

Are we witnessing the end of the desktop PC?

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The desktop PC might, in time, be something of the past due to developments which we'll go through in a little detail.

Netbooks, laptops, and desktops each have advantages and disadvantages. These are subjective and depending on what the computer will be used for, their importance might vary from critical, to minor, to negligible.

Desktops have an advantage over laptops in that the spare parts and extensions are standardised, resulting in lower prices and greater availability. For example, the form factor of the motherboard is standardised and desktops have several standard expansion slots, while laptops only tend to have one mini PCI slot and one PC card slot.

This means that a desktop can be customised and upgraded to a greater extent than laptops, using less costly expansion products such as large hard drives, additional memory, and special purpose cards. Faulty accessories and components on a desktop are easy to replace.

This is not always the case for laptops, though adding or replacing certain things like the optical drive, rechargeable battery, hard disk, and adding extra is quite simple.

From a business perspective, desktops are also relatively difficult to steal.

On the downside, they are large and space-consuming. They are awkward to move and can't be carried to meetings or on business trips, and they are more difficult to ship if repair/replacement is needed.

They also do not have features like built-in microphones and webcams.

Desktop computers provide more space for heat to escape. Intel and AMD develop special CPUs for laptops that consume less power and exude less heat, but with lower performance levels.

Desktop computers generally have more power than laptops do. It isn't practical for laptops to use the advanced processors, video cards and memory that are used in desktops partially because battery technology is not up to the task, and there is not enough air flow in a laptop to dissipate the heat generated from additional transistors.

In other words, laptops are hindered in their performance by the need for portability. In reality, you probably won't discern the difference unless you are a gamer or video editor.

Laptop batteries capable of running for eight hours could soon be in the market, Intel's Core Duo and Core 2 Duo and similar processors from AMD are already appearing in new ranges of laptops, and inbuilt wireless networking is becoming the standard. Laptops have been selling rapidly as the performance gap becomes insignificant.

Once the cost factor falls away, mobility will become the primary advantage and although corporates generally do still have a large investment in desktops, once the advantages of "cheaper and more powerful" are no longer factors, there will be no reasons to remain with desktops when the next upgrade comes around.