



KILL-A-WATT

Isn't it time that everybody gave a little thought to energy conservation? Did you know that laptops use 85% LESS energy than Desktops?

With home studies and computing equipment now a firm feature of many households, the energy consumed by our home computing habits is steadily increasing. Irish households are now spending nearly €2 million a year powering computers, printers and other home IT equipment.

How Laptops work...

As the components are smaller and more efficient than in desktop personal computers, they require less electricity to run and therefore are responsible for less CO2 emissions. If a laptop is capable of meeting your needs, then they are well worth considering as a lower energy alternative to a desktop computer.

The Savings...

A new laptop personal computer typically uses around 85% LESS energy than a new desktop computer, making them a more energy efficient choice. This would mean it would cost around €50 LESS to run each year AND its carbon footprint would be around 150kg a year lower!

How the savings add up...

If everyone in the UK & Ireland who bought a new desktop computer in 2008 had bought a laptop instead, collectively they would now be spending around €112 million a year less on running costs and generating over 450,000 tonnes less CO2 each year. 450,000 tonnes of CO2 is enough to fill over 2 million double-decker buses each year!

How to choose between a Laptop or desktop computer?

Laptops have been growing in popularity, power and affordability.

It's now easier than ever to find a cheap laptop that will perform most tasks, though spending the same amount of money on a desktop PC or Mac will still get you more in terms of raw specification and power.

This will usually only matter if you're doing something like video editing or playing the latest games. Choosing a laptop gives you the freedom to use your computer on the move or around the home rather than find yourself chained to one room.

It also means you can take advantage of wireless networking to surf the net using broadband without being connected to a phone socket.

This guide has advice on what to look for and how much to spend, explains laptop jargon, and gives practical tips.

What type of laptop or netbook should I choose?

The best laptop for you will depend entirely on what you plan to use it for. You might need your computer to be more portable, for example, or you might simply prefer something that can be easily folded up and put away to save space when it's not in use.

Before you buy, you need to carefully consider which type of laptop would suit you best, weighing up things such as portability against power and price. Size and weight vary considerably, with a small, portable netbook averaging around 1kg, and larger widescreen laptops weighing in at around 3kg.

Entry-level laptops

Entry-level systems are a cheap, basic option, best for those who just use their laptop for straightforward office tasks such as spreadsheets, email and internet use.

Desktop replacement laptops

Desktop replacements are much more powerful computers that are comparable to desktop systems in terms of power and features, but in a portable format.

This type of computer is best suited to those who want to edit photos or video and play games, as well as perform office tasks. Desktop replacements tend to be a lot heavier than other laptops, however.

Ultra portable laptops

Ultra-portable laptops make size and weight the priority, shrinking things right down so they're much easier to carry, but often at the cost of power, speed and features.

Mini laptops or netbooks

Mini laptops, also called netbooks, webbooks, or small cheap computers (SCCs), are a different class of computer from standard laptops.

Many are aimed at the children's market - their low cost makes them an ideal choice for parents who want an affordable laptop for their child. They're small and compact, and while their specifications are low, they're perfectly adequate for general tasks and internet surfing.

They generally use Intel Atom, Celeron, or Via processors, which are less powerful than the chips used in larger laptops, but are cheaper and more energy efficient.

You may find the operating system installed in a netbook different from the one you're used to. While some come with Windows XP installed, several versions use the free Linux operating system.

Some brands, such as the Eee PCs from Asus, offer a choice of Linux or Windows, though the Windows option will usually be more expensive.

Don't expect to find built-in CD and DVD drives in these machines. You'll get wireless connectivity, though, so you can connect them to a wireless network to transfer your data. Some netbooks use standard hard drives, while others use solid-state storage.

If you're on a tight budget, but want to spend a bit more making sure that you get the best performing laptop you can, aim to spend as much as you can afford on increasing the laptop's memory (Ram).

A decent processor is also a good idea, but you don't need to go overboard getting the best chip on the market. Some manufacturers may offer special deals when, for example, they offer double the Ram for the same price.