Today is Veteran’s Day – a holiday that is celebrated in many parts of the World, often using other names such as Armistice Day, Remembrance Day, and Armed Forces Day. Some choose to celebrate when the WW1 treaty was signed, while others, like us, celebrate when the hostilities stopped. Wearing red poppies has become traditional with these holidays because of the popular WW1 poem, “In Flanders Fields”.

Our Holiday was started in 1919 as a proclamation by President Wilson to remember those who fought in WW1. November 11th was chosen because a temporary halt to “the Great War” started on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918. The treaty wasn’t signed until June 1919.

By June 1926, when Congress passed a resolution concerning an annual Armistice Day proclamation, 27 States had made it a legal holiday. In May 1938, it became a legal; Federal Holiday.

Then we had WWII and later the Korean War. In 1954 President Eisenhower signed a bill changing the name to Veterans Day so the holiday could honor veterans from all wars.

In 1968 Congress passed the Uniform Holidays Bill that ensured four 3-day weekends for Federal employees by moving some holidays to specific Mondays. Veterans Day was set on the third Monday in October. This was not a popular move and many states resisted it. Because the November 11th date had historical and patriotic meaning to many Americans, a new law, Signed by President Ford, moved it back to a set date.

Starting in 1978, Veteran’s Day was celebrated on November 11th to honor all veterans, living or dead, who served their country in war or peace. We have a second holiday for veterans. To clarify the difference, Memorial Day (the last Monday in May) honors those who died from injuries they received in battle.

What got me started on this subject?

Besides the date, I received an email from Lynn Woolsey concerning the Veterans History Project created in 2000 to preserve the stories of veterans. The last WW1 vet, Frank Buckles, died in February this year. Many of the WWII vets are also deceased.

Lynn’s office is actively working to bring the History Project to Sonoma and Marin Counties. In Sonoma they are coordinating with the Pacific Coast Air Museum to capture the stories on film. If you or someone you know would like to share a story, contact Jennifer Dawes in Lynn’s Sonoma office. She can be reached at (707) 542-7182 or Jennifer.Dawes@mail.house.gov.

Uncle Bob, Dad’s youngest brother, had quite a story. He was the only one in our family to be wounded. He was also too young to enlist, but a couple of his on leave brothers got him in. I don’t know how they did it. My aunt said he was a little wild and it was either that or jail. I know all about him being wounded, but Dad never talked about getting him in.

My Mom was a telephone operator before she had me and started following my Dad around the US. She had a vivid memory of the day Pearl Harbor was bombed. I wonder if they would be interested in it?

There is another project to connect faces with the names on the Vietnam Memorial. I ran across it while checking my history facts on Veterans Day. I didn’t copy the URL, but if you are interested you can Google it.

Last September, while I was in Washington DC, I visited the Holocaust Museum. The stories they told were touching. We need to preserve our own stories and remember those who spent part of their lives keeping us free.

My mission to get this out earlier in the month failed. I’ll try to do better in December.

—Beth
Steve Jobs' bio may break records, but other tech legends, including one referred to as "an instrument of God," have had their stories told.

Biographies come in two flavors: authorized and unauthorized. Authorized bios are often part of the carefully managed package that is a public figure. They often have tasteful, sedate covers and are packed with facts and figures. They also often lack the allure of their flashier, more seductive unauthorized siblings.

Steve Jobs, which was released today, is a hybrid. There's the cover, a somber photo meant to subtly recall the origin of the word "icon," those straightforward, long-faced depictions of Byzantine and Orthodox Christian saints. Inside, however, is one of those wild tell-alls, complete with an illegitimate birth, drug use, and unmasked ambition. And it's told by the subject himself.

Having received a diagnosis of pancreatic cancer and a million retellings of his life by everyone but him, Apple founder Steve Jobs approached Walter Isaacson, the president of D.C. think tank the Aspen Institute, about taking a long walk with him. That's where Jobs proposed that Isaacson write his biography. "I had recently published one on Benjamin Franklin and was writing one about Albert Einstein, and my initial reaction was to wonder, half jokingly, whether he saw himself as the natural successor in that sequence," Isaacson wrote in an essay in Time magazine. "His passions, demons, desires, artistry, devilry and obsession for control were integrally connected to his approach to business, so I decided to try to write his tale as a case study in creativity."

Jobs' biography may break records as the most popular tech biography of all-time, but it's not the only one by far. As we celebrate the life of Steve Jobs, we also take a look at some of the other tech legends that have graced book covers, including one exec who's employee calls him "an instrument of God."

Steve Jobs

Even though the bio was just released today, many might feel as though they've already read it. Unlike an Apple launch, details, not rumors, have been circulating for weeks. But at nearly 700 pages, there's still plenty to tell. Which is exactly how Jobs wanted it. When Isaacson asked Jobs why he'd chosen him as his biographer, he said, "I think you're good at getting people to talk." Jobs left Isaacson to it, his only review or input was regarding the cover art. When Jobs saw and disliked a proposed cover image, he asked to take over the process. The result is the Helvetica-headlined black-and-white photo of him by graphic designer turned photographer Albert Watson. It might seem like the most minor of concerns regarding a biography, but a few chapters into Steve Jobs, when talking about Apple packaging, Jobs says, "When you open the box...we want that tactile experience to set the tone for how you perceive the product."

iWoz

Before Isaacson's book was named Steve Jobs it was going to be called iSteve. The title was still up for grabs since the other Steve who had founded Apple went with his nickname for his bio, iWoz. Steve Wozniak's tone in the book is simple, honest, and open. It details Woz's recollections of his father, a Lockheed engineer, who, at one point, took weeks and weeks to teach him about atoms at a patient, basic level so that a seven-year-old could comprehend the complexities of a resistor. The tales of the early days of Apple and Silicon Valley feel like they've been told over dinner, because they were to co-author Gina Smith at Pearl's in San Francisco and the nearby Hick'ry Pit. On the cover, former Apple chief evangelist Guy Kawasaki says: "Every engineer—and certainly every engineering student—should read this..."
book… It is, in a nutshell, the engineer's manifesto. The words are undoubtedly the highest praise to Woz, who talks about his father teaching him to be an "engineer's engineer:" "I so clearly remember him telling me that engineering was the highest level of importance you could reach in the world, that someone who could make electrical devices that do something good for people takes society to a new level."

**One Click**

Jeff Bezos’ biography also releases this week. Not only is it being overshadowed in the media, but on Bezos’ own site, Amazon. The Jobs bio is number one. One Click is in 847th place. Richard Brandt, who wrote The Google Guys about Sergey Brin and Larry Page, is the author. But we’re thinking for bios of the Google guys and the man who brought us one-click, we might want to instead read something written by infamous Google engineer Steve Yegge who’s worked for them all and has a way with words. Yegge misused the very product he was slamming, Google+, and made what was supposed to be an internal Google post public. He uses a good portion of his 4,500-word "Stevey's Google Platforms Rant" to talk about Bezos, the "Dread Pirate" who "makes ordinary control freaks look like stoned hippies" and "most definitely does not give a shit about your day." In a follow-up public (this time on-purpose) post last week, Yegge forewent a traditional mea culpa and instead said he was going to start sharing some Amazon stories to “paint a more balanced picture,” starting with “Amazon War Story #1: Jeff Bezos.”

**Ghost in the Wires**

The tale of a convicted hacker, cracker, and phreaker who spent three years on the lam and was believed by the law to be able to "start a nuclear war by whistling into a pay phone" isn’t a run-of-the-mill autobiography. It’s the real-life story of Kevin Mitnick, who used Ghost in the Wires to set the record straight from the much-disputed book Takedown by John Markoff and Tsutomu Shimomura. Mitnick doesn’t deny his crimes, but he does provide context. The foreword is written by fellow phone phreak Wozniak while the book itself is co-written with William L. Simon. Simon collaborated with Mitnick previously on The Art of Deception and The Art of Intrusion, both of which revealed hacking techniques. His better-known work is another bio, iCon, an unauthorized telling of Jobs’ life story. iCon was met with such hostility by Jobs that all books by its publisher John Wiley & Sons, including its tech-filled “For Dummies” series were banned in Apple stores.

**Inside Intel**

In 1998, when Tim Jackson wrote a biography of Intel co-founder Andy Grove entitled Inside Intel, the company was grabbing headlines for chip speed, antitrust allegations, and Grove’s innovation-focused management style. Grove had outlined his approach himself in the book Only the Paranoid Survive: "Business success contains the seeds of its own destruction… Success breeds complacency. Complacency breeds failure. Only the paranoid survive." Jackson was no stranger to running a company himself, starting up online auction service QXL.com a year after the book was published. Whether he culled business tips from Grove is unknown, but someone who did was Jobs. In Fortune, Grove recalled pulling Jobs aside for an impromptu lecture after an outburst: "You’re incredibly arrogant. You don’t know what you don’t know." His response was, ‘Teach me. Tell me what I should know.’

**Mark Zuckerberg**

Creator of Facebook

The Accidental Billionaires (basis for the movie The Social Network) isn’t the
most graphic telling of Mark Zuckerberg’s story. That distinction goes to the comic book Mark Zuckerberg: Creator of Facebook. It was written by freelance journalist Jerome Maida and penciled by Sal Field, and sold out in days. A new edition with expanded content will be coming out in January. Publisher Bluewater Productions says the comic book splits the difference between the Zuckerberg that donated $100 million to public schools in Newark and “the cold-blooded businessman who walks over people to get what he wants.”

The Difference Between God and Larry Ellison

The title The Difference Between God and Larry Ellison and its subtitle/punch line “God Doesn’t Think He’s Larry Ellison” sounds like it would fall under the camp of unauthorized biography. It’s actually an authorized retelling of the Oracle founder’s life. Author Mike Wilson covers Ellison’s obsession to compete with Bill Gates and the devotion of former employee Rick Bennett, who called Ellison “an instrument of God,” “an important figure in the life and mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints,” and “nontrivially involved in a full one third of the mission of Mormonism” because Oracle’s database software helps Mormons keep track of those they baptized posthumously.

How to Buy a Point-and-Shoot Digital Camera

By PJ Jacobowitz
May 4, 2011

By far the largest segment of the digital camera market, point-and-shoot models are compact, easy to use, and typically take great pictures with minimal effort. You simply press the shutter button, and the camera automatically adjusts shutter speed, aperture, focus, and light sensitivity to capture a clear image with optimal color. Unlike digital SLRs, which offer larger image sensors, more manual control and interchangeable lenses, point-and-shoot cameras can slip into a pocket, and are often hundreds of dollars less expensive than their D-SLR counterparts.

Deciding to buy a point-and-shoot camera is the simple part, but with hundreds of models to choose from, selecting the best one for your needs and budget is no easy feat. Following our seven rules will help bring your perfect camera into focus.

Rule #1: Do your research. Read lots of reviews, and don’t buy based on name brand alone.

Big-name manufacturers like Canon, Nikon, Sony, and Panasonic have all produced top-notch compact cameras, but that doesn’t mean they don’t slip a lemon or two into their lineups every now and then. Even when a major manufacturer partners with another key industry player, such as Sony with prestigious lens manufacturer Carl Zeiss, or Panasonic with Leica, you can’t be assured that you’ll always get a top-notch camera. So read the reviews before settling on a particular model—the brand of camera you end up choosing might surprise you.

Rule #2: Megapixels mean less than sensor size.

Higher megapixel count doesn’t necessarily mean better pictures, it just means larger images. You’d be hard-pressed to find a recent-model camera for sale today with a resolution of less than 8 megapixels, and that’s enough to print up to 11-by-17-inch images. If you’re just making 4-by-6-inch prints or viewing your pictures online, megapixel count means even less. A better indicator of photo quality is the size of the camera’s image sensor. Here, bigger is definitely better. Image sensors range in size from 25mm² (surface area) for inexpensive point-and-shoot cameras, all the way up to 1,977mm² for high-end D-SLRs. (See this image for a side-by-side size comparison.) Our Editors’ Choice high-end pocket camera, the Canon PowerShot S95 looks...
like a run-of-the-mill pocket camera, but in its tiny body it houses an image sensor that's roughly twice as large as most cameras its size.

**Rule #3: Pay attention to must-have features.**

Image stabilization, which helps reduce the blur that can come from shaky hands, is an important feature to have. If a camera has digital image stabilization, that's fine, but it should have optical or sensor-shift stabilization as well. Virtually all modern cameras include face-detection technology, which finds and focuses on faces in the frame and improves the image's overall composition and quality by optimizing the color and white balance. Just make sure you turn it on before you shoot portraits or group photos. Optical zoom specs are also important, especially if you plan on taking a lot of landscape photos. The benefits of optical zoom are obvious: The higher the zoom level, the closer you can get to your subject. In this class you're likely to get a 3x or a 5x zoom lens, but we've seen compact models that offer up to 10x. And if you're willing to carry a slightly larger camera, a superzoom camera can provide up to 18x, like the still-pocketable Nikon Coolpix S9100. Now, more about the size of your compact camera...

**Rule #4: Size matters, but not for everyone.**

One of the major benefits of a point-and-shoot camera is its small size, but thinner cameras are typically more expensive and sometimes sacrifice features. Unless you plan to keep your camera in a jeans pocket, there's no need to spend a premium on a super-slim camera. With a larger camera, it will still fit in a jacket pocket, but you'll likely get a bigger LCD, a longer zoom lens, and easier-to-manipulate controls, especially if you have larger hands and fingers.

**Rule #5: Don't overlook the display.**

Pretty much all pocket cameras have abandoned traditional viewfinders in favor of LCDs for framing your shots. So it's important to focus on getting the best LCD you can find. For point-and-shoot cameras, LCD sizes start at 2.5 inches and go all the way up to 3.5 inches, but there aren't many 3.5-inchers out there, and the ones we've seen are typically on the expensive side. Currently, the sweet spot for screen size is 2.7 or 3 inches. Resolution on the LCD is measured in dots—the higher the number of dots, the more detail you'll see, and the resolution is independent of the display's physical size. A decent camera LCD should have at least 230,000 dots. On the top end, the $500 Olympus XZ-1 offers an incredibly sharp 3-inch display packed with 610k dots—it's also OLED, rather than standard LCD, which means higher image contrast and less motion blur as images move across the screen.

Display contrast is important too; LCDs that are too bright without equally high contrast will make images appear washed out, and they might also be difficult to see in direct sunlight. Touch screens are making their way onto more and more compact cameras, but before you go that route, make sure the on-screen controls are easy to use. And beware: Touch-screen cameras are notorious power hogs. If long battery life is important to you, skip the touch screen. If you can, it's always best to get your (eyes and) hands on the camera to check out the screen and the controls before you buy it. A camera like the Canon PowerShot Elph 300 HS is very solid overall, but its tiny buttons could make it challenging to operate if you have large fingers.

**Rule #6: Go for HD Video.**

In addition to still images, almost all of today's point-and-shoot cameras can capture standard-definition video (640 by 480 at 30 frames per second). Models that shoot high-definition video are starting to become commonplace and affordable, with prices starting as low as $150. The resolution and frame rate of the HD video recorded by low-end or midrange point-and-shoot cameras is typically 1,280 by 720 pixels at 30 progressive frames per second (720p30). For most casual users, this is sufficient, especially if you're just sharing your footage on Facebook, YouTube, or other online services. You can find several pocket cameras that capture video in full 1080p HD, but it's a high-end feature that will likely cost you a little more. The $400 Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS3 gives you the option to record in 1080p at various bitrates. Also, if you want to watch your captured videos (or even view a still-image slideshow) on your HDTV, consider a camera with an integrated HDMI connector.

**Rule #7: Save a bundle on a great camera—from last year.**

While camera innovation often advances at a similar pace to that of computers and cell phones, those products become obsolete at a much faster clip. If a camera took great pictures last year, it will
take great pictures now. You might not get some of the cutting-edge features you'd get with a brand-new model, but you can save a lot. Some of our favorite cameras from last year, such as the Editors' Choice Panasonic Lumix DMC-TS2 and the Canon PowerShot SX210 are still widely available, but they're selling for as much as $100 below their original list prices.

Before you hit your local electronics store or hit the Buy button, read our point-and-shoot camera reviews or compare recently reviewed models side by side.

Not everyone needs a high-end digital compact or interchangeable-lens camera. If you're looking for a pocket camera, but are on a tight budget, you'll have to do a little bit of research to avoid spending your hard-earned dollars on a camera that doesn't deliver in the image-quality department. We tested eight affordable cameras to separate the wheat from the chaff. The good news is that you don't need to spend a fortune to get a camera that meets your needs.

Make no mistake, you'll have to make some feature and image-quality sacrifices in this price range. You won't find long zoom lenses, 1080p video recording, GPS, 3D image capture, or outstanding low-light performance here. Most models include smaller LCD screens, although the Nikon Coolpix L24 and Kodak EasyShare C1530 hit the very-respectable 3-inch mark. Overall, if you're willing to prioritize what's most important when it comes to features and performance, you can find a camera that will keep your snapping away with satisfaction.

Our favorite of the bunch, not surprisingly, was the most expensive. The $130 Panasonic Lumix DMC-S3 earned our Editors' Choice award thanks to a wide-angle zoom lens, rechargeable battery, and 720p HD video recording. But the Canon PowerShot A800 and the Samsung ES80 offer surprisingly good images for their under-$100 price tags.

To find the best budget camera for you, read our reviews (linked below) or compare these models side by side. Still need buying advice? Check out our How to Buy a Point-and-Shoot Digital Camera or our Digital Camera Product Guide for more reviews and tips.

8 Compact Digital Cameras Under $130
By Jim Fisher
October 14, 2011

Budget Cameras Featured in this Roundup:

Smart Computing Tip Of The Day
Smart Computing Magazine sends these tips via e mail. They also have them archived on their website:
www.smartcomputing.com

Note: PCMagazine uses a five dot rating system. They show all five dots and color in the score. My notation is the number of dots colored in.

Canon PowerShot A800
3 dots
$89.99 list
This pocket camera comes with compromises, but a $90 price tag and dead-simple operation help balance the Canon PowerShot A800's lack of optical image stabilization and HD-video capture.

Fujifilm FinePix AV200
3 dots
$89.95 direct
The Fujifilm FinePix AV200 is an inexpensive camera that is able to capture sharp images and 720p HD movies, but is held back by slow performance and noisy photos.

General Electric J1470S
4 dots
$119.99 direct
The General Electric J1470S is inexpensive and looks it, but its image prowess and general performance are impressive for a $120 point-and-shoot camera.
**Kodak EasyShare C1530**

2 ½ dots

$79.95 direct

The Kodak EasyShare C1530 packs a large LCD and delivers sharp images at a very modest price, but its low-light performance and video capabilities leave a lot to be desired.

**Nikon Coolpix L24**

2 dots

$119.95 direct

Nikon's Coolpix L24 sets itself apart from other budget cameras by including a big 3-inch LCD, but it falls short on image quality.

**Olympus T-100**

2 dots

$89.99 list

Olympus's T-100 is a compact budget camera that is capable of capturing some pretty sharp images. Unfortunately, it is hindered by high image noise, slow performance, and a short zoom range.

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**Smart Computing Quick Tip**

**Secrets for Succeeding in Common Tasks**

**Printers**

**Question:** I'm shopping for a new ink printer. Is it better to buy an ink printer that uses lots of tiny cartridges, or should I stick with a three-tank design or even go with a single integrated color tank?

**Answer:** Ink printers normally rely on the industry-standard CMYK (cyan, magenta, yellow, and black) color palette, but these color resources are provided several different ways. Some single-cartridge designs put the colors in a single cartridge (black is left in a separate cartridge), while other designs spread out the colors among three different cartridges (black is a fourth separate cartridge). A more recent development uses two different shades of each color.

Because nobody uses color the same way, it's almost always better to have more cartridges rather than fewer. Ink level monitoring will tell you which colors are low, so it's an easy matter to buy only those replacement cartridges as the need arises.

This approach to selecting a printer doesn't make the ink any less expensive overall, but it helps you by letting you buy only what ink you need when you need it.

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**Smart Computing Tip Of The Day**

**Print Sizes**

When shopping for a new digital camera, take note of how many megapixels the camera has, or, more importantly, the largest size print that can be made from the camera. More megapixels don't necessarily mean you'll get better pictures, but a camera's megapixel count does affect how large you can print an image. If you don't plan on making large prints, then getting a camera with extra megapixels will be a waste of money and storage space (more megapixels mean larger file sizes, which will quickly fill up your memory card). To determine how many megapixels you need, figure out how large you want to print your images. The rule of thumb is to multiply the dimensions (in inches) of the print you'd like to make by either 200ppi (pixels per inch) or 300ppi. The ppi indicates the print resolution of the image, and either 200ppi or 300ppi will produce good results. To make an 8x10 print at 200ppi, you'll need a file that measures 1,600 x 2,000 pixels or a 3.2MP camera (1,600 x 2,000 = 3,200,000). Using the same math, the ideal camera resolution for an 8x10 print at 300ppi is 7.2MP.

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**Panasonic Lumix DMC-S3**

4 dots & editors choice

$129.99 direct

The Panasonic Lumix DMC-S3 is a capable compact camera with a high-quality LCD, rechargeable battery, and a wide-angle 4x zoom lens. It doesn't produce the sharpest images in its class but it's the one of the best cameras you'll find for $130.

**Samsung ES80**

3 dots

$99.99 list

The Samsung ES80 is capable of producing sharp images in bright light, and unlike most cameras in its price range features a 5x zoom lens. But its low-light performance leaves much to be desired.
Software on EBay is often deeply discounted and very lucrative. The problem is that those deep discounts sometimes indicate issues to be wary of.

**Q - I'd like to purchase another legal copy of Windows XP at a discount. Looking at EBay seems a good idea but how do I know if they are actual Genuine ones? Do I just have to take their word for it?**

My question is...is it safe to purchase via Ebay and would you recommend it or not?

**A - It is possible to safely purchase software on EBay. I've done it.**

It's also possible to end up with unusable or illegal software, or simply get scammed out of your money.

In exchange for the money you're saving, you need to invest a little time.

The key to successful purchasing on EBay is, in my opinion, spending time carefully reading and understanding the description of the product you are considering purchasing, and carefully reading and understanding the feedback left for the seller you’re considering purchasing from.

I did a quick search for "Windows XP" on EBay for this article.

All the versions I found were "OEM", meaning that they were originally intended to be sold with a new computer by a manufacturer such as Dell, HP or others. In fact, if you look at the photos of the Windows XP product, you can see that they’re shrink-wrapped envelopes that look very similar to the exact same envelopes that come with many OEM machines. If the operating system is pre-installed, many people take the shrink wrapped media and sell them on EBay.

I would avoid OEM versions of Windows on EBay for several reasons:

The seller is likely in violation of the operating system license, as the OEM disks are for sale with a new computer only, and may only be installed on that one computer. Some vendors try to get around this restriction by including some piece of hardware with your purchase that may or may even not be working or useful. (I was surprised at how blatant this was.) Thereby they've not sold Windows XP alone, but rather "with non-peripheral hardware" which they believe complies with the rules.

If these are in fact OEM disks from pre-installed systems, the product key is, presumably, already in use on those systems. You run the real risk of not being able to activate Windows once you install it, as the activation process checks.

The OEM version might have differences and/or customizations specifically for the vendor it was originally intended for. It may not work completely on your hardware.

While it's conceivable that some of the OEM versions of Windows XP might be legitimate, the reselling of OEM versions is just too risky for my blood. I would avoid it, period.

Make sure you read the product descriptions carefully. Make sure you know exactly what it is you're purchasing. Unlike a standard retailer, you often have little recourse if the product isn't what you expected. Read the shipping and return policies as well and make absolutely certain that they're to your liking.

And if they seem to be playing games (like shipping unnecessary hardware), to be dancing around some rules, walk away.

**Which leads us nicely into feedback.**

Almost all feedback on EBay seems to be positive, which in my mind negates some of its value - it's hard to believe that every seller, or every transaction is perfect. That being said, there are a few things to watch for in evaluating the feedback logged against a seller you're considering doing business with:

Make sure that you're looking at "Feedback as a seller". The total feedback score appears to include both selling and buying transactions, so it's easy to get what looks to be a stellar reputation simply buying things. One of the Windows XP sellers I located had lots of positive feedback, but none as having sold anything. That makes this person look good, but tells you nothing about how...
Looking for tablets is worth your money? Let's look at the key factors you need to consider when shopping for a tablet:

First Off: Do You Even Need a Tablet?

Simply put, tablets aren't really filling any true need right now—they are neither replacements for full-fledged computers nor smartphones. A tablet is a touch-screen media device that is actually most similar to a very advanced portable media player—or an MP3 player with a much larger screen. Yes, many of them have mobile service features, but currently none of them make phone calls via a traditional mobile provider. And while you can tackle productivity tasks on a tablet, you won't get a desktop-grade operating system, like you'll find on a PC. Tablets are basically lightweight versions of laptops in every sense—they weigh less, and they're lighter on features. Plus, since we're talking about slate tablets here, you won't get a hardware keyboard. So if you're planning on doing any heavy-duty text input, you'll want to pick up a Bluetooth add-on keyboard. Still, the advantage tablets offer over laptops is an easy, portable way to check email, browse the Web, video chat, consume media, and play games, but with a much bigger screen with more real estate than your smartphone can provide.

The bottom line is, you probably don't need one, but if you want a tablet, read on.

Pick an Operating System

Whether you opt for an Apple iPad or one of many Android models, choosing the right tablet isn't necessarily a snap. Here's what you need to know before you hit the store.

It's difficult to remember a time before tablets, but it's been a mere 18 months since the first Apple iPad was released, and the current tablet market was born. Since then, we've seen scores of manufacturers trying to snag a slice of the tablet pie, which so far, has been dominated by Apple, who is now on its second iPad iteration. According to a study by Strategy Analytics, of the 7.5 million tablets that shipped during the second quarter, 80 percent were iPads, well ahead of those from rivals like Motorola, Samsung, RIM, Asus, and HTC.

That's not stopping others from trying. And the result so far has been a float of difficult-to-distinguish tablets at various price points, performance capabilities, and feature sets. There hasn't really been another standout. The latest big name to throw its hat in the already-crowded tablet ring: Amazon. The company's Android-based Kindle Fire won't be available until mid-November, but it comes at a very pleasing $199—a price low that no quality tablet has been able to yet manage. It will be interesting to see what Amazon's entry means for both the iPad and the non-Apple tablet market share.

So which of the plethora of deceivingly similar-looking tablets is worth your money? Let's look at the key factors you need to consider when shopping for a tablet:

First Off: Do You Even Need a Tablet?

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The bottom line is, you probably don't need one, but if you want a tablet, read on.

Pick an Operating System
Apple's iOS is the mobile platform used by the iPad, as well as the iPhone and iPod touch. On the iPad, iOS works very similarly to the way it does on the iPhone, with certain tweaks made here and there to take advantage of the tablet's larger 9.7-inch screen. The built-in iPod app on the iPad, for instance, has an extra side menu for additional navigation options that wouldn't fit on the iPhone's screen. Generally speaking, the great strength of Apple's iOS is twofold: it's incredibly intuitive, and the wide selection of iPad apps—more than 90,000 tablet-specific titles at the time of this writing—work uniformly well with very few exceptions.

Google's mobile OS, Android, is a more complicated story. Besides having your choice of hardware from several manufacturers, there are a few iterations of Android floating around right now, but only one—Android 3.0, Honeycomb—is designed specifically for tablets. This year, we've seen plenty of Honeycomb tablets, but some manufacturers are still making tablets with previous versions of Android that are meant for phones with much smaller screens, which doesn't provide the best tablet experience. Also, some Android tablets don't include access to the Android Market on the device, which means you have to sideload apps, which is less than ideal.

Google's forthcoming Android revision, Ice Cream Sandwich, promises to merge Gingerbread (the phone OS) with Honeycomb (the tablet OS), for a single operating system for all Android devices. Ice Cream Sandwich is expected soon (this October or November), but if you're buying an Android tablet today, you want a Honeycomb tablet with the Android Market preloaded. The good news is that we're hearing from various tablet manufacturers that Honeycomb tablets will be upgradeable to Ice Cream Sandwich when the OS is released.

Android 3.0 has its benefits, including configurability, an excellent notification system, Adobe Flash support, and seamless integration with Google applications like Gmail, Google Maps, and Google Talk for video chat. For more, check out our Honeycomb review.

Lastly, there's RIM's QNX operating system, which runs on the company's BlackBerry PlayBook. Despite having a top-notch user interface with some promising features, like tight integration with BlackBerry smartphones, the PlayBook was released before it was ready, and five months later is still missing major features, like native email support. Until RIM gets its act together on the PlayBook, we can't recommend the tablet or the OS.

Ultimately, the operating system you choose will largely depend on your comfortability and personal preference. If you're unsure, get some hands-on time with a few tablets before you commit to one.

What About Apps?

Android lacks a strong selection of apps. It's tough to say exactly how many tablet-optimized Android apps are available, but it's in the low hundreds, and there are even fewer BlackBerry PlayBook apps than that. If you want lots of apps for your tablet, right now, nothing out there beats the iPad with its 90,000+ apps designed specifically for the tablet. Apple's App Store is well-curated and offers a deep selection—no competitor can come close to claiming this right now, partially because apps made for Android tablets have to work across multiple screen sizes, while iPad apps are designed for a single tablet. It sounds simple, but the variation in size (and manufacturers) complicates things greatly. Eventually, one hopes, the other app stores will catch up to Apple, but if a wide range of compelling apps is your main priority, Apple is currently your best bet.

Screen Size and Storage

This consideration is a bit obvious, but size—both screen real estate and storage capacity—is important to consider. First things first: When you hear the term "10-inch tablet," this typically refers to the size of the screen, measured diagonally, and not the size of the tablet itself. Apple continues to offer the iPad in one size only (9.7-inch screen) and the BlackBerry PlayBook comes in a single 7-inch screen size, which RIM argues gives it the advantage of pocketability. Samsung, for one, wants you to have a choice, so it offers its Android Galaxy Tab tablets in multiple screen sizes (7, 8.9, and 10.1 inches).

The weight of a tablet is one definite advantage it has over a laptop—but let's be clear, at around 1.3 pounds (in the case of the iPad 2) it's not cell-phone light—even a 7-inch model. After you hold one on the subway for ten minutes, your hand will get tired. Setting it flat in your lap, rather than propped up on a stand, can also be a little awkward. And, again, a 10-inch tablet doesn't fit in many pockets.

As for storage, the more the better—all those
apps, when combined with a typical music, video, and photo library, can take up a lot of space. Right now storage tops out at 64GB of flash-based memory, with many of the quality tablets we've seen available in 16, 32, and 64GB varieties. Larger capacity models can get as expensive as full-featured laptops, especially when you factor in cellular service plans. (The top-end 64GB iPad with Verizon or AT&T wireless service will run you $830 plus a monthly fee.)

**Wi-Fi-Only vs. Cellular Models**

Many tablets come in a Wi-Fi-only model or with the option of always-on cellular service from a wireless provider. If you want to use your tablet to get online anywhere, you should opt for a model with a cell radio like the Verizon Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 or the AT&T Acer Iconia Tab A501. Of course, this adds to the device's price, and then you need to pay for cellular service. Generally, though, you can purchase data on a month-to-month basis, without signing a contract, and charges typically don't exceed $30 monthly, as long as you stay within data-usage limits.

Another way to get your tablet online: Use your 3G or 4G phone as a Wi-Fi hotspot for your tablet—this won't work with every phone/tablet combo, so you should check with the carriers before you buy in.

Finally, before you buy, head to your local electronics store to get hands-on time with some different tablets, so you can see which feels and works the best for you. And for the latest lab-tested tablet reviews, hit our Tablet Product Guide.

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### More Shopping for Bargains on the Internet

*By Steve Bass, Publisher and Self-appointed Chief Content Officer, TechBite
Stevebass(at)techbite.com subscribe at www.techbite.com
Author of a well read column, newsletter and blog plus many feature articles at PC World Magazine*

#### Such a Deal

Is your bargain-hunting urge quelled? I hope not: I have a bunch more sites to help you find bargain-priced products, coupon codes for discounts or free shipping, and tools to make bargain hunting easier.

Before you start reading, take a look at Cheapsim, a site dedicated to finding cheap deals on hundreds of items, and in dozens of categories. It's worth a look (and the owner, Max Levitte, is a TechBite freebie reader.)

#### Gimmie a Coupon Code

I couldn't tell you how many hours I've spent trying to find a discount code to use at a site's checkout page. I feel cheated if I know there's a discount to be had -- and I might be missing it.

When I get to a site's checkout page, my typical next move is to open a new browser window and Google the site's name and the words **promo code** or **discount code**. That, folks, is crazymaking. That's because at last count, a Google search will bring up roughly 2 million sites offering coupon codes.

A better way to work the system is by using a coupon code site **before** you start shopping. And here are some of the coupon code -- and daily deal -- sites I'm happiest with; you'll need to choose the few that fit your needs the best.

- One of the best coupon sites is RetailMeNot. It has spots for coupon codes as well as printable grocery coupons. (Thanks to Yehuda Katz, who's almost finished with the archives.)
- If you clip supermarket coupons, there are four sites that do a good job: Shortcuts, MyCoupons, CouponCabin, and CouponMom. And while it doesn't look very sexy, ConsumerNow has lots of useful coupon codes too. (Thanks to Vladimir T.)
- FatWallet has become a mega-site with more than just coupon codes. You'll find daily deals on eBay, Amazon, and lots of retailers.
- Offers does more than coupons, they have promotions and free trials. They also have an editorial team checking everything that's on the site, making it current and valid for users, and adding some good content.
- DealCatcher works all angles -- printable coupons, daily deals, and a forum to exchange coupons.
- Subscribers in Canada are always kvetching about being left out (rightfully so). Not today!
Redflagdeals's daily deals and coupons are (almost) exclusively for Canadians.

- SlickDeals, like the others, provides coupons and price deals, as well as a forum to kick around coupon stories.
- DealTaker supplies coupons for stores and grocery shopping, as well as free stuff and spots for free shipping.
- Deal of the Day has 30 pages of deals, including nationwide local deals.
- Woot has one product bargain a day, but they do have other Woot sites, including, Sellout, woot and Win.woot.

If you don't want to visit all these sites every day, try DealFan, an aggregator for many of the coupon code sites above.

How to Buy a Laptop
By Cisco Cheng
August 5, 2010

Shopping for a laptop, but completely baffled by the myriad options available on the market? We clear through the clutter to guide you to your perfect laptop.

Go online or walk into any store's electronics section to find a laptop and chances are you will feel paralyzed at the sheer variety of laptops available. Most shoppers have a general idea of what their laptop should look like and what they want in terms of features, but are often intimidated by their sheer number and baffling complexities of the laptops available, which have grown to include terms such as netbooks, and CULVs, and small business (as opposed to enterprise) laptops.

But don't lose heart. This buying guide will point you in the right direction, whether you're shopping for a tiny netbook or a massive media center, because your decision to buy what you thought was the perfectly configured laptop can suddenly be affected by unknown forces, such as a price changes. We're here to help you get back into the right mind-set, immediately spot the trends, and finally, bring home that perfect laptop for you.

Laptop Design is a Key Differentiator

Plastic is still the most commonly used material in laptop frames, and while inexpensive, manufacturers have managed to turn them into art forms.

The most common technique is a process called In-Mold Decoration (IMD)—a process made popular by HP, Toshiba, and Gateway—in which decorative patterns are infused between plastic layers. Textures and etched imprints will be big this year, as shiny plastics are on their way out.

In the end, though, plastics are often associated with cheap laptops. What you should be on the lookout for are designs that employ metal. The most common of those is aluminum, found in laptops such as the Apple MacBook Pro 13-inch (Core 2 Duo 2.4GHz), Asus U30Jc-1A, and HP Pavilion dm4-1063cl. They have a more luxurious look and can be made thinner than plastic. In fact, HP is moving its entire laptop line to metals this year, and Toshiba and Acer are already deploying a fleet of laptops with this fancy material. A metal such as magnesium alloy is more commonly found in business laptops that place a strong emphasis on durability (check out our business laptop buying guide). Carbon fiber is yet another attractive material, but is less used than aluminum and magnesium, as it is expensive to make. If metals aren't exotic enough for you, check out the Asus U33Jc-A1—a laptop that's made from bamboo.

Bigger Screen, Heavier Weight

Power Adapters For Laptops

Power adapters for laptops will offer your notebook PC some protection from spikes in power. You didn't have to think twice before plugging your desktop PC into a power conditioner or surge protector. But have you taken the same precautions with your laptop? Surge protectors ensure that the electrical current running to the device(s) attached to it doesn't exceed acceptable levels. A sudden spike in electricity can destroy a laptop, so taking the time to plug in to one every time is worth the few seconds it takes. Surge protectors designed specifically for laptops are compact, making them easy to pack away in your laptop bag.

Smart Computing Tip Of The Day

Power Adapters For Laptops

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Weight and screen size are directly correlated to one another. The cutoff point between a laptop that should stay permanently on your desk and one that can be a commuting companion is a 14-inch widescreen. There are exceptions, of course. The Apple MacBook Pro 15-inch (Core i5) and Asus UL50VF-A1 are two of the lightest 15-inch laptops—lighter, in fact, than many of the 14-inch ones in the market. A 13- or 14-inch widescreen means that you can still be productive without sacrificing portability. The Asus U30Jc-1A and Sony VAIO VPC-Z116GXWS are prime examples of superb 13-inch laptops. Fourteen-inch models like the Lenovo IdeaPad Y460, Dell Inspiron 14R-1898MRB, and Gateway ID49C07U offer a terrific blend of features and components, but they won't weigh you down. Below that, you'll be venturing into netbook territory, which is an entirely different category of laptops.

Get a screen larger than 14-inches and you'll have to contend with deeper and wider dimensions, which your laptop bag may not have room for. Screen sizes that range between 16 and 18 inches are usually reserved for media centers, gaming rigs, and desktop replacements, such as the Acer Aspire AS8943G-6782 (18-inch) and Dell Studio 17 (17-inch). These massive systems often have luxuries like high resolutions, a multitouch option, and a wealth of screen real estate.

**What to Look For in a Laptop**

Even the cheapest laptops come with many of the features you would find on a $2,000 laptop. Ample USB ports (3 to 4 minimum) are pretty standard nowadays, but look for a laptop with one of the USB ports doubling as an eSATA port, so you can expand storage capacity when the internal hard drive isn't roomy enough. Most of the time, you won't even use a port like eSATA since most laptops nowadays come with at least 320GB of storage (Netbooks are averaging 250GB). Upgrading to a 500GB hard drive won't cost you an arm and a leg either, but do so only if you're a video junkie or an aspiring video content creator. Most people don't need all that hard drive space.

Although VGA is still the most common way to present Powerpoint slides on a big screen, technologies like DisplayPort and HDMI are better equipped to stream high quality videos and audio. With the exception of netbooks and sub $600 laptops, most laptops have an HDMI port or DisplayPort. The Dell Studio 17, for example, has both.

Unless you're talking netbooks, a DVD burner is the de facto standard for internal optical drives. Look for one that burns dual layer discs (twice the capacity of a single layer disc), and don't settle for a DVD-ROM/CD-RW combo drive. Blu-ray drives are coming down in prices, and you can find one in the Samsung R580 and HP Pavilion dv6-3033cl for under $900.

Of course, the lack of an optical drive isn't a deal breaker anymore, especially if you're intent on minimizing weight. The Alienware M11x (Core i7) and Acer Aspire 1830T-3721, for instance, give you everything but the internal optical drive. A Webcam and a media card reader are already integral parts of any laptop or netbook, as video conferencing and digital photography are as common as surfing the Web.

Once you check off all of these standard features, you can go on to look for ones that are specific to your individual needs.

**Buying an Extended Warranty**

Most laptops are backed by a complimentary 1-year parts and labor warranty. Asus and Costco sell laptops that come with standard two-year warranties. The standard warranty is a limited one, so it won't cover accidents that stem from a spilled drink, a key that was scraped off by a fingernail, or a drop to a hard surface. Extended warranties are also available.

Most laptop manufacturers also sell accidental coverage as a separate plan, on top of extended warranties that work on top of a standard one, so you might end up spending close to $300 for three years of comprehensive coverage. Apple offers a maximum 3-year extended warranty ($250), while most Windows-based laptop manufacturers will offer up to 4 years.

Our rule of thumb is that if the warranty costs more than 15% of the laptop, you're better off spending the money on backup drives or backup services that minimizes downtime. Of course, you can't put a price tag on peace of mind. There are instances when the logic board or the display—the most expensive pieces of a laptop—fail, and while rare, it can cost you half of what the laptop is worth. Faulty components usually break down during the first year; anything after that is probably your fault.

**Weighing the Netbook Option**

As the competition grows more fierce in the netbook category, these little laptops, which were
once considered as mere Web surfing and word processing devices, are now being pegged as primary laptops for everyday tasks. Had you bought a netbook a year ago, you would have been dealt with a 10-inch widescreen, a small keyboard, and a basic set of features. For $500 today, the Lenovo IdeaPad S12 (ion), Asus EeePC 1201PN, and Lenovo ThinkPad X100e have screens that range between 11 and 12 inches, a full-size keyboard, and an HDMI port. Though smaller, the Toshiba mini NB305-N410 and HP Mini 5102 have the best typing and navigating experience on a 10-inch platform.

You'll also find the Intel Atom platform, made up of the Atom processor, integrated graphics, and memory (usually 1GB) in almost every netbook. The Intel Atom may not be the fastest processor, but it's the most energy-efficient chip you can get on a netbook platform. (AMD is making a run at the netbook market, performing as well, if not better than their Intel counterparts.) By the end of this year, a dual-core Atom processor (all Atom processors thus far are single core), such as the one found in the Asus EeePC 1201N, will be more widely available.

For now, netbooks equipped with the Atom N450 (N455, N470) are your best bets, as it is the most battery efficient. You'll see many more netbooks that have AMD processors, and while they aren't as energy efficient, they are faster than their Atom counterparts. You can find AMD processors in netbooks such as the Lenovo Thinkpad X100e and the Acer Aspire One AO521-3782. Many of these netbooks will run fine on 1GB of memory, and most of them can be upgraded to 2GB (highly recommended), provided you can make this simple upgrade yourself. These days, you won't many netbooks that run on the Windows XP operating system; all of them are either using Windows 7 Starter Edition or Home Premium Standard. Netbook batteries start with 3-cell (30Wh) units, but many netbooks are now standardizing on 6-cell batteries. Our battery tests have shown that the smaller batteries will get you anywhere from 3-4 hours of battery life on a single charge, while the bigger ones range between 7-9 hours. If your activities include trips abroad and all-day classes, consider looking for netbooks that ship with 6-cell options.

New Intel Technology Already Here

As for the rest of the laptop market, the most dominant processor chips come from Intel. For instance, you can choose one that maximizes performance or one that favors battery life. Or you can choose one that plays to both strengths: The Intel Core i3, Core i5, and Core i7s are currently the most popular processor brands and have the benefits of both power and battery efficiency. If you desire all-day battery life, it's best to go with a low-voltage (ULV or LV) or an Atom processor, such as those found in the Acer Aspire 1830T-3721 and netbooks, respectively.

Intel also launched the quad-core Core i7s for laptops, which currently ranks as the most powerful, not to mention, hottest processors in the world. AMD has its own multi-core processors as well (triple or quad core), called the Phenoms. Most of these processors can be found in desktop replacement and gaming laptops, but Intel and AMD claim that these processor will find their way into mainstream laptops—as small as a 14-inch laptop.

Unless you're a part-time gamer or a CAD user, most students will find that integrated graphics is more than enough for graphics related tasks. High-end graphics cards are terrific for 3D games, decoding a 1080p video, or watching a Blu-ray movie, but like a fast processor, they also feast on the battery. Nvidia (Optimus) and Apple (Automatic Graphics Switching) have technologies that leverage two graphics chips—an integrated and a discrete version—and the switch happens seamlessly, depending on what application the laptop is running.

Battery Life

A big battery can be your biggest ally in a day travel hectic day. Many laptops, including netbooks, are sold with multiple battery options. Apple laptops, on the other hand, have non-removable batteries. In this case, figure out where battery life ranks in the grand scheme of things. For instance, netbooks, which come with a 6-cell battery option, last between 7 to 9 hours on a single charge. Business laptops, on the other hand, come with the largest variety of battery options. It might be a good idea to purchase an additional battery, if an extended one isn't available. The more "cells" you buy, the better the battery life. And look at the battery's capacity, which is usually measure in Watt-hours. Two batteries claiming to be 6-cells can have different capacities. A big battery is accompanied by some heft, but the weight gain is well worth it if it means leaving the system unplugged from dawn 'til dusk.