

12/28/13- PCHS Whitepaper: Is a Chromebook a Realistic Option for Business Users?

Q: What is a Chromebook?

A: Chromebooks are essentially dedicated Chrome web browser appliances in the form factor of a traditional laptop. Almost everything you do with a Chromebook occurs within a Chrome browser window. There are applications included and others that can be installed, but they all run inside of the Chrome browser framework. This is a new way to think about computing: Chromebooks occupy a space somewhere between tablets and laptops. With a full keyboard for doing some serious work (documents, spreadsheets, presentations, e-mail, and web-based applications) Chromebooks are superior to tablets for business-- you can produce content with Chromebooks but generally only consume content with tablets (and smartphones).

For this report we tested the **Acer C720 (\$249 MSRP) Chromebook** powered by an Intel Celeron 2955U 1.4 GHz (Haswell micro-architecture) CPU, 2 GB DDR3L SDRAM, 16 GB Solid-State Drive, 11.6-Inch Anti-Glare Screen and Intel HD Graphics. This lightweight device boots nearly instantly, runs extremely quietly (it has no internal moving parts) and has a long battery life (6+ hours of actual use). The Acer C720 also sports a decent screen and keyboard, the ability to add local storage through SD cards or USB[2 & 3] flash drives or external hard drives, an efficient multi-gesture trackpad and a built-in camera.

PROS	CONS
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Cannot be infected with viruses or malware.2. Starts nearly instantly; runs fast and quietly.3. Has a long (6+ hours) battery life.4. With Chrome Remote Desktop (free) you can remote control your <i>Windows</i> or <i>Mac</i> PCs back at the office or at home. Your business programs (<i>ACT!</i>, <i>QuickBooks</i>, etc.) are available to you on the road wherever you have internet access.5. With Google Drive (15GB storage free) your documents and Gmail are available when you are connected to the internet.6. With Google Docs (free) you can create and edit <i>Word</i>, <i>Excel</i> and <i>PowerPoint</i> documents and save them to Google Drive or to the Chromebook for offline editing.7. With Microsoft SkyDrive and Outlook.com (free) you can use the Web App versions of <i>Word</i>, <i>Excel</i> and <i>PowerPoint</i> and save these documents to the cloud or to the local device for offline editing.8. Email, Calendar and Contacts (free) are automatically synced with the cloud and your Android smartphone.9. All cloud docs can be shared with colleagues (collaborators) and are available on all your internet-connected devices (PCs, tablets, smartphones, etc).10. Free or inexpensive apps are available for a variety of functions like image editing, project scheduling, accounting, contact management, etc.11. HDMI output (or Chrome Cast for \$35) allows you to connect the Chromebook to a TV or large monitor for presentations, etc.12. Can print through the cloud, to Chrome-aware printers and to legacy printers attached to the LAN.13. Free automated OS updates.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Doesn't run Mac, iOS, Windows, or Android applications2. Chromebooks are dependent on internet access for most functions.3. Access to most third-party and vertical-market programs are dependent on internet access for remote access to a second PC (at work or home, etc.) Performance is of course a lot slower when you remote access a PC than when you use that same PC locally.4. There are privacy concerns as Google reads everything you type (and sends you annoying email Ads accordingly). Probably everything you do on a Chromebook is being monitored and cataloged by Google. The larger question is: do you ever have privacy online regardless of the OS?5. Skype is not currently supported on Chromebooks, but there <i>are</i> alternatives to make phone calls, instant message, or video chat from Google, Microsoft, Yahoo and AOL.6. For IT professionals there <i>is</i> a Terminal mode for PING, etc. but there are evidently no robust network troubleshooting functions or apps developed yet.7. Compared with the Apple and Android stores, there is a pretty limited selection of apps at this time.

Conclusion: According to NPD Group, Chromebooks sales are surging and accounted for about a fifth of the commercial laptop market in 2013. For the right kind of business user (see features and limitations above) a Chromebook can be an excellent choice for a second (portable) computer. It is possible that for a few business users a Chromebook may be the only PC they need, especially if their organization has already moved most or all of its programs and data into the cloud. Privacy-minded users, power users and users that depend on fast performance of specialty business programs irrespective of internet availability should look to conventional laptops instead.