TOOLS ‹‹‹‹‹‹
››››› of the TRADE

Motorola MILESTONE

Originally called the Motorola Droid, the Motorola MILESTONE smartphone was recently launched with the most expensive promotional push ever by Verizon. The phone has a larger and higher-resolution screen than the iPhone, a slide-out keyboard, and it runs Google's Android operating system. Like the iPhone, the MILESTONE is hyped as a computer and a phone, but the difference is that its system can manage multiple applications open at the same time. The Droid camera also has higher resolution than the iPhone (five megapixels instead of three), it has a flash and 4X zoom and can shoot video, but the initial reviews say it's slow. The MILESTONE inputs include Bluetooth, Wi-Fi, and USB. Memory is 16GB internal and 32GB external, with memory slots capable of accepting MicroSD and MicroSDHC. The Li-ion battery is rated at 360 hours of standby and 6.4 hours of talk time. There's built-in GPS with turn-by-turn directions, and the Android 2.0 offers a selection of 12,000 apps that can be downloaded to run on the phone. Far fewer than iPhone's 100,000, but the Android system is younger. A major advantage for the MILESTONE is the superiority of the Verizon network over AT&T, the iPhone carrier. The sound quality of the Motorola phone has been generally described as superior, and the drag-and-drop utility for loading music files from hard drives also has gotten a lot of notice. As a serious competitor, the Motorola Android sold 100,000 units in the first week of its release, and many expect the Droid OS to continue to dramatically improve from release to release. www.motorola.com
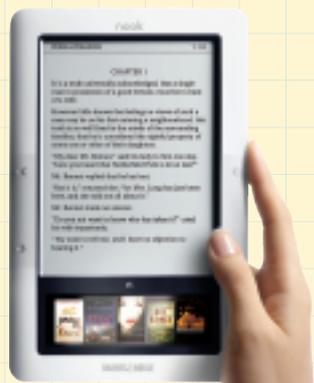
Barnes & Noble nook

The largest bookseller in the world has entered into a head-to-head contest with the largest bookseller online by offering its new electronic reader, the nook™. Like the Amazon Kindle, nook has free 3G wireless access to more than one million e-books, magazines, and newspapers, but it also has Wi-Fi that lets browsers connect to the networks in the Barnes & Noble stores in order to look over and read from the catalog of e-book offerings. The E-Ink® display is the same as a Kindle, very sharp and with various text sizes, but the nook screen has a color touch-screen section that displays the library with book covers. A less obvious but very important feature of the nook is its LendMe™ technology, which allows most e-books to be loaned to friends for up to 14 days at a time. You send the book to your friend's reader, cell phone, or computer. Not all e-books will have this ability, as it's up to the publishers to decide whether their titles can be loaned. Purchases of new books, newspapers, and magazines are done over AT&T's 3G wireless network, and there are no setup or fees required. You can also download purchases at the bookstores over AT&T Wi-Fi networks there. With the "Reading Now" feature, nook opens the book you're reading at the place where you left off. If your reader is at home, you can still access your book with your smartphone or computer, and when you finish reading, the new place will be bookmarked remotely on your nook device. Curiously, the nook, like the just-released Motorola smartphone, runs on a version of the Google Android Operating System. www.bn.com

Nokia N900

The Nokia N900 is the latest evolution of its N-series Web tablets. The series now joins the rest of the Nokia lineup of smartphones, with voice calls

TECH FORUM

Netbooks—Think "Elsewhere"

By Michael Castelluccio, Editor

Last month we examined the basic idea of the netbook computer and came to the conclusion that the design profile of the small device depended most on its reduced size, its expanded battery life, and its reach into the clouds. It's a portal, not a power computer, so any heft depends on how far and to what it can reach—not on the computing power wired in. You won't be doing much 3D gaming on your netbook, but you *will* be wandering through some pretty vast libraries. Just remember: It's an (Inter)netbook.

If you mistake your new netbook for a conventional notebook, you're likely to head down a disappointing path. Load it up as you would a normal laptop, or even desktop, and you've missed the revolution. The Intel Atom processor and all the miniaturized elements are there to liberate you from a device-centric world to the information-centric cosmos of the Internet network and its latest stratosphere of layered cloud computing where the programs, the massive computing engines, and the large storage areas all remotely serve the modest device resting on your knee.

SETTING UP

Certainly everyone has his or her own way of customizing his/her computers, so consider the following as just suggestions. Remember: The basic principle is that you're usually better off if the program resides somewhere else and you're just switching it on or off on your machine as you need it.

Netbooks generally come with much less crapware loaded on them than other laptops, so dumping what you don't want doesn't take much effort. The Asus Eee that I recently set up came with a trial version of Microsoft Office Home and Student 2007 and a trial for a virus program. Thankfully, there weren't the dozen or so other offers/ads with their shortcut buttons littering the desk-

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added to the long list of Internet capabilities of the previous tablets. Pre-installed Nokia Messaging mobilizes up to 10 personal e-mail accounts, and the N900 will manage voice calls, Internet calls, instant messaging, and SMS. The Mozilla browser offers Flash 9.4 and AJAX support, and the 3.5-inch touch screen has an extremely sharp 800 x 480 pixel resolution. The five-megapixel camera has Carl Zeiss optics and takes stills and widescreen video. The OS is Maemo 5, and there's 32GB of internal memory with 16GB expansion with a MicroSD card slot. The N900 has integrated GPS and an FM transmitter, and battery life is up to two to four days always on and five hours of talk time.
http://maemo.nokia.com/n900

Belkin Conserve

The Belkin Conserve Surge with timer cuts the standby power on office electronics after an 11-hour duration. The outlets on the strip are separated: Six are controlled by the desktop button that sets the auto-off function, and two are always-on outlets for devices like computers, phones, and clocks. The savings from shutting off the residual power fed to devices like monitors, printers, speakers, and power-block PDA and cell-phone chargers can be substantial. On the website, Belkin shows the ROI for a company that has 100 employees with savings of almost $1,000 by eliminating power costs when the office is closed. The remote desktop button for the Conserve Surge lets you override the automatic turn-off. Hit the button to turn the outlets on or off. A blinking light on the button notifies you that the strip is about to turn off the six outlets. A tap will allow another 11 hours. www.belkin.com

top. Because I wouldn't be using this computer as a primary work machine, I wasn't going to purchase the Office Suite, and the virus program was too large and intrusive, so I dumped them with the Windows sequence: Start/Control Panel/Add or Remove Programs/Remove. Skype was another program preloaded on the computer, but that I kept.

Because there would be times when I needed to do regular work on this computer, I downloaded a copy of OpenOffice from Sun Microsystems. It's a free office suite that includes a word processing program, spreadsheets, database, presentations, drawing, and even a neat formula editor. It's in version 3.1.1, and it's a mature set of applications that are compatible and fully functional (www.openoffice.org). This would serve for offline work.

I have a Google Docs account, and those tools and files are stored online. Recently, I have been using an online word processor from Adobe called Buzzword. It's a simple, elegant writing program that also includes collaboration and online storage for files. Buzzword is free and well worth a look (www.adobe.com/acom/buzzword).

Instead of a large, intrusive virus program that would draw too much of the modest resources of the netbook, I downloaded the free version of AVG 8.0 antivirus software. It works well and runs a lot leaner than Norton or McAfee. One caution about antivirus programs. When looking for a free download, Google the name of the program you're interested in and add the word "review" right after it before you hit any buttons. If publications like CNET or *PC Magazine* don't have reviews of the program, better keep away. Some virusware programs are the exact opposite of what they say they are. AVG reviews are readily available, and version 9.0 is now available at http://free.avg.com.

A few words about the browser. Both Internet Explorer and Firefox work well on the XP platform on the Asus. With the smaller 10-inch screen, however, the stacked toolbars at the top steal a lot of space. Of course, you can get the whole screen back by tapping the F11 button and then tapping it again when you need the toolbars, but there's another way to claim some of the space back. Both the Google Chrome and Opera browsers take less from the top, and they have neat opening pages with a set of small page images of your favorite (most often visited) websites. Both are also very fast. Download Chrome at www.google.com/chrome and Opera 10 at www.opera.com.

For free online storage and the ability to sync files to all your computing devices (save it on your netbook, and it syncs with your desktop and smartphone), there are a number of cloud offerings. Dropbox is such a service, and with it you get 2GB of storage space free, with an option to pay for additional space up to 100GB. You have Web access, and your files are transferred and saved in an encrypted format. (www.dropbox.com)

So now you're all set. You have a modest office set up on your hard drive, virus and spyware protection, a storage unit connected to all your computers, and a browser window that's wide open.

PERSONAL PREFERENCES

If you would like to experience some of the full force of the fire hose of information aimed daily at your netbook, consider downloading FeedDemon (www.NewsGator.com). It's the most popular, and often cited as the best, RSS reader/news aggregator. You select the categories and receive daily news headlines and brief descriptions of items in those categories. You can tell the program to look out for key words or phrases, and it will alert you when they appear in your daily feeds. Get overwhelmed with an unread backlog, and you can hit something called the panic button, which will clear many of the older unread entries.

Netbooks are about the size of a trade paperback, and, not surprisingly, they make good e-book readers. With the Windows operating system, you can download a variety of readers. I have the Adobe Digital Reader for Adobe ePub books, Mobipocket for e-books from my local library, and a Sony program to read e-books that reside also on my Sony Reader. A program to download and read Kindle books on Windows has just been released, and with it you can buy and read Amazon's $9.99 Kindle versions of best-sellers without purchasing the Kindle device. The local library, incidentally, typically has dozens of databases you can reach with a library card and a netbook—Lexis-Nexis, the complete *Britannica*, a *New York Times* archive that goes back to 1851, Gale Business, Medline Plus, and so on. Check your public and university libraries to see what's available over their networks.

Finally, every computer needs some relatively mindless diversions, so here's my suggestion for upgrading the basic game that comes with all computers. There's a solitaire program from SolSuite that not only has dynamite graphics (70 card sets with more than 300 back designs and 100 different table backgrounds), but it also will statistically keep track of the game (even count cards for you). The program has 502 different games, including 26 versions of Klondike and 16 of FreeCell. The program is about $20, and there's a free trial download at www.solsuite.com. **SF**