

Tech Tip 35 - Laptop Accessories

The basic design of laptops makes them the obvious choice for those who need their computing to be mobile. All of the key components (and then some) of a desktop computer can easily be configured into a minimal housing that goes with you just about anywhere.

That said, there are some things you may want to add to your laptop computer in order to make it more comfortable to use, more convenient, and to extend its life while enduring the strains of daily use.

This Tech Tip will take a look at five items that any laptop owner may want to take a look at in order to enhance their experience.

Carrying Case



Laptop computers are made to be portable, but for the most part, they are not designed as indestructibly as they may need to be in order to survive the bumps and bruises of traveling.

Most laptops include a carrying case of some sort, but many don't seem adequate enough to protect the valuable contents, and many others don't have the capacity to hold much more than the basic essentials. Finding a carrying case that will not only protect a laptop, but that will also hold all of the necessary accessories, and perhaps your other items (camera, digital audio device, etc), may be worth while.

It seems that on every flight I take I see at least one person come down the plane's aisle with a laptop case slung over their shoulder... allowing it to bounce off every seat they pass! How long can that last?

Cases (<http://www.geeks.com/products.asp?cat=NBB#NotebookCases>) in a variety of sizes, styles, and materials are available to replace the one the laptop manufacturer was kind enough to throw into the deal. Whether you need the strength of a hard metal case, or the refined style of saddle leather, finding an appropriate case can be an important and worthwhile investment.

Mouse



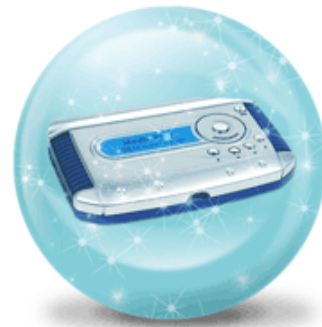
Laptop computers all come with some sort of pointing device built in. Generally, you either get a touch pad located just below the keyboard, or a tracking pointer (a small knob) located in the middle of the keyboard. These may suit your needs just fine for occasional use, but for extended use they may not be the best ergonomic solutions. Adding a mouse to a laptop is simple and can greatly increase the comfort level, productivity and enjoyment.

You can obviously use a standard (USB or PS/2) mouse with a laptop, but space constraints may make a smaller device more appropriate. Miniature mice are available in wired (<http://www.geeks.com/details.asp?invtid=BLU-USBMINIMOUSE&cat=MOU>) and wireless (<http://www.geeks.com/details.asp?invtid=931171-0403-DT&cat=MOU>) versions, and the reduced size may be appreciated given the generally limited space available in a carrying bag. The reduced size may pose a concern to those with large hands, or those who have gotten used to a larger mouse, but there should be a mouse out there to suit anyone's taste.

This Bluetooth-enabled miniature mouse (<http://www.geeks.com/details.asp?invtid=GME225B-DT&cat=MOU>) could be great for use with a laptop computer, especially one with Bluetooth built into the system. That way, no external adaptor would need to be plugged in, and only the mouse would have to travel with you.

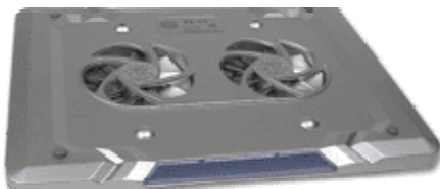
Card Reader

Card readers (<http://www.geeks.com/products.asp?Cat=CAM#CameraMemoryCardReaders>) have become fairly common devices, and prove to be extremely handy whether the computer is a desktop or a laptop. With the rising popularity of digital cameras, digital audio/video devices, personal digital assistants, and the handful of other items that use flash memory, having a central location to access these memory cards is a good idea.



Desktops afford the convenience of having the card reader built in, but for the most part, laptop users will need to use an external USB device. A reader capable of accessing 7, 12, or even a higher number of flash memory formats can be had in a compact device that won't consume much space in your carrying case. And for even greater space savings, perhaps you can kill two birds with one stone and go for something like this USB mouse / card reader combo (<http://www.geeks.com/details.asp?invtid=KMOUSE-SDMSMMC-N&cat=CAM>).

Cooling



or



Cool electronics are happy electronics, and a laptop is no different. Today's computer chips can run extremely hot, and given the minimal space a laptop takes up, there isn't room for optimal cooling solutions. The heat created by the processor, hard drive, graphics processor, and so on are all going to radiate through the computer's housing, as well as being blown out the exhaust vent. Keeping these components as cool as possible can not only extend their lives, but the user will be comfortable as well.

A notebook cooler, such as this one (<http://www.geeks.com/details.asp?invtid=SIL-NB-03&cat=NBB>), connects via USB to power fans that cool the bottom of the laptop. This will not only keep the internal components of the laptop cool, but can also keep the user more comfortable by reducing the temperature felt by their hands, and perhaps lap.

Another comfort feature experience with some laptop coolers is the inclusion of a slight slope that allows the keyboard to be angled towards the user in a more ergonomic position. Some of these coolers may also feature additional USB plugs for connecting other devices, making them even more convenient, and a bit like the item to be discussed in the next section.

Docking Station



If you have a laptop computer that does a bit of traveling, but still does most of its work in one location, a docking station (<http://www.geeks.com/products.asp?cat=NBB#NotebookDockingStations>) may be worth a look. What these devices do is allow for the various connections to the computer to be made to the docking station, and then just one connection is made between the laptop and the station whenever you want to use it in that location.

So, you could leave anything like a mouse, keyboard, second monitor, power cord, network cable, and speaker wires connected to the docking station, and simply connect the computer when it is time to work. For those who regularly use their laptop in a desktop setting, this makes setup much easier than connecting all of these individual devices each time.

Final Words

Laptops are great devices that make conducting business away from the office simple and effective. Adding a few key accessories to a laptop can help take things to the next level in terms of convenience and comfort, as well as insuring that your precious laptop is ready for just about anything your travels may throw its way.