

My previous laptop having become a bit long in the tooth and also having been "re-purposed" by my family, I decided it was time for a new one. Here is how and what I chose:

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Firstly, I have wanted a small netbook for quite some time - ever since the rise of the netbook as a distinct market segment. So this was where I started looking. However, with the arrival of Windows 7, with touch and pen support, the tablet PC has become a viable option too. Tablet PCs are like normal laptops, but the screen can be turned round so that when the laptop is closed, the screen is on top and can be used like a tablet. (I have to admit, seeing a friend's new iPad was also a factor in wanting a touch/pen system. However, an iPad just won't do what I want to do, however cool they look. But they do look cool.)

So: The Asus T101MT was my first pick - a netbook with a 1024 by 600 pixel resistive touch screen. Nicely built and small but getting a bit expensive for an email reading and surfing tool. And not really powerful enough to do much more.

Moving up the scale led me to the Hewlett Packard TouchSmart TM2 - This has a 1200 by 800 dual touch screen, i.e. resistive and capacitive. This provides the best of both worlds - light touches for finger gestures and pressure sensitivity for pen work and handwriting recognition. It also has significantly more power, memory and hard disk. This could actually be used to run my development tools if I needed to - not ideal, but certainly possible. It is however considerably bigger. Still smaller than my previous laptop though.

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The decision came down to the TM2 so I ordered one - a cheap offer as the model is due to be upgraded soon and suppliers were selling off their stocks of the older model. The PC arrived

and needed a good clearing out of most of the junk that comes pre-installed. Physically the machine is very pretty, though my wife said that it looked a bit "Girly" due to the wave patterns engraved on it... The build quality is very good too, especially the very important hinge for the rotating screen.

I also installed office XP but made a nasty discovery - outlook XP cannot store the passwords for email accounts on Windows 7! This is a real problem for me since my outlook checks about ten different email accounts at five minute intervals... this is such a pain in the butt that I can only imagine Microsoft have made it deliberately so to move people to newer Office versions. There are tools claiming to automatically enter the passwords for you, but they were not free either and they sounded like a bit of a hack to me too. I tried installing Eudora OSE but after spending about a day trying to get the mail accounts and folders set up as I wanted, I gave up (Office 2010 is expensive, but still cheaper than a day of my time...) So, I caved in and bought Office 2010. (I am waiting to the end of my current paid work before moving the email setup - but will do so as soon as I am not likely to need response times of a couple of minutes for emails.)

I am starting to try and learn how to use OneNote 2010 as a tablet Pen application, but I am still not sure if it is a good idea - still, learning how the latest pen and touch interfaces are setup is a good idea anyway. It would be nice if I could retire the series of A4 paper notebooks that I carry around all the time. Although there is something reassuring about the low tech solution, it is always irritating when I move to a new book and find that lots of important facts were in the old one - phone numbers, addresses, design notes, to do lists - and need to be duplicated in the new one.

I also needed to update all the drivers for the devices on the machine that I could find, particularly the Wacom pen digitizer, the wireless card and the display.

I have trained the handwriting recognition in English and am halfway through the training in German - this training makes a big difference to the accuracy of Windows 7's recognition. To train, windows asks you to write out sentences (that Windows shows you) and individual characters. Complete training requires about fifty sentences. One irritating feature is that I have to choose either to have my handwriting recognised as English or German - annoying when I write in English but include a German name with an umlaut. Or when I use English words in German.

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Generally I have only one niggle left - the wireless adapter gets turned off sometimes, probably by the power management, and fails to turn on again properly without a couple of shutdown/restarts, preferably with a change from AC to battery or back again too. I am hoping that Windows 7 or HP updates will fix this soon though.

Office 2010 also has machine translation included - I will be playing with this a bit and will probably write a later blog on the subject. In fact, I may do an Office 2010 review blog.

I may update this blog later after I have had the laptop a bit longer.