

Special Online Article: Laptop Computers and Social Workers

Contributed by Lee D. Cooper

Computers are now ubiquitous in today's workforce. Computers are used in almost every profession, including social work. The social worker can especially benefit from the use of a laptop computer. Portability is essential for someone on the move. {mosgoogle right}

Laptops (or notebooks) are practical and useful when social workers go on a home visit or travel from one location to another. They are portable and affordable. New laptops can be purchased for under \$600, and refurbished models cost even less.

For the social worker, a laptop computer is very helpful in keeping up with and updating client documents and records. Instead of carrying massive amounts of paper files, a social worker can keep the records of hundreds of clients on the notebook's hard drive. Be sure to follow your employing agency's protocol in regard to maintaining confidentiality of client information. A strong password will assure the information on the hard drive is kept confidential. Be sure to include letters, numbers, and symbols to assure proper strength to your password. (See the Fall 2008 issue of The New Social Worker for more on confidentiality and electronic information.)

A broadband Internet card from a cellular provider will open up even more opportunities. Just slip in the broadband card and access the Web and e-mail from almost anywhere. You can log in to your office and upload records and update critical client information. You can even send an email for a client that does not have Internet access. A laptop with a broadband Internet connection makes it easy to log on to your favorite social worker Web site, The New Social Worker Online. You will be able to check out what's new in the profession, jobs, and upcoming events.

If you are considering a refurbished laptop, try to stay with a later model. Choose one that has a Pentium 4 CPU, 512 MB memory, at least a 20GB hard drive and a DVD/CDRW drive. The operating system (such as the version of Windows) is also important. A computer with Windows 2000, Windows XP, or Windows Vista will do all of the basics and more.

As Marshall L. Smith PhD pointed out in his article "Electronic Connection: Teach Your Teachers," published on this Web site, Open Office offers an excellent way to get most of the functions of MS Office, and it's a free download. There is a lot of other free software on the Internet. Be careful, though, and check it out prior to installing it on your computer. Some of the free downloads from less scrupulous sites contain spyware and other malicious computer code that can actually harm your computer. Once installed on your computer, it could cost a lot of money to repair the damage to the computer's hard drive. In the most serious instances, you could lose all of your data and programs.

Antivirus software is a must if you are on the Internet. I highly recommend Norton Internet Security. It is very effective in protecting your computer and information on your hard drive.

The uses and benefits of a laptop are numerous.

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