

**American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division  
The Young Lawyer**

***The Digital Edge — An Attorney’s New Best Friend: The Netbook***

*By Joel Braithwaite*

You may have seen the commercials for Verizon FiOS® (fiber-optic television) and Comcast offering a “free” netbook for switching to their services. And, you probably asked yourself the question, “What exactly is a netbook and, as an attorney, should I get one?” Read on.

As compared to full-sized laptop computers, netbooks are similar in proportion to DVD players that kids watch in the backseat of cars or on airplanes. The critical distinction between netbooks and laptop computers is that netbooks have no DVD or CD drive (optical drives), which saves weight. Netbooks are typically half the weight of full-sized laptops and are designed to handle the majority of computing tasks for simple uses, such as Internet, legal research, word processing, and e-mail.

Netbooks browse the Internet by Wi-Fi® or with the 3G network if equipped. Because netbooks have no optical drives, users must use the Internet or USB drives, SD, MMC, and other formats of flash drives to transmit data. The operating system on netbooks varies by manufacturer, but Windows XP is very popular and Linux and Google’s new Chrome OS also are available. Netbooks have voluminous hard drives; 160 gigabytes is not out of the ordinary, which is enough storage space to replace most desktops in operation today.

In some respects, a netbook is everything an attorney needs to be productive on the road minus the DVD reader. But then again, when was the last time you used the DVD or CD drive on your laptop? Netbooks are useful alternatives for attorneys who need to conduct online legal research, write client letters or briefs, review contracts, communicate with clients, or even collaborate with other attorneys while traveling. Some netbooks tout battery lives of up to 6 hours, which is sufficient for a cross-country flight from Washington, D.C., to San Diego, California, and perfect for attorneys who travel often.

The netbook really makes sense for attorneys on the run or on a budget. Did I mention that most netbooks can be purchased for around \$400? Have you begun to see why they are so attractive?

**Next Steps**

- Read reviews of popular netbooks at <http://reviews.cnet.com/best-netbooks/>.
- Get free “FYIs: Technology Overviews” from the ABA Legal Technology Resource Center at [www.abanet.org/tech/ltrc/fyidocs/](http://www.abanet.org/tech/ltrc/fyidocs/).

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