

# How to pick the perfect netbook for you

- netbook buyer's guide -

Written by **Andrei Girbea** from [www.netbooklive.net](http://www.netbooklive.net)

Version 1.0 from September 2009

## Introduction

The term "netbook" is widely used to name every type of sub-laptops. **In reality, netbooks are portable, compact and affordable electronic devices, powerful enough to run regular every-day applications.** They provide most of the features you would need from a portable laptop, but are not made to become your primary computers. They're more like a secondary travel companion.

These are relatively new gadgets, as they entered the market in late fall 2007 with the first 7" EEE PC. Back then, they were tiny notebooks with poor hardware, autonomy and features. But a lot has changed since, as the netbooks industry grew exponentially and these gadgets evolved from the weak machines they were, to devices that could now easily replace a standard notebook.

In fact, at the moment (fall 2009), it is estimated that 1 in 5 laptops sold worldwide is a netbook, and they are gaining ground every day. All the major producers have a netbook in their offer, like Asus, HP, DELL, Acer, MSI, Samsung etc. Even Apple is preparing an entry in this segment, so the future looks quite good for netbooks.

## What's the purpose of this guide?

I was talking with some of my friends the other day about my plan to buy a new netbook this fall and I was amazed to see most of them didn't even knew what a netbook is, although they all work in IT related domains and deal with computers every day.

That's why I decided to **write a quick guide (this one) that would really help those looking for a mini notebook**, by explaining what netbooks really are, what are their pros and cons, showing the best available options on the market (according to price range and features) and also by suggesting some reliable and trustworthy places where they could find great deals on netbooks.

This way, by the end of these pages, you will be able to get an idea if netbooks are the portable devices you're looking for and if they are, you'll know what to get and where you can find the best bargains.

## My experience with netbooks

You **might wonder what gives me the authority to advice others on this subject.** First of all, I must say I'm an IT College graduate (with a diploma in Computers Science), so I've had my fair

share of experience with both hardware and software aspects. Also, I worked as an IT Editor for the biggest Technology website in my country between 2006 and 2008, and I was able to get my hand on most devices available on the market during all that time. So I've gather some knowledge on testing gadgets.

Also, these days I run a website about netbooks: [www.netbooklive.net](http://www.netbooklive.net) , so I'm very familiar and also up to date with this subject.

Last but not least, **I'm a netbook owner and user myself**. Everything started when my laptop's mother board fried and I had to replace it for a couple of weeks with a borrowed MSI Wind U100. Although reticent at first, I learned to appreciate the little gadget to the point of replacing my every day laptop with a netbook (a Toshiba NB205). Not as a primary computer, as I have a powerful desktop too, but as a portable gadget I can easily carry around wherever I might go (at the office, when traveling, in the park or during holidays).

## Table of Contents

Those being said, enough with the introduction, it's time to learn more about netbooks. And **let's see what we are going to talk about:**

1. What's the difference between a netbook and a laptop?
2. Main hardware specs for a netbook (this is the geeky part, so you might want to skip this if not into technical details).
3. How to pick the netbook that better suits your needs?
4. Types of netbooks:
  - a. 7-9 inch netbooks
  - b. 10 inch netbooks
  - c. 11 inch netbooks and above
  - d. Touch-screen netbooks
5. Accessories and Upgrades for your netbooks.
6. Where can you get the best prices and deals for netbooks?
7. Is this a good moment to buy a netbook?
8. What the future holds in store for the netbooks segment?

You could choose to skip to the chapters you desire, but **I do recommend you read them all**, as they provide usefully info worth knowing when buying a new netbook.

## 1. What's the difference between a netbook and a standard laptop?

First of all, laptops are bulky and heavy, at least the ones with a 14 inch screen or above.

**Netbooks on the other hand are a lot lighter** (most weigh around 2.5 - 3 lbs, while laptops weigh 4-5 lbs or more) and have a compact footprint. Thus, they can be easier carried around and if you're a girl, you can even put them in your hand-bag.

Then, netbooks offer usually a better autonomy than most laptops do. Nowadays the mainstream devices will boost something **between 5 to 9 hours of real tested battery life**, even though on paper these figures can pass the 12 hours mark. Most laptops on the other hand can't compete with that, although there are a few exceptions, like the ultra-portables from Sony Vaio, Toshiba or the new Macbooks. But, they do come with hefty price tags.

And speaking of price tags, **netbooks have the advantage of being cheap**. You can easily find something good for around \$350 right now, with most versions averaging between \$250 and \$500, for the top models.

**Netbooks are less powerful than most laptops, even though they can be perfectly used for everyday activities** like Web-surfing, watching movies (most play 720p content well, and some even 1080p), listening to music and working with standard applications like a light photo editing software or text editors like Microsoft Word. They are not made for resources hungry applications though, like games, rendering software, etc. So yes, laptops are usually more powerful, thus if you need raw power you should choose them over netbooks.

Also, you should know that **most netbooks don't come with an optical unit drive**, but you can use an external one connected via USB (they cost around \$60; more on that later).

And if someone told you **that netbooks boot faster than other computers, that's not really true**. Devices equipped with ordinary hard-drives and regular full operating systems like Windows or **Ubuntu boot actually slower** than standard laptops/desktops, because of their poorer hardware. There are some very light OSes that can boot in just seconds, but don't get fooled by that: those are limited in terms of features and capabilities.

These are the important differences between netbooks and laptops. [Here you can find more about what netbooks are](#) and what you should expect from them.

**As a wrap up**, netbooks are compact, more portable notebooks, good enough for regular applications, while laptops can offer better performance, but for a bigger price and while sacrificing autonomy and portability. So, no wonder netbooks become so popular so fast, as most people don't really need raw performance from a portable device.

## 2. Main hardware specs for a netbook

**This chapter is a little bit more technical**, so you might want to skip this if you don't like such details. But I'd advice you not to, as you'll get an idea on the components a netbook houses and the performances they provide. Thus, you will be able to easier choose a device according to your needs, in the next mini-chapter.

### 2.1 Display size and resolutions

There are many types of netbooks out there with many types of screen sizes. In the following list you'll find the most common display dimensions, along with the associated resolutions:

- 7 "- 800 × 480 px
- 8.9 "- 1024 × 600 px
- 10.1 "- 1024 × 576 px and 1366 × 768 px
- 10.2 "- 1024 × 600 px
- 11.6 "- 1366 × 768 px
- 12.1 "- 1280 × 800 px

Also, you should [see this picture here](#) that would give you a better idea on how a web-page is represented on each of the resolutions above.

**I for one am a fan of the 10.1 - 10.2 inch and 11.6 inch screens, because they provide the perfect balance between size and resolution.** A small sized display with a small resolution won't give you enough working space, while a decent sized one with a too big resolution might be painful for your eyes, as everything will be smaller and harder to read (that's the case of the 10.1" screens with 1366 x 768 px resolutions. I don't have problems with my eyes and I don't use glasses and I still got a terrible headache after using a netbook with such a screen for just around 20 minutes.)

Recently, a couple of producers have started shipping tablet-netbooks with touch screens. They are pricier, but we might see more and more such devices in the near future, so they had to be mentioned too.

Of course, there might be other options available, **my best advice to you would be to be careful and pick a screen with a good enough size/resolution rapport**. And if possible, try to see the device in a showroom before or at least search online for what other buyers have to say about the display of the netbook you would consider buying.

## **2.2 CPUs, Chipsets and Graphics**

It's very difficult to give you a complete view on all the platforms used on netbooks, as there are many options and choices available.

However, almost all the current generation netbooks use Intel's Atom platform, that's why we're only going to talk about this one in here, as we don't want to get too deep into technical details (More info will appear in a future update of this guide).

The Atom platform itself divides between several series of CPUs, paired with a couple of different chipsets and graphic boards (on this platform, CPUs and GPUs are two separate chips).

Here are the main Atom CPU models:

- **Atom N Series - 512 KB cache L2, 533 or 667 MHz FSB and HT.** These are the first and the most popular processors from the Atom series, launched back in spring 2008. There are 2 different versions, the N270 (1.6 GHz, 533 MHz FSB) and the faster N280 (1.66 GHz, 667 MHz). Both have the same 2.5 W TDP
- **Atom 300 series - the only dual core CPU from the Atom series,** with 533 MHz FSB, 1 MB Cache L2 and 1.6 GHz but a way bigger 8W TDP (so provide poorer battery life)
- **Atom Z series - low power CPUs with 512 Kb Cache L2, 400 or 533 MHz FSB and Hyper-Threading,** with frequencies starting from 800 MHz on the Z500 and going up to 2 GHz on Z550. They offer a very low TDP (between 2 and 2.4 W for the top versions). For Z520 and above you will also get the Intel® Virtualization Technology on.

So in terms of CPUs, there aren't that many choices. You have the low power Z series, the cheap and common N series and the powerful but energy avid Atom 330 dual core CPU.

There's also the matter of chipset, because one certain CPU will be faster on a newer chipset than on an older one. A more detailed look on chipsets and CPUs soon, in a next version of this

e-book.

Most of these platforms offer limited graphic performances. There is however the solution of joined forces between an Intel Atom CPU and an Nvidia 9400M graphic card that greatly boosts them. **This solution is called Nvidia Ion** (with a low end version, Nvidia Ion LE and a soon to come Nvidia Ion 2 in early 2010).

For the end of 2009 or early 2010, Intel is planning to replace the Atom platform with a new generation, called Pine Trail. This one will bring increased performances and some important architectural changes (CPU and GPU will be on the same chip, for instance). **More about this once it enters the market, in a future update.**

### **2.3 RAM memory**

**Nowadays most netbooks come with 1 GB of RAM. But they can be easily upgraded with an extra 1 GB** (most only support only 2 GB, but there are others that could house more, depending on the chipset). That will **only cost you around \$20**.

All that needs to be done is unscrew a plastic cover on the back of your device and stick the extra RAM module in its place. There are netbooks that have a compact body and lack that cover; upgrading RAM for them is more complicated and should only be done by specialists. In both cases, **it would be better to order this upgrade from the retailer, when you buy the device**, because if you want to do it yourself you might lose warranty (it depends on each seller's policy).

In the near future, as the new Intel platform and Windows 7 OS will hit the market, I aspect to see most netbooks ship with at least 2 GB of RAM.

### **2.4 Storage space**

**Mainstream netbooks come with 160 GB 2.5" 5400 rpm hard-drives.** Some can be configured with bigger storage, and you can also replace the drive by yourself with another 2,5" laptop hard-drive (**I would recommend a 320 GB 7200 rpm one**, you'll really see the increase in performances and the storage space provided is more than you will ever need on a netbook).

Of course, there are netbooks that ship with SSD drives. The performances provided by such drives are way superior, but storage space is smaller (32 to 256 GB) and they cost many times

more than a regular hard-drive. I for one don't see the reason of using an SSD on a netbook as they are too expensive. But that's up to you to choose.

Older or cheaper netbooks can have Flash storage drives. These offer low performances and low storage space, between 2 to 16 GB. I would stay away from this option unless you are really looking for something really cheap (below \$250).

## **2.5 Connectivity**

Most netbooks offer at least wireless Wi-Fi 802.11 b/g and Ethernet connectivity. These are a must if you want to easily connect your device to Internet. The faster 802.11 N wireless standard is supported by only some netbooks, and I'd recommend choosing a device with this feature, as the speed difference is quite noticeable.

Bluetooth connectivity has also become a standard, with extra functions like EDR 2.0+ and AD2P (useful for connecting Bluetooth stereo headsets to your netbook).

Last but not least, **some netbooks house an internal 3G modem**. You just have to insert a SIM card and get virtually unlimited Internet access (as long as you're in a covered zone). This is also a good to have feature, especially if you travel a lot in places without Wi-Fi coverage, but it will cost you some additional tens of bucks.

## **2.6 Keyboard and Touch-pad**

When I first tested the early 7" netbooks, I found the keyboard so crowded and the keys so small I thought only a kid could use it. And no, I don't have big fingers at all.

Things changed now and **most 10" netbooks or bigger have good, ergonomic and pretty comfortable keyboards** (around 90-95% of a standard laptop keyboard). Some even offer chiclet style independent keys. You will still need to get used to them and might find them awkward to use in the first couple of hours, but everything should be just fine after that.

As for touch-pads, **having a decent sized touch-pad with individual click buttons is a must**. I can't really describe how frustrating is to have to move your finger inside a 1 by 1 inch border when you have to do things fast. And while most of the 9" netbooks and above have satisfactory touch-pads, I still prefer using a mouse if I can.

## **2.7 Other stuff**

There are a couple of other things you should know about netbooks. First, **they don't have an internal optical drive** (with one or two exceptions), but there are external ones available to purchase if you really need one. There are some examples in Chapter 5.

**Netbooks also come with other features, like:**

- USB slots: I do recommend choosing one with at least 2, because you might never know when you'll have to connect a flash drive, external hard-drive or other peripherals.
- card readers
- VGA (Standard D-Sub15 or Mini-VGA) or HDMI output
- web cams - between 0.3 to 2 MPx
- Audio jack for connecting headphones or an external sound system

## **2.8 Operating systems**

In terms of operating systems, **Windows XP dominates the market at the moment**. There are netbooks equipped with Vista and various distributions of Linux (with Kubuntu being the most used one) or lighter OS-es like the ones some Asus EEE PCs have. Unlike the OS-es built by Microsoft, the last ones have the advantage of being free.

During this fall **Windows will launch the new Windows 7 OS** with its netbook optimized version (Starter Edition) (I've already tested the RC1 version on a couple of netbooks and I must say I was really impressed), that is expected to quickly replace XP on most systems. It will probably face a **tougher competition from the recently announced OSes made by Google (Android) or Intel (Moblin)**. Regarding Windows 7 though, you should be careful, as not all standard netbooks will be able to run it decently ([more details here](#)).

I for one don't think much will change, as Moblin, Android and others are pretty light OSes that won't offer all the features and functions Windows 7 will. They might be chosen by enthusiasts, but most people will still go for Microsoft's OS. Of course, marketing strategies and, of course, prices will have something to say in here also.

## **2.9 Accessories**

There are many netbooks accessories on the market, some better than others. I for one consider the following must haves:

- a good and compact wireless mouse
- a sleeve that can perfectly fit the netbook and protect it
- maybe some kind of bag/case for it, useful when travelling

Besides those, there are external optical-drives, external hard-drives, flash drives, skins and many others. I'll show you more options later on, in Chapter 5.

### 3. How to pick the netbook that better suits your needs?

Now that you know what netbooks really are and what you should expect from them, I have to tell you that there are different types of netbooks on the market. Thus you should carefully choose the one for you, according to your requirements.

#### **3.1 Do you need a very light device?**

Than you should get a 9 inch netbooks or even a smaller 7 inch one. They are usually cheap (below \$300) and have the advantage of being really small and weighing just around 2 lbs. However, most of them aren't too powerful and have low resolution screens and tiny keyboards.

There are some high end versions that lack these downfalls (can be considered exceptions), like the 7 inch Sony Vaio P , but they do come with a hefty price tags that easily pass \$1000.

#### **3.2 Do you need a netbook for school/college?**

If you need a netbook for school, not too powerful, not too big and not too expensive, then you should go for the 10" segment. You will find the most diversified offer here, with prices between 300 to 400 bucks, good hardware specs (Atom CPUs, 1 GB of RAM, 160 GB hard-drive, Wi-Fi 802.11 b/g/n, Bluetooth) and great batteries (5 to 9 hours verified autonomy).

Also, devices in this class are well built and durable, especially if you'll protect them with a sleeve or/and a case. Thus, they have all the qualities a netbook for school needs and are even good enough for grownup users, not just kids. More details and some good options on such netbooks, in a future update.

#### **3.3 Do you want a netbook to replace your bigger laptop?**

If you want such a netbook, there are two choices. You could choose the 10" class with the advantages specified above, but the transition from the bigger screen to such a small one and the lower performances might not be the best idea for you.

That's why I'd recommend the second option, one of the 11.6" or 12" netbooks. There aren't many on the market at the moment, but more are on their way by the end of this year. They will come with bigger/better displays, better performances (dual core Atom CPUs or CULV

processors, Nvidia Ion platform) and yet good autonomy, compact size and light weight. Features like 3G connectivity and even fold-able touch screens might be present also.

It's true that these netbooks will not be cheap, somewhere between \$400 to \$600 for the top versions, but I do reckon prices will drop as more producers will bring their products on the market and as the winter sales period approaches.

### **3.4 Do you need to use the netbook unplugged for a longer period of time?**

I believe it's important for a netbook to have a good battery life. So, according to the autonomy you would want, you could buy netbooks with a 3 Cell, 6 Cell or even a 9 Cell battery. The last option is only offered on a very limited number of netbooks for now.

A 3 cell battery offers between 2 to 5 hours of life, depending on hardware specs, operating system, etc. A 6 cell battery on the other hand, would usually give you between 75 to 100% extra autonomy. **So I would really advice picking such a bigger battery.**

Most netbooks have swap-able batteries so if you bought a device with a smaller one, you could replace it later. But this will not be cheap and you'll end with two batteries, when you only need one. So you should really try picking the 6 Cell (or bigger if available) heart for your netbook, from the beginning.

### **3.5 Do you want a specific Operating System?**

**Although around 90% of the netbooks retail these days with Windows XP**, you might want a specific OS or maybe you're just one of those people hating Microsoft :P .

In these cases, you have the option of buying a netbook with several Linux distributions (light specially made versions from the netbook producers or better and complex options like Kubuntu ). **Netbooks sold with these OSes will be cheaper**, as they are free and you won't have to pay extra, like when buying Windows equipped machines. However, on these OSes you won't be able to run some of the programs you know from your Windows PC (Word, Excel, PowerPoint), but **there are alternatives with similar features. And most of them are also free.**

**I for one would advice most of you to get a Windows powered netbook**, with XP or even better, the upcoming Windows 7, but not Vista (because Vista is a resources hungry OS). This way you get the Microsoft OS for a better price than the one you'd have to pay later, if buying

it separately. And of course, you can also install Linux or Moblin or Android later on if you want to.

### **3.6 Do you have a maximum budget for your netbook?**

This aspect is also crucial in choosing the netbook you want. It's hard to make an exact price table, as there are so many netbooks on the market with so many options. But at the moment (early fall 2009), you should be able to get:

- medium 7 to 9 inch netbooks for something between 200 to 300 bucks
- mainstream 10" netbooks good enough for the standard user for between \$300 and \$400
- more powerful "laptop replacements" for above \$400 (and maybe up to \$600 or even more)

There are of course some products that will jump these limits, like the ultra-portable ones, the fashion designed versions or the tablet-netbooks with touch screens.

### **3.7 Still not decided on what you should get?**

I tried to cover a couple of scenarios here that should answer most people's questions. However, if you've read the above and still didn't know what kind of device you should get (or have more questions unanswered by this guide), just [send me an e-mail](#) and I'll try to help you if I can, by providing advices according to your needs. **Be sure I'll answer you all, just be patient, it might take a couple of days sometimes.**

## 4. Types of netbooks

During the last year I managed to get my hands on some of the most popular netbooks on the market; in the next pages you will find the products I for one liked the most. You should know I'm a very picky person, **thus if I consider a product to be good, that must mean it's really awesome** :P (this is also proved by the reviews owners gave the products on big sites like Buy.com, Amazon, Newegg, etc and overall opinions on forums and websites)

### 4.1 7-9 inch netbooks

Early netbooks launched back in 2007 were extremely small and compact, having 7" screens. They've been well received by the public, but still too small to have a great impact on the notebooks market. That's why only a couple of months later, during spring-summer 2009, the 9" versions emerged, with models from several big producers like Asus, Dell, HP or Acer. Bellow you can find the most appreciated such netbooks at their time (back in 2008 that was), versions easily usable these days as well (because they're only 1 year old after all).

#### **Asus Eee PC 701 4G**

**Specs:** Intel Celeron M ULV 900MHz processor, 512 MB RAM, 4 GB flash storage, 7" screen 800 x 480 px resolution, wireless 802.11b/g , Xandros Linux OS , 3.5 hours real battery life, weighs around 2 pounds

**Pros:** Small size, light weight, cheap, fast OS

**Cons:** screen size and resolution, keyboard an track-pad , poor hardware and limited OS

#### **Bottom line:**

The last of the 7" Asus EEE PCs, the 4G model, is nowadays quite obsolete, because of the poor hardware and low storage space (only 4 GB). Also, the crowded keyboard with those small keys and the small screen made it difficult to use for a longer period of time.

But, the device is incredibly small and light, having a price that can't be beat by many other netbooks (just \$199). Thus, I still consider it provides good value for the money invested, if you're looking for something ultra-portable for reading your mail and getting online from time to time. Just don't have very high expectations from the little fellow.



**Price:** \$199

### **Dell Mini 9**

**Specs:** Intel ATOM N270 1.6 GHz processor, 1 GB RAM, 16 GB SSD storage, 8.9" glossy screen 1024 x 600 px resolution, wireless 802.11b/g , Linux or Windows XP OS , 4 hours real battery life, weighs 2.2 pounds

**Pros:** compact and light, good price , fast SSD storage, multiple configuration options, overall well built and good looking

**Cons:** keyboard is odd and has compromises, storage space is too small , pretty poor screen



#### **Bottom line:**

Dell entered the netbooks market with a very configurable and properly priced netbook, the Mini 9. The device is well built, compact and light. Hardware inside offers decent performance, but the storage space provided by the SSD drive is way insufficient.

However, this device might not satisfy some, as the screen has quite poor viewing angles and the keyboard has a weird layout (a smaller QWERTY, without the F-keys) .All in one a good portable 8.9" netbook, nice looking and with a decent battery life.

**Price:** \$400

### **Asus 900HA**

**Specs:** Intel ATOM N270 1.6 GHz processor, 1 GB RAM, 160 GB hard-drive an 10 GB EEE Storage, 8.9" glossy screen 1024 x 600 px resolution, wireless 802.11b/g , Windows XP OS , 5 hours real battery life, weighs 2.7 pounds

**Pros:** compact and light, excellent price, big storage space, excellent autonomy

**Cons:** crowded keyboard



**Bottom line:**

The Asus 900HA series continues the success story of the 7" models. It provides very good performances and enough storage space, all in a compact low footprint body that's doesn't lack its looks. Autonomy is also better than the competition can offer and the price/quality rapport is unbeatable.

There's only one problem though: the keyboard has small keys and is kind of crowded, thus you might have problems using it without making many typos, especially if you have thick fingers or long fingernails (it's not worse than what other 9" devices have though).

All in one, the Asus EEE PC 900HA series was perhaps the best 9" netbook money could buy.

**Price:** \$329

And there were other interesting 7" or 9" netbooks at their time that could be mentioned, like the **Acer Aspire One AOA150** or the **HP Mini 1010NR** .

These days however it's **hard to find new 9" netbooks in stores**, as they have been replaced with the bigger new 10" generation. That's why prices can be also pretty high. But, if you really want a more compact and light netbook like these 7 or 9 inch models, you can try getting them used or refurbished (so you'll end up with better deals).

## 4.2 10 inch netbooks

Since fall 2008, it was clear that the 9" netbooks had their limits: still the keyboards were too crowded and uncomfortable to use, the display too small and the prices pretty high. Thus, producers started working on the next generation, the 10" netbooks, the ones that quickly brought netbooks the success they enjoy today.

These were received by many as **the perfect combination between portability, size, performances and price**. More about some of the most successful such sub-laptops in this class can be found in the paragraphs bellow.

## **Samsung NC10**

**Specs:** Intel ATOM N270 1.6 GHz processor, 1 GB RAM, 160 GB hard-drive, 10.2" glossy screen 1024 x 600 px resolution, wireless 802.11b/g , Windows XP OS , 6 hours real battery life, weighs 2.8 pounds

**Pros:** good price, good performances, comfortable to use keyboard, multiple colors available for the chassis

**Cons:** battery life is good but not great, small touch-pad

### **Bottom line:**

There's no wonder the Samsung NC10 is so popular, there's almost nothing you can't like about it. Hardware specs are similar to those of other 10" netbooks: 1.6 GHz Atom CPU, 1 GB of RAM, 160 GB hard-drive. The device also looks good, especially if you're a fan of glossy finishes, and comes with multiple color options for the case.

The keyboard on this Samsung NC10 is very well balanced and comfortable to use, but the touch-pad however is small, so I do recommend using an external mouse with this device. Battery life is good, around 6 hours real tested autonomy, but there are competitors that can do way better.

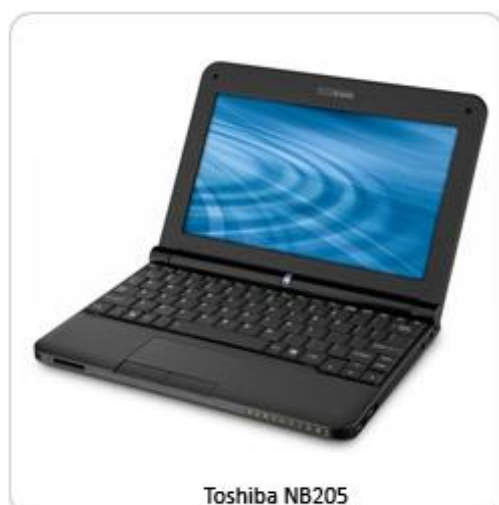
All in one, the NC10 is a well balanced good priced and decent looking 10.2" netbook, one that I would recommend to any Samsung fan and more.

**Price:** \$349

## **Toshiba NB205** ([review here](#))

**Specs:** Intel ATOM N270 1.6 GHz processor, 1 GB RAM, 160 GB hard-drive, 10.1" screen 1024 x 600 px resolution, wireless 802.11b/g , Windows XP OS , 8 hours real battery life, weighs 2.9 pounds

**Pros:** one of the few matte netbooks on the market, comes in 5 different colors, has good reviews and marks from buyers, battery life is good, chiclet



keyboard for some versions

**Cons:** a little bit pricey, screen is still not matte, but not as glossy as the one found on other netbooks

**Bottom line:**

This Toshiba NB205 is only one of the very few 10" matte netbooks on the market, and probably the best. It's true, it's a little pricier than other similar netbooks, but is a very good product, with hardware specs, keyboard, battery life and screen at least comparable (if not better) to what competitors can offer. And yes, you can actually use this devices outdoors, as the screen is not as glossy as you might think.

Marks received from current buyers are high and so are the reviews, although some complain about the speaker's volume and quality.

Prices range between \$349 and \$399, with the \$399 version boosting a chiclet style keyboard and some other goodies. You might ask if it's worth paying a little bit extra just for the matte body, good keyboard and decent screen. Well, unless you consider greasy fingerprints cool, the answer is definitely "yes".

**Price:** \$349 - \$399

**Asus 1005HA** ([review here](#))

**Specs:** Intel ATOM N280 1.66 GHz processor, 1 GB RAM, 160 GB hard-drive, 10.1" ultra-glossy screen 1024 x 600 px resolution, wireless 802.11 draft n , Windows XP OS , up to 10 hours real battery life, weighs 2.9 pounds

**Pros:** the best battery you can get on a netbook at the moment, standard specs and power, Wi-Fi draft n compatible, decent price, available in black, blue and silver

**Cons:** it has an ultra glossy screen and body, some might not like the touch-pad



Asus 1005HA

**Bottom line:**

This is the best sold 10" netbook at the moment in many US stores. Buyers pick it because of the brand name (it's an EEE PC), but mostly because of what it can do: overall build quality is

good, offers good performances level, comes with Wi-Fi draft n and has the best autonomy in its class (up to 9-10 hours - tested).

Also, the 1005HA looks good, but the glossy exterior is quite nasty and it scratches quite easily unless you cover it with a skin (or protect it with a good sleeve). You can get this netbook in black, silver or blue and prices are around \$369 .

Overall, the Asus 1005HA is a very good choice, perhaps one of the best in terms of features and performance. That if you can live with the glossiness, of course.

**Price:** \$369

### **Acer Aspire One 150** ([review here](#))

**Specs:** Intel ATOM N270 1.6 GHz processor, 1 GB RAM, 160 GB hard-drive, 10.2" glossy screen 1024 x 600 px resolution, wireless 802.11b/g , Windows XP OS , 6 hours real battery life, weighs 2.8 pounds

**Pros:** excellent price, standard performances for a 10" netbook, multiple colors available for the exterior, good marks and reviews received from buyers

**Cons:** battery life is good but could be better

#### **Bottom line:**

This is the most popular 10" netbook from Acer . Specs are pretty standard, overall construction is good and the case and screen are glossy. Battery life of only 5 hours is worse than the competitors can offer, though.



Acer Aspire One 150

You can choose from 4 different colors for the exterior, but price varies according to these colors (between \$299 and \$329). Still, as you can see, this Acer is one of the most affordable high quality netbooks in its class. Combine the above with the good marks and the good reviews received from current buyers and you won't be surprised to see that this model is one of the best sold netbooks in the world.

**Price:** \$299 - \$329

Of course, these are only few of the 10" netbooks available; [you can find other interesting options via this link](#). And of course, each of the above comes in different configuration so they will better fit the needs of each particular user.

But, since hardware is improving and new and more powerful platforms emerged, producers decided it's time for netbooks to go up another level, and they are right now working on probably next year's mainstream devices: the 11.6" netbooks.

### 4.3 11.6 inch netbooks and above

There aren't many 11 inch and above netbooks on the market yet, but the ones available are quite impressive. There are versions based on the old Atom platform (some with Nvidia ION graphics) and even CULV powered devices. They all offer better performance level and a bigger working surface, so can be for most a lighter cheaper replacement for their everyday laptop. But, they do cost more than their 10" relatives, at least for now.

**Asus 1101HA** ([more detailed review here](#))

**Specs:** Intel ATOM N520 1.3 GHz processor, 1 GB RAM, 160 GB hard-drive, 11.6" glossy screen 1366 x 768 px resolution, wireless 802.11 draft n , Windows XP , 9 hours real battery life, weighs 3 pounds

**Pros:** decent performances, powerful enough to play 1080P movies and run Windows 7 with Aero (but it can get sluggish sometimes), comfortable keyboard, affordable, good looking

**Cons:** glossy finish (some may consider this a plus also)



#### **Bottom line:**

This one is perhaps the most successful 11.6: netbook on the market at the moment. It's an Asus EEE PC, thus it combines looks, portability and performances. Because it can play 1080p video content and run Windows 7, all these while providing a tested autonomy of around 9 hours (up to 11 hours on paper). It can be easily upgraded with an extra RAM module; unfortunately the 1.3 GHz Atom CPU is quite powerless.

Last but not least, it comes for a very good price. So, if it wasn't for that glossy finish I find

annoying (dust and fingerprints magnet) - although I noticed most like that part , there would be almost nothing I could reproach to the 1101HA EEE PC from Asus.

**Price:** \$385

### **Dell Inspiron 11z**

**Specs:** Intel Celeron 723 CULV CPU 1.2 GHz processor, 2 GB RAM, 250 GB hard-drive, 11.6" screen 1366 x 768 px resolution, wireless 802.11b/g , Windows Vista Home , 3 hours real battery life, weighs around 3 pounds

**Pros:** more powerful than other similar netbooks and better equipped, good looking, light and compact, very good price

**Cons:** battery life is quite poor (for the 3 Cell version)

**Bottom line:**



The Inspiron 11Z is one of the most powerful netbooks on the market at the moment. The 1.2 CULV CPU might seem pitiful, but is actually almost 40% faster than the standard 1.6 GHz Intel Atom. So this netbook comes with a faster CPU, more RAM, bigger storage space and Windows Vista OS (replaced by Windows 7 pretty soon).

All these for a very good price of just \$399, for the base model. And Dell offers lots of customizing options too, that will transform the 11Z in quite a powerful machine, [but price can get up to \\$800](#) .The 3 Cell battery is the only real down fall the Inspiron 11z has, but you can easily configure your 11z with a bigger 6 Cell one.

**Price:** starts from \$399

**For some more interesting choices of 11.6 inch netbooks, [you should read this post here.](#)**

I expect to see more and more such devices on the market by the end of this year and early next year. Once the new Intel Pine Trail platform gets out, along with Windows 7, many producers might enter the dance. Also, there might be some new versions with Intel's CULV technology on-board joining them also.

## 4.4 Touch screen netbooks

Last but not least, there's a new subclass of netbooks emerging lately: the so called tablet-netbooks, mini laptops with foldable touch screens, similar to those used by tablet-PCs, but yet better priced.

There aren't many options in this class available just yet, that's why I'll update this part in a couple of months, once there will be some noticeable products on the market to recommend you folks.

## 5. Accessories and Upgrades for your netbooks?

Although netbooks offer you almost anything you need out of the box, there are a couple of accessories every netbook owner should have. You can choose to [read this article about the crucial netbook accessories and upgrades you should consider as a netbook user](#), or find below a list of the ones I consider important and use with my netbook.

### 5.1 A wireless mouse

I for one **am not a very big fan of the touch-pads netbooks offer**, as in most cases they are too small and a little bit uncomfortable to use. Thus, **I recommend using a wireless external mouse**, at least when you use the netbook at the office or at home. It's important to pick a cordless device so you won't get stuck with extra wires on your desk, but you should also pay special attention to autonomy, size and ergonomics.

There are many different options for portable mice on the market at the moment. I have a Logitech VX Nano and I totally recommend it, but [you can read in this post here more about some of the mice](#) for netbooks I consider best buys right now. You should pick one of those, according to your requirements and budget.

### 5.2 Upgrade RAM

At the moment, almost every netbook comes with no more than 1 GB of RAM installed. Thus, I advise you to upgrade it from start with one extra module (will **only cost you around \$20**). **Brand doesn't really matter when you choose the memory module**, but you have to be careful to get a module compatible with your device. More details on how to pick the needed RAM and how to install it in your netbook, in a future updated version of this e-book.

### **5.3 An external optic drive**

Netbooks lack an internal optical unit. In order to cope with this downfall, there are a couple of external ultra-slim and ultra-light such external drives that can be easily carried around and connected via USB when needed. You'll mostly find CD/DVD units, but there are also some devices capable of playing Blu-Ray disks.

So, if you're looking for such an external optical drive for your netbook, [here are the best options at the moment](#).

### **5.4 An USB flash drive**

Having an USB flash drive in your netbook bag can always come in handy, cause you never know when you will need to transfer something on or off the little laptop. And since these devices are really cheap, I would recommend at least an 8 GB one. [You can find some very good options here](#).

### **5.5 Protection accessories**

A case, sleeve or a skin are much needed accessories for your netbook, especially if you buy one of those glossy devices. I for one only use a sleeve, and it's important that it will perfectly fit the netbook. Some producers offer a sleeve when you buy the netbook, but most of you (and me included) won't be satisfied with the looks and quality of that standard sleeve and rather spend some extra 10-20 bucks for something better.

If you're looking for some good and affordable options on such protection accessories, you should [see this list here](#).

## 6. Where can you get the best prices and deals for netbooks?

If you've got this far, you should already know a lot about netbooks and you are convinced such a device is what you need.

That's why I want to **give you a final helping hand by telling you where you can get the best deals on netbooks and accessories**, either new, refurbished or used.

First of all, there's [this section on the site](#) where I gather the best deals I find online, a couple of times a month. Most of those deals are only available for a limited amount of time (most just for 1 or 2 days), so you should [subscribe to my RSS feed](#) to keep updated with the latest posts (this way you won't miss anything important).

Then, there are a couple of **big and trustworthy websites** that offer good deals for these devices, and you can find some of the ones I use and recommend below:

**[Amazon](#)** - Amazon has good prices on almost any kind of products. Actually, **it's quite hard to find better prices than the ones they offer**. There are lots of netbooks and accessories in there, with interesting price cuts and you can get even bigger discounts if you buy bundles (like a netbook + a case + a sleeve). Also, the store offers reviews for the products they sell from previous buyers, so you can easily see if the product is worth it or not.

**[Buy.com](#)** - Another big online store in US. Doesn't have as many products as Amazon, but prices for the ones available are similar. And from time to time, you might even get special price offers only available for a couple of hours or days on some products and accessories.

**[Newegg](#)** - The ultimate source of hardware and electronic accessories. Their prices on netbooks might not be as good as the ones on Amazon and Buy.com, but **you can get upgrade parts and accessories for peanuts if you get lucky**, as there are many short time deals available here. Also, they do **tend to get new products faster** than the other big online stores.

**[Refurbished Depot](#)** - here you can find **factory refurbished and restored products for very good prices**. You will find some netbooks and even some laptops cheaper than anywhere else, but warranty on these products usually goes for only 3 to 6 months.

**[eBay.com](#)** - here you can find almost anything, mainly used netbooks and accessories, but also

some deals on new and refurbished devices from time to time. You just **have to be patient and search through all the crappy ads to get the good deals.**

All of these stores above (but Ebay) offer money back guarantee policies, reviews for the products from previous buyers, free shipping (for some devices), special prices on bundles, etc.

That's why I'd advise you to check out their offers and if you can't find there what you're looking for, then [send me a message](#) and I'll try to give you a helping hand.

## 7. What the future holds in store for the netbooks segment?

**Two years ago netbooks didn't even exist.** A lot has changed since then, and like I told you before, 20% of the portable laptops sold these days are netbooks. **These small devices managed to become so popular so fast,** and that's because they are able to satisfy the needs of those looking for a portable laptop, that can run regular every-day applications and comes with a decent price tag.

**I do believe this is only the beginning for netbooks.** They managed to succeed in developed markets like US and Europe. In the future, they'll bring many more features for the customers in these zones (along with yet better prices) and also they will try to reach emerging countries in Asia and Africa, where there are billions of potential buyers.

Also, it seems that netbooks evolved during the last 2 years only by getting bigger and closer to laptops. That's why I'm curious to see where the line will be drawn. I for one believe 10" netbooks will still remain the most popular, at least in the near future, with 11 to 13 devices creating a new class, the so called laptop-replacements.

## 8. Is this a good moment to buy a netbook?

If this is the proper moment to buy a netbook or not is only up to you and your needs. It's true technology evolves quickly in this domain, but it's the same for laptops and any other kind of electronic devices.

So, there's no point in waiting a couple of months for something better to enter the market, because at that point, something even better would have been announced. **This way you might never get what you want :)** .

My sister for example is a Med-School student and she just got a new 10" device (an Asus 1005HA). And yeah, I know more powerful devices will enter the market in just a couple of months, but the actual 10 inchers offer just enough for what she wants. So, there would have been no point in waiting a couple of months to get something better, with extra features that she wouldn't even have used, when she needed the device now.

Thus, just analyze your needs and try to find the best portable device that could meet them, while offering an as good as possible price/quality rapport. If you manage to find one, just go for it. It's that simple.

## Final words - conclusion

In the end, I have to thank you for baring with me in this guide. I wanted it to be quick; it ended spreading on quite a couple of pages (and will get even better with future updates). This always happens to me 😊 .

**I do hope it was useful though** and you managed to learn what you needed to know about netbooks and also managed to find the desired products for the desired prices.

I know that so many things happen in this domain almost every day, so I'll update this eBook with extra info every couple of months, so all the advices will be fresh and useful for you folks.

**Of course, if you want to stay in touch with the latest subjects about netbooks**, you should visit <http://www.netbooklive.net> and also [subscribe to the RSS feed](#) if you haven't already.

**And also, if you have anything to ask or have any complaints about the info presented here**, [feel free to contact me](#) and I'll get back to you as soon as I can.

**All rights for this guide reserved. This material may not be published, broadcasted, rewritten or redistributed in whole or part without the express written permission** of the owner. For more details see the [Terms and conditions page](#).

That's it for now; I must once again thank you for your time and wish you happy netbooks hunting!

Andrei