

Mobile Lawyering Meets the Sherman Tank: HP's Pavilion zd7000 Series Laptops

By:

Ross L. Kodner, Esq.
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So you've decided to toss the old desktop PC and get on the mobile lawyering bandwagon with a new docked laptop system. The array of choices is dizzying - the word "panoply" doesn't begin to describe the confusing morass of laptop choices facing the average lawyer today. The laptop range today runs the spectrum from the sleekest and sveltest (is that a word?) 2 pound, 3/4 inch ultralights to much, much, bigger notebooks. But taking a cue from most old adages regarding relative size of various objects, let's take a look at the king of laptops - think of it as the Harley-Davidson of computing technology. Twelve pounds of solid American plastic, metal and that squishy liquid inside flat panel displays. Hewlett-Packard's new Pavilion zd7000 series laptops put the big in huge, the enormous in colossal - you get the picture. They're so big they should come in a riding model with a mulching attachment and a pull start. I spent five minutes thinking there just had to be somewhere to pour in the oil and gas mixture for this thing.

Okay, that's more superlatives than anyone should have to tolerate in one mini-column. Let's look at the specifics. HP's zd7000 series is one of two available "wide-body" laptops - the most striking characteristic being the 17" wide-aspect LCD display - it's just plain visually stunning and frankly, it's what grabbed me by the throat as I turned the corner around an aisle at a Cleveland CompUSA and refused to let go until I earned over 2500 frequent flier miles and the right to take it home. Toshiba makes a similarly megasuper-sized series of laptops as well - the Satellite P25 series. What is so compelling about the HP zd7000 series though, aside from the incredible display, is the keyboard. It's bar none, the best laptop keyboard I have used in 20 years of portable computing. The laptop's chassis is so wide that there is room for a full-sized keyboard - even a complete built-in numeric keyboard to the right of the "regular" QWERTY key area.

In terms of capability, these machines are true desktop replacements, with processors ranging from Intel's 2.66 GHz Pentium 4 to the rip-snorting, hyperthreading, computing version of laying rubber Intel 3.2 GHz Pentium 4 processor. So speed is as much a non-issue as the fact that you'll need a Sherpa named Tenzing to lug this beast to your depositions.

The important bits: 40 to 80 GB hard drives with the new 60 GB really fast 7200 rpm hard drive available, 512 MB of RAM (expandable to a whopping 1 GB), that extraordinary WFXGA (Wide-Freaking XGA is what it should be called) display (1440 x 900 resolution), a DVD writer in some models, a 4-in-1 "digital film" reader, four - yep, count 'em, four USB 2.0 ports and a Firewire port as well as the usual parallel, serial, PS2 and docking station ports. Built-in 802.11g "Fast WiFi" will connect you wirelessly wherever you find a signal - which seems to be just about

everywhere these days, A standard 10/100 Ethernet port and built-in modem round out the “I want my Internet NOW dammit!” connectivity complement.

A few more items of note:

- * Some models run the Media Center 2004 edition of Windows XP Pro - the amazing thing is that these models come with a PVR device (Personal Video Recorder - think “Tivo-like”). This attaches the laptop to your cable TV system to allow it to record and play back TV programming - a lot like the popular Tivo and Replay TV systems. So you could record a month’s worth of “Law & Order” or “West Wing” episodes to play back through your sub-miniaturized headset during that really dull partner’s meeting!
- The speakers on most laptops have the tonal quality of the typical 1950’s crystal radio. But not the zd7000 series - it’s built-in Harmon Kardon speakers sound incredible - rich tones, deep bass - who needs a Bose Wave Radio when you can tote your laptop and several thousand legally downloaded MP3 files or a stack of audio CDs?
- Docking to your network when in the office . . . HP’s \$249 Notebook Expansion Base” is a port replication marvel. It’s hard to describe so be sure to look at the pics on HP’s website, but it effectively tilts the entire laptop upward so that gorgeous visual panorama is at perfect eye level - absolutely zero reason to have to pony up for a separate flat panel display. A single connection to the Base connects you to all your essential plug-ins to connect you while in the office. A must.
- Battery life. Not great. Two hours if you’re lucky. The moral of that story is . . . be near a plug.

The laptop’s weight might sound imposing - and, well, it is. But the laptop is actually 10 pounds and the AC power brick (truly the perfect term here) is another 2 pounds. My answer? Get a laptop bag with wheels and your problem’s solved. I recommend either Targus’ sub-\$60 wheeled XL model, Toshiba’s upright roller for widebodies, or my current “ride”, a Victorinox Web Messenger Plus with a padded laptop sleeve from Waterfield Designs.

Pricing runs from about \$1300 for the most minimally configured models to about \$2800 for a full-tilt, add-the-vinyl-roof and Scotchguard-the-seats fully optioned unit. Well-configured law office workhorses, sans the PVR option can be had for under \$1800 - a LOT of laptop for the money. Info is at www.hp.com.

So . . . if you were entranced by King Kong as a child, the HP zd7000 Pavilion series of laptops is a full-size dream for semi-mobile, no compromise law office computing.