

Revisiting Chromebook

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I've used a Chromebook in the past and the premise of its operating system, Chrome OS is a great one. It's a very lightweight operating system that doesn't require premium CPUs, extensive amounts of memory, or large amounts of storage (because it largely uses the Google cloud for that. For any user who simply requires a computer for getting online, checking emails, and doing the occasional very light other tasks, it's perfect in theory.

Of course, I'm not that user and so upon using it last time, I missed the full range of features I'd have at my disposal with one of the full-featured OSs of Linux, Mac OS, or Windows.

In recent years there has been more and more buzz about Chromebooks. Particularly during the last few years of the pandemic with homeschooling requirements, Chromebooks have surged in popularity. There have also been some big additions to Chrome OS in recent years with the addition of Android app support and the Google Play store, and the addition of Linux compatibility. So I thought it was time to take another look at a Chromebook.

Setup is as easy as ever. I joined my WiFi network and signed in with my Google account and I was up and running. Everything was still there from the last time I had used a Chromebook, as though I had never left. All my apps were already installed, and all my settings were remembered. I don't know any other operating system that is able to achieve that so simply.

I have a certain way I like to use a computer and certain applications I like to install that I find indispensable. Generally no matter the operating system, I am able to find versions of them to use, giving me a very consistent experience no matter what sort of computer I'm using. Last time around with Chromebook I had to either use progressive web app (PWA) versions of them or look for substitutes through the Chrome store.

This time around I had the Google Play Store at my disposal. This meant I could actually find Android versions of all the apps I usually use, put them in tablet mode, and then they really worked as well as they would have on any other platform. And I like to have all my email addresses set up in a client I can look at in a unified view. This time around I could install the Android version of Gmail for that. Despite being the Gmail app it supports any other sort of email account as well, whether it's a Microsoft Exchange account or an IMAP account

The other thing that has improved this time around is the ability to install Linux applications and run them from Chrome OS (which is itself based around the Linux kernel). This has really been introduced to allow developers to write their code and test it while using a Chromebook for their day-to-day computing needs. But for me, it means that I can fill the gaps that aren't filled by Android apps with Linux applications, such

as Visual Studio Code. I also installed LibreOffice as a test. In theory, any Linux application can be installed using the Debian virtual machine which you can easily install.

So I think Chromebooks are now worth considering, particularly if you have very basic computing needs and mainly check email and browse the web. But even if you want to do more on your computer as I do, then they are worthy of consideration.