

## Crossing the Digital Divide (v49)

### “Replacements”

By Joseph Feigon for the Observer

Tech tools, like most tools, don't last forever. Electronics wear out. Heat and cold, moisture, movement, and dust all take their toll on our phones, laptops, desktops, TVs, toasters, Xboxes, incubators and laundry machines. Tech, for me, is primarily tool based - what do we need to get the job done, reliably, and within budget. Matters of esthetics are subjective, brands somewhat less so, but when the need can be clearly articulated, the proper tool becomes obvious.

I'm seriously considering a Chromebook when the time to replace my laptop grows near. My current laptop, like its predecessor, and its predecessor, are Lenovo Thinkpad T-Series. The T-Series are road warrior machines: built with sturdy cases, these laptops are equipped with fast processors, ample amounts of high speed RAM, Solid State storage, robust graphics, and leading edge radio and network interfaces. Quality electronics aren't cheap. The 'average' laptop is 30% the cost of my typical Thinkpad.

Is it possible a \$400 Chromebook could replace a \$2,000 mobile tech station?

A **Chromebook** is a laptop of a different breed. Instead of Windows 10 or Mac OSX, **Chromebooks** run Google's Chrome OS. These machines are designed to be used primarily while connected to the Internet, with most applications and documents living in the cloud.

**Positive points:** A Chromebook, for users of the Android Smartphones, will feel quite familiar. They start up quickly, run forever on batteries, and the user interface of tiles and icons and Google products should be a familiar interface for most. As long as one protects their Google password, nothing will ever be lost if the device is stolen, lost or otherwise unavailable. Your pictures, notes, documents, spreadsheets, videos will be safely stored in Google's global hive-like Data Centers. Trashing a \$400 computer isn't \*as\* painful if the replacement can be 'up and running' with a sign-in.

**Negative points:** Gamers may not find their favorite sport available for the Chrome OS. Users with limited Internet access may find a Chromebook unable to support their word or number processing needs. Fans of rich media will not be able to use Blue Ray or DVD when their Internet connection dies.

**Conclusion:** I may consider a Chromebook as a replacement for my Android based tablet. I've put little time in with my tablet, granted, the screen is larger than the one on my phone, but the device is too large for one hand, and too small for two. I find I use the tablet for piping Internet audio sources through my legacy sound system.

For those considering a replacement to an old desktop or laptop, get to know Google's product suite. If you can store your photos and documents on Google Drive (e.g., you don't

have 200GB of files), and spend the rest of your computer time on email, web searches, or Netflix, the Chromebook might save you some money.

The Cloud is safer than relying on any single hard disk drive.