [laptop](#) comes in white or black. The white model has a choice of four accents around the keyboard and under the device: blue, red, yellow and green.

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