

Basic Laptops

A November 2010 discussion on SoloSez, the email listserv for general practice, solo and small firm lawyers

Is there a real difference between a budget Acer and a budget Lenovo, assuming the hardware is the same? I know that Acer is a second tier company but the basic Lenovo is a second tier computer. I bought an Acer (that I can return), and missed a good deal on the Lenovo. I'm wondering if I should wait.

How does one determine if a computer is second tier????? I love acer.

Lesley Hoenig, Michigan

That's what I was told but I'm happy to hear that.

Meyer Silber, New York

Sent from my lenovo: I love my Lenovo. It has really taken a beating and still works great. OTOH, I'd switch to Acer without even thinking about it, if the price was right. Reality is the functional components are all made the same places.

Andrew Paterson, Michigan

As an unrepentant computer geek, allow me to voice an unpopular opinion: The less well-known the brand of laptop you buy, the better experience you can expect.

Smaller upstart companies that are struggling to compete are eager to win a "customer for

life" as early as possible. The Asus, Acer and Lenovo laptops of today aren't as good as they were 5-10 years ago (IMHO). The brands to invest in right now are MSi, ViewSonic, Panasonic and Samsung.

If anyone wants any specific advice regarding computer purchase or repair, I'm always happy to give guidance pro bono. ;)

Justin Wilder
Not a lawyer but I wish I was

Not to say Panasonic and Samsung are "upstart companies," but rather their laptop divisions are relatively new and unestablished.

Justin Wilder

I've had two Samsung netbooks. Top-notch quality!

Scott I. Barer, California

Thanks all. I never even heard of a samsung laptop.

Meyer Silber

I have an Acer... synchronized with my desktop using Windows Live so as not to lose my entire business life in the event of a computer crash...I've had no trouble out of my Acer...which is more than I can say for my Dell desktop...just my two cents....

Anna D. Collins Ford, Paralegal

I agree that most laptop components are made in the same place or at least with the same attention to quality, but not all are made the same. I've had two HP laptops, both had issues so I have decided to stay away from HP. I've had 3 Acers in my life, two older ones and one brand new Acer. I love them! After we retired the two older ones from service, we employed them in our race cars and other cars that we tune for customers. One is about 11 or 12 years old and it works great! Lenovo is a solid brand as well - I know several attorneys and financial planners that have had the same Lenovo for several years without a single glitch. So, if it is between the two, choose the one that gives you the most power for your budget (look for a i3 or P6000 Intel processor IMO) and, most important, meets your personal/professional preferences.

Also, MSI is a solid brand. I've seen MSI laptops on sale for as little as \$399 and even \$499 for a i350.

Matt Brown

My 2 cents -

I have an HP too and have more issues than I like to think about. Customer service is not good shall we say. Next time I would go for the Acer based on my current knowledge, or Lenovo -- my Lenovo laptop at my prior job was probably the best unit I've ever had. Of course there I had an IT guy to keep it in sparkling shape.....

Laura Kosloff

I love my Lenovo's - that is all we have in my office.

WDJiii

Walter D. James III, Texas

I wonder if there are a lot of voting ex-HP laptop owners in CA?

Jon van Horne

For my two cents I've had a lot of problems with my Lenovo, although I upgraded all the way at time of purchase, so maybe that has something to do with it.

Matthew Callis, Massachusetts

I've been a computer geek since my parents brought home the 8086, and I've had good and bad experiences with every company I've used. None of the major (or minor) brands makes crappy laptops any more, but, also, nobody makes perfect ones, either.

Now I pick my laptops based entirely on aesthetics and usability (it only takes a few seconds of typing to know the keyboard's a deal-breaker). I'll take whichever brand I enjoy seeing, carrying, and using the most.

Devan Bennett, California

I have had a Lenovo for a little over two years; it is a Thinkpad X61 tablet. It has 4 Gb of RAM and Core 2 Duo at 1.8 GHz; it came with Vista Ultimate, and I recently upgraded it to Windows 7 Ultimate. When I bought it, I got the four-year depot-service warranty; until recently, I did not use the warranty service except for telephone support (for networking help when I first got it and for a replacement pen when its button mechanism fell out--the new pen arrived overnight).

Over the last month or so, I have sent it to depot level maintenance three times: the first was for a broken pen holder (the pen also shed its small mechanism and button on the barrel). I was about to travel, so I really did not want to give up the tablet; the shipping box arrived before I left, so I used the box to ship it as I was returning home. My computer was returned the day after I got home (two days after I dropped it off at a UPS store). Not only were the broken parts replaced, but there was a new pen in the slot.

Very shortly after that, I tried to get help with the touch screen--it would not work, and Windows indicated that there was not a supported touch screen. The phone tech got a little impatient, and diagnosed it as a broken LCD or a loose connection; I sent it out without a hard drive. It turned out that it was physically fine--when I got it back, I still had no touch screen. But the depot had replaced the palm rest and the keyboard for "wear and tear." I was able to get the touch screen to work by rerunning the driver installer. My one complaint was that I had to do it on my own--Lenovo/IBM does not support a "re-imaged" system. When I upgraded to Windows 7, I deleted the partition that contained the system installation that would restore the computer to delivery status. Anyway, Lenovo/IBM does not provide any significant help for Windows 7 for my system, although it does for the ones it sells with Windows 7 installed--and it would not sell it to me when I tried to order from Lenovo.

Last week, I dropped the tablet onto a linoleum-tiled floor--it was closed and in sleep mode. It woke up fine, but the extended battery was really loose. I shut down the computer, removed the battery and found that I had broken all three (one completely and two about half) of the tabs on the bottom of the computer exterior that held the battery in place (not the latches, just the small, molded tabs). When I called, I could not even remember for certain whether I had purchased the damage protection part of the warranty; the tech confirmed my coverage and gave me a case number. The box came the next day, I sent it, and it came back to me on Monday (it was put into shipping on Saturday). I have an essentially new exterior (the palm rest and keyboard bezel were replaced, apparently for breaks I missed).

The point of this long story is how responsive and thorough the warranty service is. It is not great doing without the tablet for three to five days when I have to send it off (the stated turn-around time is five to six business days), but overnight shipping both ways is included.

The short version is a Lenovo with the extended warranty and damage protection is a great value; since you can get one now with Windows 7 (so that there is not an OS support issue), I would not buy anything else. My prior experience with other manufacturers' tech support has never matched up to the Lenovo service.

As far as physical durability and comfort go, I have never had a laptop I liked as well as this tablet. The keyboard is very good (and I generally use an ergonomic keyboard at my desk).

Good luck.

T. B. Patterson, Jr. ("Brownie"), South Carolina