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iBook vs. NEC Versa TXi, Part Two

What will that extra $1000 buy?

by Paul Cesarini

Based on the amount of feedback received for the "iBook / Versa TXi" comparison, I though a follow-up might be appropriate. As expected, several people emailed saying that a 500mhz G3 was *far* more powerful than a 750mhz mobile PIII. A near equal amount emailed proclaiming the exact opposite, including one person who demanded that I "...quantifiably prove a 500mhz Mac G3 [sic] is anywhere near as good as a 750mhz Pentium III." While I could perhaps resort to the trusty ByteMark integer tests that Apple has touted since the very first G3 system shipped, I have neither the time nor inclination to do so. After all, this isn't my day job. Since I use Macs, Windows-based systems, and Linux systems at work and at home, I'm really just going by gut feeling on the whole processor thing. Let's just agree to disagree about processor speed comparisons, ok?

A few of you pointed-out that the whopping $1000 price difference between similarly-configured iBooks and Versa TXi systems could be further widened if the additional ram and larger hard drive were bought from a third party, rather than directly from the Apple Store. I agree. In spite of Apple's recent 50% off ram promotion, it is still cheaper to click over to Ramseeker.com, scan for the lowest price, and order from one of numerous memory vendors. The $193 Apple wants to swap-out the stock 10gb drive in place of a 20gb one is certainly no deal, either. Prices on 20gb IBM TravelStar drives, or similar ones from Toshiba, have dropped to $125 - $145 range. If you bought one and swapped-out the stock 10gb drive, you'd have an excellent back-up drive available. All you'd need is an external FireWire drive kit enclosure, which are readily available and darn cheap, too. :)

The main reason why I opted to exclude third-party vendors is that I wanted to go with a straight Apple -> NEC comparison, with as few middlemen as possible, to keep it a clean fight. This proved difficult, though, due to NEC not having their own online store.

One person also mentioned the ATi chips used in the iBook and Versa appear to be different, as do the beefiness of the LiON batteries. This may well be true; I'll need to look at both more closely. Same goes for the person who pointed-out the PC card slots on the Versa, which the iBook of course lacks. Since nearly

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everything is built into the iBook, the lack of PC card slots, to me, is really less of an issue than, say, the lack of monitor-spanning capability. There are plenty of external, USB solutions to flash memory readers, cell phone modem use, etc. I admit that there may well be some instances where no external solution, either USB-based or FireWire-based, exists, and that could be construed as a minor shortcoming of the new iBooks.

Hats-off to the person who pointed-out that 128mb on the new iBooks, if ordered through the Apple Store, likely means getting the motherboard with 128mb soldered-on while still having an empty ram slot. On the Versa, no such luck: 128mb means you have to yank some existing ram if you ever want to add more.

Anyway, the main reason why I felt a "pt. 2" might prove interesting is due to a suggestion one of you sent: what will the extra $1000 get you? My first reaction was, "A bunch of stuff, of course." After mulling it over, however, I started to really think about what to do with that extra grand. Picture this: You own a small business, are fairly platform indifferent, and were about to drop down $2700 for a cool new Versa TXi until you saw the new iBooks and changed your mind. You've already set aside the $2700 -- *you've already planned on spending that much* -- but now find yourself with a cool grand leftover. Aside from pumping that grand back into your business, here are some suggestions.

Top 10 "Bonus Grand" Possibilities:

- Since you just bought a new iBook, use the extra $1000 to get a color inkjet printer, extra AC adapter, flash memory reader, extra battery, scanner, carry case, max-out the memory, external monitor, USB keyboard & mouse, Virtual GameStation, and maybe The Simms. You'll still likely have some cash left-over. Two words: gas money.
- Get a brand-new iMac. You'd have both a laptop and a desktop computer for the price of the Versa.
- Get a brand-new Windows-based desktop system. Seriously. If you were already considering the Versa, that means you were already considering Windows. Hell, build your own system and you could get two for $1000. Play Half-Life. We can't.
- Get a second iBook. A grand won't buy you a new one, but it sure will buy you a refurbished model from last year. Better yet, get two base models of the new iBooks. At $1299 each, you'd *still* be coming in $200 below the Versa. Buy some extra ram with the $200.
- Give it to me. My PayPal account is: pcesari@cyberdude.com. I guarantee the transaction will be quick and efficient.
- Invest the extra grand in Apple stock. Wait 18 months. Sell the stock and get that Versa. You will have likely made some money off the investment by then, and this hot, new Versa TXi should be marked-down quite a bit. It really does looks like a decent, Windows-based laptop.
- Build a patio. I just did. It cost $1000, and looks good. (gas grill and patio furniture are extra, unfortunately).
- Call 1000 friends for 20 minutes each, using one of those "10-10" phone services.
- Visit your grandparents, or similar older relatives. This has nothing to do with the extra grand. My grandparents live over 1200 miles away. I don't see them anywhere near as often as I should.
- Donate the extra grand. The American Cancer Society, as well as numerous churches, schools, and similar organizations, could always use the help.

Of course, these are just suggestions. You could, and probably should, just pocket the extra cash and drop it back into whatever account you pulled it from. While you're doing that, you could also thank Apple for making such a cool little laptop, and for saving you $1000 in the process.

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