focus on TECH

HP Spectre One computer, Logitech Bluetooth, LogMeIn service in the news

By Art Snyder

Efficiency has been the go-to word in the business world ever since Henry Ford pushed the "start" button on his assembly lines and transformed society. You might not have the same prospects, but efficiencies are wonderfully at hand this year. Below, a look at a new printer from Epson, new business computers from HP, and new online services from LogMeIn and FreshBooks underscore this, and the emerging world of LED lighting and signage is sure to put a smile on your face come April 15.

HP Spectre One

HP's Spectre One is a glossy, high-end computer for those who are looking for the latest in features, and the unit's wireless design saves a lot of desk space. This makes the Spectre One ideal for rinks with tight office space. Most notably, the 23.1-inch LED display is bright and easy on the eyes, for daylong use and enhanced productivity.

The Spectre One includes stylish wireless peripherals: a keyboard, touchpad and mouse. The keyboard keys have a short stroke, which may be different from what most users have used, but the short stroke makes for fast action and increased productivity.

Available ports for peripherals are a plus. Two handy USB 3.0 ports are on the side of the base, and three USB 2.0 ports are on the back of the base and underneath the unit. A wireless or USB printer is ideal for the Spectre One, which features Windows 8. Other ports include Ethernet, 802.11 a/b/g/n Wi-Fi and the latest Bluetooth (short-range wireless networking), for Internet and other connections.

Standard RAM is 10GB, more than enough for almost any need, although you can configure the unit with a range of RAM and hard-drive sizes, which determine the Spectre One price. Built-in speakers complete the all-in-one, clutter-free Spectre One, which starts at $1,299. It's a beautiful, powerful computer that should provide years of service and overall value. For more, visit http://x.co/se9o.

Epson Expression Photo XP-850 printer

Your rink is only as good as your printer, and that holds true whether you produce media releases and other marketing materials or print a lot of high-quality photographs, perhaps to enhance your birthday, school, church and other private sessions. The Epson Expression Photo XP-850 Small-in-One (their descriptive) is a fast, full-featured color inkjet multifunction printer (MFP) with automatic duplex (two-sided) printing and scanning, in addition to photocopying and faxing. As has been the norm with Epson, printed images truly look like photographs, as long as you use photo-quality paper stock.

Setup is a breeze, and operation is intuitive, thanks to lighted buttons, a touchscreen and a smart menu of printing choices. A nice plus: The tidy-sized XP-850 has mobile printing via e-mail and Wi-Fi, which makes a digital camera, a laptop and a smartphone prospectively all the more versatile.

One reason for excellence with colors and details is that the printer uses a six-ink system, which adds light magenta and light cyan to the usual cyan, magenta, yellow and black. Text printed on standard paper is sharp, as expected. Epson replacement ink cartridges are priced lower than the competition, and you can expect secondary ink suppliers, such as Staples and Office Depot, to meet Epson cartridge needs with their own, lower-priced generic inks (I've had good luck with such off-brand inks with about 10 different printers over the years). For more, and a video, visit http://x.co/seek.

HP ElitePad 900 business tablet

Like business people everywhere, you probably enhance your 9-to-5 days with evening and weekend computer work. That's why Hewlett-Packard designed their HP ElitePad 900 tablet computer specifically for small business.

Available this spring, this new Windows 8 tablet sports a generous 10.1-inch touchscreen display, and the whole unit is only .36 inches thick and 7 inches deep. A digital camera, a webcam, a microphone and speakers are built in, for added, and unexpected, versatility.

A solid-state hard drive saves weight, adds to battery life and works fast. The frame of the ElitePad 900 is machined aluminum, for strength and low weight. Overall, the ElitePad 900 weighs just 1.5 lbs., for effortless portability.

Should you want to use this tablet as a desktop, you can opt for an available HP docking station, although companies like Logitech also make an excellent docking station and offer a wireless keyboard, to transform the tablet into desktop mode, when that's wanted.

The HP ElitePad 900 tablet has all the elements to complement rink office life, with a Windows 8 computer operating system that will be familiar to Windows fans and most of the business community. For more, visit http://x.co/s9vf. To see a YouTube overview, visit http://x.co/seem.

LogMeIn remote log-in

LogMeIn is a security system that allows you to access your Windows (or Mac) computers, software, files and apps from anywhere, as with checking your rink desktop while you're at home or on the road, wherever you have access to the Internet. You can do this via a smartphone (Internet-enabled mobile phone), iPad or iPod, too. This access allows you to wake a "sleeping" computer, as well, which can be especially valuable when you need to

HP ElitePad 900 business tablet.

check your computer and are physically nowhere near it. One of the key safety features of LogMeIn: The software uses the latest encryption features, the same as those used by banks. A free version of LogMeIn is available with online registration, and a pro version offers added features, such as remote file access with local printing. That is, you could print an office document or photograph file on your home printer, or, for example, access a file or document while you're at your local print shop, to have them print it for you on the spot. For more on the array of LogMeIn products, visit https://secure.logmein.com.

FreshBooks cloud accounting

Calling themselves "the No. 1 cloud accounting specialist for small business owners," FreshBooks cloud accounting improves your options when you want to work on your books — wherever you are.

You can store your accounting files in the cloud (via the online storage provided by FreshBooks) and access them from anywhere you have an Internet connection and a suitable computing device, such as a smartphone, tablet, desktop or laptop.

FreshBooks provides secure access and backup of your files, for added safety and peace of mind. As with LogMeIn (above), FreshBooks employs the latest encryption features, the same as those used by banks. Should you want an accountant or other financial professional to access your FreshBooks accounting files and collaborate with you, that's another feature of the product. Should you want to accept payments for rink billings, you can do that, too, with FreshBooks; the service accepts payments by credit card and PayPal, among others.

Other tasks for FreshBooks include online invoicing, expense-tracking, time-tracking, accounting reports and taxes. FreshBooks' service might be a good fit for small rinks. A free 30-day trial should provide answers. For further details, visit freshbooks.com.

Reduce energy costs with LED lighting

As the world has gone digital with most office equipment, improvements are rapidly happening with lighting and signage, now that LED-type lighting is coming into its own. Businesses like Walmarts, 7-Elevens, Pizza Huts and other retail, convenience and foodservice stores, as well as rinks with all the interior and exterior lighting and signage are all dependent on electrical efficiency, and few advances have stood out like LED lighting.

By design, LED devices operate at only a fraction of the cost of comparable lighting and signage. An ordinary 60-watt incandescent bulb has its LED equal when the latter is rated at only 10 watts, a huge savings. And LEDs can last for years, instead of months. When you scale these efficiencies to the size of rinks, the monthly operating savings can be enormous.

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