Laptops

When you're on the road, your laptop can be your link to the world.

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TAKING A notebook PC with you when you go on the road is a great way to stay productive away from the office. But it also means that you have an expensive piece of equipment to worry about. Taking your laptop on a plane flight can be even rougher, from getting your PC through airport security to watching in horror as an airline attendant reaches over your notebook with a cup of coffee—just as turbulence rocks the plane.

The following strategies will help you maintain your productivity, comfort—and sanity—when taking your notebook on the road.

Before You Go

Protect your notebook. A lot can happen to your laptop when it ventures out of the office—it can be stolen, damaged, or lost. To minimize »

Cool Notebook Accessories

- **NeatReceipts Scanalizer** ($230, neatreceipts.com) is a portable scanner for receipts, documents, and business cards.
- **Creative Live Cam Optia** ($80, find.pcworld.com/57553) is highly portable and captures surprisingly good Webcam video.
- **Boostaroo Portable Headphone Audio Amplifier & Splitter** ($30, find.pcworld.com/57554) cranks up your laptop's volume and provides three headphone jacks for maximum flexibility.
- **Kensington Vo200 Bluetooth Internet Phone** ($90, find.pcworld.com/57551) is ultracompact and can slide into your notebook's PC Card slot for recharging.
- **Targus Notebook Stand** ($80, find.pcworld.com/57611) helps prevent notebook overheating.

these dangers and maximize your peace of mind, start by taping your business card with your cell phone number on the back of your notebook. In addition, register your PC with StuffBak.com (stuffbak.com). The Web service will send you a sticker ($6) stating that there is a reward for your device's return and providing a phone number to call. Safeware.com (safeware.com) provides affordable laptop insurance covering theft and damage. The LoJack for Laptops service ($50 yearly, lojackforlaptops.com) tracks, locates, and recovers stolen notebooks. A laptop security cable/lock will help keep your laptop physically secured. And the Targus DefCon 1 Ultra ($50, find.pcworld.com/57547) emits a piercing alarm when someone tampers with the laptop's cable.

Protect your data. TrueCrypt, available as free download at find.pcworld.com/57548, helps protect the data on your laptop by encrypting a hard disk partition or storage device (such as a USB drive). Store all your passwords away from your notebook on a secure USB thumb drive with RoboForm2Go ($40 at find.pcworld.com/57549). Another option is to store sensitive information on Lexar's JumpDrive Secure II USB Flash Drive ($20 to $120, find.pcworld.com/57735), which encrypts your data.

Plan ahead. Most airplanes don't provide Internet access. So before you leave, think about the work you plan to do in flight and the information you need to collect from the Web in order to do it. Save Web pages to your notebook's hard drive in Firefox or Internet Explorer. Or use Adobe Acrobat 9 Standard ($299, find.pcworld.com/57623) to create PDF archives of multiple Web pages and sites.

Look for power ports: Before reserving a flight, check SeatGuru.com (seatguru.com). The site's airplane diagrams reveal which seats have power ports, for keeping your notebook juiced (you'll need an airplane power adapter).

Check airport Web sites. Visit the airport's Web site in advance to find out where (or if) power recharging stations, Wi-Fi networks, and other business amenities are available. For example, the Charlotte, North Carolina, airport's main terminal has a free business center and Wi-Fi network (though there »

» tip

Put your laptop through the airport X-ray last. At a crowded security checkpoint, notebooks may sometimes get stolen or forgotten. Put your shoes, jacket, and other items through the screener first and your laptop last, minimizing the time it's out of your control.

» tip

Prevent prying eyes from reading your notebook screen by buying and using a 3M privacy filter ($40 and up, find.pcworld.com/57555).

Boosting Your Battery

- **Shut down your notebook.** The Stand By and Hibernate modes use up precious power.
- **Turn off Wi-Fi.** Bluetooth and cellular wireless are additional drains on your laptop's battery.
- **Remove CDs.** Besides taking out CDs, you'll want to remove DVDs, flash media, PC Cards, and ExpressCards. Even when they aren't in active use, these items consume power.
- **Dim the screen.** LCDs are tremendous power hogs. Most notebooks provide function keys, such as the **<F7>** key, that enable you to decrease screen brightness with a single touch.
- **Pack auxiliary power.** Xantrex's XPower Powersource Mobile 100 ($130, find.pcworld.com/57556) is handy source of emergency juice when your battery dies unexpectedly.

» tip

Ask whether your hotel room has flat-screen TVs. If you have the right cable, you can plug your notebook into the TV to view DVDs on the big screen, rather than on your notebook's LCD.

are fees for services such as faxing). Visit find.pcworld.com/57560 to see if the airport you are traveling through has a Laptop Lane center. This company rents small offices containing T1 lines, printers, fax machines, and desktop computers to travelers.

When You Pack

Pack your carry-on notebook bag wisely. Every airport-bound laptop bag should include these essentials:

- Noise-canceling headphones to drown out chatty passengers. Shure's SE10 ($150, find.pcworld.com/57561) are expensive but compact.
- Your laptop's AC adapter or a multiple-device power adapter with airline and automobile power adapters, such as the iGo Juice 70 ($130, find.pcworld.com/57562).
- A three-prong extension cord with extra outlets at one end, such as Monster's Outlets to Go ($20, find.pcworld.com/57563), so that you can recharge multiple gadgets in the airport simultaneously.
- DVDs to help you while away the time on long flights.
- An RJ-11 phone cord and ethernet cable, because you may need them unexpectedly.

» tip

Some hotel chains offer rooms geared toward laptop-carrying business guests, with dedicated work areas, ergonomic chairs, and free Wi-Fi. Among these are AmeriSuite, with its Taking Care of Business rooms; Days Inn, with its Work Zone rooms; and Quality Suites, with its Executive Rooms.

Never pack your notebook in a checked bag. Here are some reasons why: Airlines often stack bags atop one another; your notebook could be stolen out of the bag; your bag could get lost. The worst part is that airlines exclude computers from their liability, which means that they don't have to pay if your notebook gets lost, stolen, or damaged in transit.

Leave the printer at home. Don't bother packing a portable printer. Send documents over the Internet to your hotel's printer via EFI's PrintMe.com (printme.com); but note that hotel charges may apply. If your hotel isn't part of the PrintMe network or if you need a more sophisticated level of printing, try sending your print jobs remotely to a nearby Kinko's at fedexkinkos.com. ●

Choosing a Notebook Bag

- A notebook backpack puts the weight comfortably at the center of your back. Good choice: **eBags Downloader Laptop Backpack** ($50, find.pcworld.com/57565); available in eight colors.
- Wheeled bags put the least amount of strain on your back. But they can be difficult to maneuver down narrow airplane aisles or in crowded airport lines. Good choice: the rather expensive but extremely well-made **Tumi Generation 4.4 Wheeled Compact Computer Brief** ($475, find.pcworld.com/57567).
- Messenger-style bags are hip. But they can be uncomfortable when loaded with a heavy laptop. Good choice: **Waterfield's Cargo** (various prices, www.sfbags.com), which you can order with an airplane seat–style buckle.