

Anyone using just a laptop in their office?

Having problems with my 5 year old PC which I discussed in a previous thread. I have a Samsung laptop with Windows 7 that I am thinking of using as my primary computer in the office. Before I start transferring everything off the PC to the laptop I thought I'd ask the collective for their thoughts. I've used nothing but a laptop at home for years and like it, so why not the office? I'm not the kind of person that marvels at having 3 monitors running at the same time on my desk. I'm a one task at a time kinda guy.

I have always used a laptop in my office. I have a Dell Studio running Windows 7 which I sometimes bring home and sometime take to the library. I would never have a desktop at this point.

John J. Genova

When I was a solo I ran my whole practice off a laptop, PC law and all.

When I hired a secretary I bought her a PC and networked them.

Now at my current boutique we are large enough so we need an actual server, but I still use my laptop as my workstation. We are going to go to all laptops for attorneys as we retire people's current PCs. They are just more efficient.

Works great for me.

F. Joseph Gormley, Maryland

I have used nothing but a Lenovo laptop for the last 15 years and do not use a desktop at all

Walter D. James III, Texas

Only you can make that decision but I have to add, that 2/3 monitors at a time is to make that one task more efficient.

My wife who is an insurance adjuster has no desktop anywhere and her whole job is off that laptop.

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Just be prepared for when you forget your laptop at Denny's or the airport, you drop it, your kid spills milk all over it, or someone makes off with it.

Joseph D. Dang, California

I've been doing this for the past 7 years or so. I use a Dell Vostro laptop with a big screen (big for me, anyway) and have done since 2008.

My reasons for using a laptop are that I like the fact it's smaller than a desktop, I don't have to worry so much about cables, and there's a built in battery backup if the power goes out.

I do use a server to hold all my data, and the server is backed up with SugarSynch (which synchs to my computer at home, and which is accessible via my Android tablet and phone) as well as Mozy. Overall the arrangement works very well.

Russ Gray, Utah

I use just a laptop, but it's connected to a 32-inch monitor and full-size wireless keyboard when I'm using it in my (home) office.

Karen Fetter, Freelance Paralegal, South Carolina

I have always used just my laptop. It makes it easy for me to work at home if I want to (instead of coming to the office on the weekend) or need to (snowed in or no electricity at the office). I have a Lenovo running Windows 7 and I've never felt that I was missing anything.

Susan L. Beecher, Washington

They still make "desktop" computers? I doubt they will ten years from now, and I can't think of a single reason to invest in one today.

Tony LaCroix, Missouri

Ditto here. I haven't had a desktop in I can't remember how long. I've had several different laptops but my favorites have been my IBM and then Lenovo Thinkpads.

Laura H. Kosloff

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Fine me a laptop with a Xeon quadcore 3.6Ghz processor, and 16gb of ram.

Oh you don't need that right? Try running Premiere and Photoshop CS5 on a laptop.

A laptop will never, ever be as fast as a desktop at a reasonable price and size.

Joseph D. Dang

Joseph, exactly. Try running 3d rendering or video editing software on a laptop. Not to mention the productivity benefits of two or three large monitors. Oh, and so what if I want to play some Borderlands once in a while.

Jake C. Eisenstein, Colorado

On the video editing software I agree - on the monitors, not so much. I run a laptop that sits on a docking station when I am in the office, and feeds the video to two very large monitors. They help productivity immensely, agreed. But they are not a point of distinction between laptops and PCs.

F. Joseph Gormley

Well, in the sense that they are a more permanent fixture on your desk's top, they are. I'm assuming you don't fold up the monitors and take them home with you at night.

Jake C. Eisenstein

For the last 3 years, I've been running an HP Pavilion laptop w/ Windows 7. When I'm in the office, I hook up the laptop to an AC adapter and run a full size monitor and keyboard from it. When I leave the office, my office goes with me. I wouldn't go back to a desktop PC.

Rod Klafehn, New York

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Like everybody else, just a laptop, and it's always been that way. Originally it was because I only had a laptop; now I can't imagine why I'd need a desktop.

Lisa Babcock, Michigan

I can't believe I wrote "fine" instead of "find."

But yeah, same difference.

Joseph D. Dang

If you go into BestBuy or Staples I think you'll see five laptops on display for every desktop PC. I think the reason is for most people desktops are not needed. They're less expensive probably, but take up more room. Nowadays for office use generally any laptop off the shelf is more than adequate for a law office. I'm looking now for a new PC for my new assistant who is starting next week, and who knows about light office cleaning but whom I won't ask to clean the bathroom, and what in the world do I need a laptop with 500 or 750 gb of storage? I'm trying to setup my assistant to use Office 365 and cloud services where ever I can; all the laptops are far, far too powerful for what my assistant will actually be doing. I agree with Joseph in so far as if you're doing video production and editing work or relaxing with MS Flight Simulator X you need a big box with big GPUs in SLI configuration and multi-threaded cores and a heatsink the size of your fist. But for office work it just doesn't make sense to go with a desktop anymore. Especially if the building goes on fire and you have to grab the PC and make a run for it.

Rick Bryan, New York

I use a Samsung laptop. Love the flexibility. I can take it and go if I need too. I can even take it to my tech guy, if he can't get to me.

Tonya Gi

Dual Monitors is a great reason to have a desktop.

Mark J. Astarita, New York

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Laptop only for me ever. Dell Inspiron. Love it. With advent of iPad/ smartphones accustomed to smaller screen. The only advantage to desktop for me was big screen. And can still do that with laptop if want.

Micah Guilfoil, Kentucky

I have a MacBook Air, no desktop at the office anymore (I used to have an iMac). I do have a desktop at home though it's mostly for the kiddos these days.

Kelly Phillips Erb

Thanks for all of the input! And Micah, you are right on point about the iPhone and iPad (I have both) making a laptop screen seem huge. I think over the next few weeks I am going to migrate all of my programs and documents on my PC over to the laptop and clear up some space on (and under!) my desk.

Kurt Valentine, Missouri

My office computer is a Lenovo T420s laptop running Windows 7. It's in a docking station that supports dual monitors. It's also possible to leave the lid open and have three monitors. If I wanted to, I could add a USB-to-DVI adapter and have four monitors.

Mike Phillips, North Carolina

I have used a laptop for years. Currently, I have an ASUS which I love. My daughter has my "old" ASUS (which is about 3 years old now) not that there was anything wrong with it, but because my husband (the IT guy) thought that I needed a new laptop so he bought me one as a gift. Prior to my "old" ASUS, I had an HP. It blew up. I have no problem running my usual office type stuff on it (Clio, Word, Adobe Acrobat), plus internet, and an MMORPG (Lord of the Rings Online). I would be hard pressed to trade out my laptop for a desk top at this point. My laptop does everything I ask of it, but the choice is a personal one. If you're happy using a laptop for everything and can find one that does what you want for a price you want to pay, go for it! If you find a desk top that meets everything you want, get that. My husband wouldn't switch to laptop if you paid him to do it, but it's his preference.

Morag Polaski, Just A Paralegal

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We have only laptops in my office. They are all Macs.

Macs rarely malfunction, and when they do, the folks at the genius bar in the Apple Store can almost invariably fix it.

When I had desktops, it was a pain in the neck to lug them in to the store, so I would put it off. Now I just go on line, make an appointment, tuck my computer under my arm, and take it in. I see no need for a desktop.

Joanne C. Fray, Massachusetts

Since I started working from home, I've gone with a laptop. At home I plug in an ergonomic keyboard, mouse and HD monitor (so I have a dual monitor setup). I don't travel often, but when I do, I just grab the laptop and go--no need to transfer files or even sync to the cloud. I used to have a 17" laptop but actually dropped down to a 15" screen when I bought my most recent laptop because the 17" was just a bear to lug around.

Some years ago I wrote a fairly lengthy piece in Technolawyer about why desktops were better if you didn't travel much, but the principal reasons I gave then--more bang for your buck on the desktop and cheaper components--are less true now, both because the prices on all computers and components have gotten lower and because these days most programs that lawyers use don't push the hardware capabilities of even fairly cheap computers.

Kevin W. Grierson, Virginia

I only work in a recliner with a Toshiba 17" Laptop. Have a couple of desktops for backups & emergency. Sometimes run projects on them, but do that on laptop keyboard using* KaVoom*! Software *KVM Switch* <<http://www.kavoom.biz/>>

ONCE YOU'RE PAPERLESS, MAY AS WELL BE DESKLESS.

John Page, Florida

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I started using a laptop as my only office computer back in 1993. I have had no problems or regrets. I currently use external keyboard and mouse and run 2 monitors when I am actually in the office. Right now I am at the local cafe/coffee shop and have all my files with me.

Randy Birch, Utah

One huge advantage to a desktop (actually, an under the desk full tower) that no one has mentioned yet is the capability to have multiple hard drives. I set up four drives in two mirrored RAIDs, with my OS on one and all my data and work on the other. This setup became important to me after I had experienced dual hard drive failures on my previous desktop twice in one year--each time cost me nearly a week to recover as much as possible, replace the hard drives, and reinstall everything plus my data (I had to use a carry-in servicer to get it done as quickly as possible). My laptop let me keep working (along with my USB backups), but I wanted an easier and less messy recovery. When one of the drives on my current system was reported by the RAID software to have failed, I was able to download the manufacturer test program, test, submit the data, get an RMA, "break" the RAID, remove the bad drive, ship it, get the replacement, install the new drive, restore the RAID, and resume "normal" operation, all without losing any functionality or time to reinstalling all of my OS and programs (the failed drive was part of the OS and programs RAID).

Although others report being able to do everything on a laptop, I find my desktop invaluable for briefing--my most recent large project was an appeal from an administrative decision to the court system. I think I counted sixty open documents at one point in the process, with most being online cases, but a lot of my own images of the transcript, prior pleadings, opposing counsel pleadings, and exhibits were in the mix, too. Using that approach would have been impossible with a laptop.

If you want to use a lot of peripherals (printers and scanners, for example), a desktop is much more practical, especially if you want to use USB connections. To be fair, you can make that work with a powered USB hub, too.

I also use my computers for editing and storing digital photos--the pictures would fill my laptop hard drive very quickly.

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

What is the approximate cost? What components would I need to purchase. Also, how did you go about installing the OS and applications - -was that all from scratch?

I have a Dell desktop and nothing more. I rotate three Iomega portable drives for backup of data, but that does nothing for the applications and all of their updates.

Curtis D. Drew, Arizona

Yup. I have 2 Terabytes on my main and that's filling up.

I edit photos and video clips on there. But that's not work related I see, but the question was, why would anyone want a desktop computer.

Another thing, is my computer impatience. I'm so used to fast computers that my top of the line Retina MBP with the bigger processor is slow to me. Not to mention the full width keyboard and mouse I love (although that could be replicated on a desk as well).

I've contemplated running my office on my Mac, with a monitor, kb/m on my desk at work when I bring the laptop in. That was when I was toying with Daylite. But I'm not going down that path anymore.

But the biggest thing is that laptops just aren't fast enough for my daily use. They're just too slow. Even the fast ones.

Joseph D. Dang

The cost varies by what you choose; I built mine from components I ordered from Newegg.com after I had tried to configure what I wanted through Lenovo and HP (and I spent a lot because I wanted a fast computer with lots of RAM and lots of storage and four monitors, so two video cards with dual outputs). If you want to set up a mirrored system, the minimum is two hard drives; for a dual mirrored system, it takes four. Almost any tower will support four hard drives, but your motherboard has to have sufficient connections (I think most current motherboards will support four or more eSATA drives now); I have seen really good prices on one and two terabyte drives lately. If you wanted to build a new computer from scratch, the minimums are a motherboard, a CPU, RAM, a video card, four hard drives, a DVD or Blu-Ray burner, a case, a floppy drive (if you want), and a card reader (optional)--look at Newegg.com to find pricing for those components,

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or any others. You are in a large enough town that you could find a local computer repair place that also builds to order.

I honestly do not remember whether you can mirror from an established hard drive without destroying/reformatting/overwriting the one already filled--my RAID is software-created under Windows 7 and I installed after creating the RAID setup (but I think that was required for the Windows 7 array) on my newly-built system at the time. If you were asking whether I had to reinstall the OS and applications after I lost one of the RAID drives, the answer is "no"--I was able to replace the bad drive and rebuild the RAID from the drive that remained.

While I know you can copy all of your system disk, you cannot just copy it and import that copy into a new drive if your operating system drive goes bad; I believe there are backups that will mirror the drive and let you do that, but I have never relied on such a backup. I have the impression that it is safer and easier to create your registry by installation than by restoring (we have people on this list with more expertise than I in using the right backup systems).

I built my office computer two-and-a-half years ago--I got a CPU that has been abandoned for a different architecture, a motherboard that is no longer sold in the US (or maybe anywhere), and so on--I bought the hottest CPU I could get and the motherboard that had just set an overclocking record. So I bought bleeding-edge hardware--you don't have to do that to get a reliable system with redundancy built into it.

Good luck. If you have other questions I would be glad to take a shot at them (but now you know some of my limitations!).

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

I use only a laptop (as well as a netbook for portability). Key is to a) make sure that you have the insurance rider on your homeowners insurance to cover loss/theft of laptop and b) make sure you back up back up back up....I back up my entire computer to a secured position (to the Cloud), have a separate backup of my outlook and have a hard back up (a portable harddrive). Belts, suspenders -- the whole works.

Karel Karpe

I bought a low priced Toshiba at Best Buy yesterday for my assistant starting next week. Even at \$279, it had 4gb of ram, 320gb hard drive, a respectable AMD processor, and a 17 inch screen. So more than adequate. Windows 8 is somewhat annoying to work with. I spent the day downloading

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and installing printer software and drivers, the stamps.com and Dymo twin turbo software and drivers, and of course the damn SnapScan software and drivers did not work out of the box. Typically it's a four plus hour ordeal to get the snapscan working right. The product is great, but their proprietary drivers and ridiculous Organizer are horrible. The website says the latest drivers are working for Windows 8, but they're not for me, so far.

Rick Bryan

Oh, dear, TB. "Mr. Valentine" will be impossible to live with now.

Kurt, I started out with a laptop and had that as my one-and-only until just a few years ago. The drawback that comes to mind is that, if your one-and-only crashes, you have no alternative but to (ack) write on clay tablets. But your upgrade can be your primary, and your upgraded can become your secondary.

Save everything in a couple of places. I backed up to diskettes, yeah really, in the early 90s. One for each client. Got fancy later and used disks, one for each client, stowed in the client's folder. Now I have as many external hard drives as an octopus can manage. I kept Ron's, I had two already, so I backup client and research and financial information to 2 externals. In case of zombie apocalypse, I have several others that I can use to stash secret information all over the planet.

This multi-drive capability isn't limited to desktops. I can do the same with my itty netbook -- take it to a client meeting, back it up to other media or to the externals.

By the way and speaking of taking it with you, I couldn't have done this without my laptop in my, well, lap: My client, Wife 3, and I went to mando mediation with a pathological husband. He had married two other women, and was courting a fourth, using the same now-standardized blitz of romance and financial lies. I represented #3. I'm a fast typist, and I had outline format set for the meeting. With the laptop in my lap, I was able to maintain eye contact, ask and answer, fully participate without seeming distracted. I was able to catch him in numerous obfuscations and flat-out lies by scrolling back to the last time he spoke about this issue or that. "Well, I'm confused. A while ago, you said, 'This and that,' and now you're saying 'that and something else'. So which is incorrect?" He does not like me anymore.

I copied that informal transcript into my client's file on each of my backup external drives.

If/when I buy another laptop, I will copy all that client info onto its HD and use it as without a hitch when I have an out-of-office meeting.

C.J. Stevens, Montana
