TechTips: Have a Laptop? Care Tips for Laptop Screens

The recent PC "refresh" cycle included 176 laptops to add to the 75 or so purchased in the last year or two. Using a laptop is almost the same as using a desktop - almost.

The screen on a laptop is an LCD (liquid crystal display) composed of individual transistors at every pixel (the tiny dots that make up the images on the screen). The screens of the laptops we just purchased have 1,470,000 pixels. Each pixel is a separate transistor/liquid crystal combination. If any one is damaged you will have a permanent black spot on your screen. To be sure, the loss of a single pixel will not make your screen unusable, but if you physically damage the screen you will probably lose more than a single pixel. The screen is the single most expensive part of your laptop. Most damage to it is non-repairable. Replacing it can cost $700 to $1,000, a substantial portion of the $1,483 cost of the most recently purchased machines.

To keep your screen in good shape, stay away from it - i.e. do NOT poke it with your finger - or even worse- with a pen or pencil. If you want to show something on the screen to someone else, point "from a distance" or use your mouse and cursor to point to the item of interest (incidentally, you can make your cursor much larger and/or change its shape if you find it hard to see on the screen. Go to My Computer > Control Panel > Mouse). If you do get fingerprints or dirt on your screen, you can clean it - with care and the proper cleaning solution. Remember, your laptop screen surface is thin, flexible plastic, not glass. Do NOT (repeat, do NOT) use glass cleaner. The ammonia that is a primary component of most glass cleaners will eventually yellow the screen and make it brittle.

Your first attempt to clean a screen should be with a soft cloth (NOT paper towels) dampened with water. If a gentle wipe with this does not work, then use isopropyl alcohol (rubbing alcohol) at 50% or less (most isopropyl is 90-95% strength; just dilute it with an equal amount of water). You can buy commercial cleaning solutions and cleaning pads for computer screens - but make sure they specifically say "for laptop or LCD screens" - otherwise they most likely contain ammonia and/or ethanol, both of which will damage your screen.

And, of course, always pour the cleaning solution onto the cleaning cloth - never pour or spray it directly onto the screen (where it may run off and damage electronic components).

The same care tips hold true for any LCD screen that you may have - for a desktop computer or TV as well as for laptops.

If you are a new "owner" of a laptop, were unable to attend any of our recent Personal Technology Consulting days, and have questions about your new machine, please contact the Helpdesk for assistance.