

## Traveling with Your Notebook

**O**ne of the main reasons people of all types buy a notebook PC is because they can take it with them when they travel. Whether you're a frequent business traveler or just want to check your email while you're on your family vacation, it's great to have your notebook with you.

However, this assumes that taking your notebook with you doesn't become a supreme hassle—which it can, if you don't do everything just right.

There are definite do's and don'ts when it comes to taking your notebook on the road. Read on to learn what you need to do—and not do—to make traveling with your notebook a little easier.

## Accessorizing for Travel

One of the things you can do to make traveling with your notebook a more pleasant experience is to take along the right accessories. After all, a notebook by itself is only so functional when you're away from home.

**note** Learn more about the many different accessories available for your notebook in Chapter 20, "Accessorizing Your Notebook."

## Cases

We'll start with that most essential accessory for anyone traveling with a notebook PC, a notebook case. Although you can stuff some smaller notebooks into a traditional briefcase or shoulder bag, you're better off with a case designed specifically for notebook use. You can go with an over-the-shoulder model or a backpack case; just make sure you get a case big enough to hold your particular notebook. (Not all cases are big enough to hold 17" or larger widescreen models.) Also make sure that the case is adequately padded, so that your notebook is protected if you ever drop the case.

**tip** I personally prefer a backpack if I'm carrying a notebook over long distances, such as through large airport concourses. It's easier on my back and shoulders.

To limit the possibility of theft, some professionals recommend a case that doesn't immediately look like a notebook case. The thinking is that a generic black case will be less attractive to thieves than one that screams "Expensive notebook inside!" I'm not sure this is a necessary protection, given that almost every traveling businessperson is carrying a computer these days; it's a good guess that the accompanying case contains a notebook.

## Batteries

There's nothing worse than being in the middle of an important document and having your laptop battery go dead. (Unless, perhaps, it's being in the middle of a DVD movie during a long flight when the same thing happens.) For that reason, every serious road warrior needs to carry a spare notebook battery.

Some notebooks make this easy by accepting a second battery in a modular internal bay; when one battery runs down, your PC automatically shifts to the backup battery. With other notebooks, you

**tip** Your PC's manufacturer should sell replacement and secondary batteries. You can also find a good selection at Batteries.com ([www.batteries.com](http://www.batteries.com)).

have to shut down the machine and manually swap batteries to and from the single bay. In any case, you should definitely carry that second battery with you on important trips—and make sure it's fully charged in advance!

## Power Cables and Adapters

Your laptop probably came with a single AC cable/adapter. Because you'll need to take an AC adapter with you on the road, you might want to purchase a second adapter, so you can leave one hooked up at home and carry the second one with you in your briefcase. You can purchase the original equipment adapter direct from your PC's manufacturer, or you can get a compatible unit from Targus ([www.targus.com](http://www.targus.com)).

If you plan on connecting your PC to the cigarette lighter/DC adapter in a car, you'll also need to purchase a DC auto/air power adapter. Your best bet is to order a unit specific to your notebook from your PC's manufacturer, although third-party suppliers also offer compatible adapters.

(Different notebooks use different shaped and sized connectors.) In any case, make sure it's the right model for your notebook.

To use your notebook on a plane, you want to be able to plug into the airplane's power ports. Some airlines use a standard DC jack, whereas others require proprietary adapters. That means you might have to purchase a special power cable, or at least a connector to fit between your normal DC adapter and the airline's power port. (For example, Continental uses the Hypertronics connector, whereas Delta and United use the PowerExtender connector from EmPower.) Contact your airline to see if special adapters or connectors are necessary.

There's another option, particularly useful if you have multiple portable devices and don't want to buy multiple DC adapters. You can purchase a unit called a *power inverter*, which plugs into a DC power port but then provides a normal AC jack, into which you can plug any AC-powered device, including your notebook. For example, the Targus Auto/Air Power Inverter, shown in Figure 15.1, features dual outlets and runs \$79.99.

**tip** The Targus Universal Notebook AC Adapter is a nice way to go, because one unit can work with a variety of laptops from different manufacturers, using the various power tips supplied with the unit.

**FIGURE 15.1**

The Targus Auto/Air Power Inverter ([www.targus.com](http://www.targus.com)).



## Removable Storage

Transferring data from your desktop PC to your notebook can be accomplished in any number of ways. If both PCs are connected to the same network, it's easy enough to copy a file from one machine to another. If both machines are connected to the Internet, you can email the files from one PC to another. Or you can copy your files to a removable storage device and physically move the data in that fashion.

The most common removable storage device today is the so-called *USB drive*. This isn't a hard drive, per se, but rather a form of random access memory called *flash memory* that functions like a removable disk. As you can see in Figure 15.2, these devices are small enough to be carried in your pocket or hung on your keychain, and they plug directly into an open USB port on your computer. When connected, one of these devices is instantly recognized as a new disk drive by your computer; no special installation is necessary.

**FIGURE 15.2**

A USB flash memory drive from SanDisk ([www.sandisk.com](http://www.sandisk.com)).



Of course, you can also burn your data to a recordable CD or DVD, using your computer's built-in CD/DVD drive. And if that isn't enough storage, consider attaching an external hard drive to your PC. These portable hard drives can be purchased with over 200GB of storage capacity, at prices under \$100. Buy one that connects via USB for the easiest hookup; I particularly like the WD Passport portable hard drives from Western Digital, such as the one shown in Figure 15.3, which are small enough to fit in any notebook bag—or your shirt pocket.

**FIGURE 15.3**

Western Digital's WD Passport portable hard drive ([www.westerndigital.com](http://www.westerndigital.com)).



## Essential Software

Before you head out on the road, you need to make sure that your notebook is loaded with all the applications you plan to use while you're gone. For most users, this means installing the same software on their notebook that they use on their desktop PC—in particular, the key Microsoft Office programs (Word, Excel, Outlook, and PowerPoint). You should also make sure you have Internet Explorer or some similar web browser installed, as well as any propriety applications used by your company. In addition, if you plan on managing your personal finances from your hotel room, make sure you have a copy of Quicken or Microsoft Money installed.

## Flying with Your Notebook

If you're flying to your destination, your life just got a bit more complex. That's because plane travel in the post-9/11 era involves heightened security procedures—which can complicate traveling with electronic devices, your notebook PC included.

That said, here are some tips that can help you get more quickly through the airport and onto the plane with your notebook:

- **Carry it on.** Thinking of checking your notebook as normal luggage? Don't. Baggage handlers will not treat your notebook as a fragile object, and damage is likely. Instead, your notebook should go with you on the flight as carry-on baggage.
- **Be ready for security.** Security personnel *will* inspect your notebook, along with the rest of your carry-on items. Be prepared; remove your notebook from its case and place it in a separate tray on the security conveyor belt. And make sure the battery has a bit of charge, as some security personnel may want to you to turn it on and demonstrate that it's actually a working notebook, and not something else.
- **Keep it in sight.** The one place where your notebook is briefly out of your possession is on the security conveyor belt. Keep a close eye on your notebook as it passes down the line and as you pass through the metal detector. It's possible for canny thieves to take advantage of the momentary confusion and make off with your notebook as it comes off the conveyor belt. Don't let this happen.

**note** Some travelers worry about the security's x-ray equipment damaging their notebooks. Not to worry; the weak magnetic field generated isn't strong enough to erase data from your notebook's hard drive.

- **Keep a low profile.** If you want to use your notebook while in the terminal, go ahead—but be cautious. Pick an area where you’ll have some privacy and won’t have to worry about anyone looking over your shoulder. Whatever you do, don’t flaunt your notebook, and don’t leave your notebook unattended; you don’t want to advertise to potential thieves that you have a notebook to steal.
- **Keep it locked.** When your notebook is in its case, lock the case (if it locks). This not only prevents others from taking the notebook from the case when you’re not looking, but it also keeps them from putting anything else (such as a bomb) into your case. Both in the terminal and on the plane, keep your case locked.
- **Keep it with you.** When you’re on the plane, don’t be tempted to place your notebook in the overhead storage area; it can easily get knocked around or even stolen by your fellow travelers. Instead, store it under the seat in front of you, where it’s always in sight.
- **Use it in flight—if you can.** A lot of mobile professionals like to get a little work done on a long flight. Other travelers like to use their notebooks to watch DVD movies or listen to music. It’s all good, if you have the room to open and use your notebook. If you’re traveling first or business class, this shouldn’t be a problem. But if you use a widescreen notebook in coach class, be prepared for some major ergonomic difficulties. In fact, I find it next to impossible to open the notebook enough to see the screen when flying, especially when the person in front of me reclines his seat more than a half-inch or so. The seatback tray table just isn’t big enough and there’s not enough vertical space to provide a comfortable viewing or typing arrangement. One possible solution to this is the Aviator Laptop Stand, shown in Figure 15.4, which positions your notebook at an angle to make the most of the available space. But even with that, some airlines simply don’t allow enough space to use a notebook comfortably.

**FIGURE 15.4**

Keynastics’ Aviator Laptop Stand, for computing in cramped cabins (www.keynastics.com).



- **Getting power in flight.** In most instances, you'll have to run your notebook on battery power while flying. However, some long-haul flights—especially overseas flights—provide power ports that supply 15V direct current to power your notebook and other devices. (Your best bets for finding such power ports are on cross-country and international flights on American, Delta, United, and US Airways.) To use a power port, you'll need a compatible DC auto/air power adapter. These cords can be purchased at most electronics stores, at LaptopLane outlets ([www.regus.com/files/html/laptoplane/](http://www.regus.com/files/html/laptoplane/)), or from Targus and other power cord manufacturers. Keep in mind that power adapters are device and model specific—although you can always go with the iGo Juice power cord, shown in Figure 15.5, which is an all-in-one power adapter that connects your device to any AC or DC power source.

**tip** If you're flying internationally on a Boeing 747, ask for an emergency exit seat. On most airlines, there is a live 110V AC outlet directly in front of each exit door, into which you can plug your notebook, no adapter required.

**FIGURE 15.5**

The iGo Juice power auto/air power adapter ([www.igo.com](http://www.igo.com)).



- **Turn it off when asked.** Frequent travelers are familiar with airline restrictions regarding the use of personal electronic devices, including notebook PCs. The concern is that electronic devices may cause electromagnetic interference with cockpit navigation or communications systems during ground operations and while the aircraft is flying below 10,000 feet. When the aircraft is above 10,000 feet, you can use your notebook and other devices.

## Driving with Your Notebook

Here's the first thing to know about driving with your notebook PC—don't use your notebook while driving! That said, here are a few things you might want to consider when taking your notebook on a road trip:

- **Use a DC power adapter.** Using your notebook in the car is a great idea for everyone except the driver (while you're driving, anyway). For long road trips, however, a single battery charge won't cut it. Instead, invest in a power adapter that plugs into your car's cigarette lighter. (A power inverter will also work.) This way you can get constant current while you're cruising down the highway.
- **Get a notebook desk.** If you're a mobile professional who likes to check in during driving breaks, consider investing in a mobile notebook desk that provides a good resting surface for your notebook. Some of these mounts (such as the one in Figure 15.6) attach to your steering wheel, some (such as the one in Figure 15.7) attach to the passenger seat, some mount permanently to the front floor of your car, and others just sit on your lap.

**FIGURE 15.6**

The Wheelmate notebook desk mounts to your car's steering wheel (www.nudell.com/road.htm).



**FIGURE 15.7**

The LapTraveler Execudesk laptop seat mount (www.laptraveler.com).



- **Use a cellular data card for roving Internet access.** You'll find lots of Wi-Fi hot spots when you stop your car, in rest areas and hotel parking lots, but that doesn't help when you want to go online while you're driving I-94 between Madison and Minneapolis. For connecting from anywhere you get cellular phone service, invest in a broadband cellular data card for your notebook, and the accompanying data service.
- note** Learn more about cellular data service in Chapter 14, "Connecting to an Internet Hot Spot."
- **Use your notebook for maps and directions.** If you can get Internet service, there's no reason not to use your notebook to help you navigate—and to find gas stations, restaurants, and hotels on the road. I like to use Google Maps ([maps.google.com](http://maps.google.com)) for these tasks, although any general-purpose mapping site will do the trick.
  - **Let your kids use your notebook for in-car entertainment.** If you have kids with you on your trip, your notebook PC can also function as a mobile game player and a portable DVD player. Just stock up with the latest PC games and DVD movies, and you won't hear a peep from the peeps in the backseat. (And for long trips, you may want to consider a rear seatback notebook mount, such as the one in Figure 15.8.)
- note** Learn more about using your notebook as a portable DVD player in Chapter 16, "Playing Movies on Your Notebook."

**FIGURE 15.8**  
The RAM Rear Seat Laptop Mount ([www.ram-mount.com](http://www.ram-mount.com)).



## Boating with Your Notebook

If you do a lot of boating, you can use your notebook PC as both an entertainment and navigation device. Here are some tips to consider for nautical notebooking:

- **Navigate with electronic charts.** Instead of carrying paper charts, your notebook lets you use electronic charts on CD-ROM or downloaded from the Internet. Electronic charts are more convenient than paper ones and easily updated online. Charts are available from MapMedia ([www.mapmedia.com](http://www.mapmedia.com)), Navionics ([www.navionics.com](http://www.navionics.com)), Passport ([www.nobeltec.com](http://www.nobeltec.com)), and other companies.
- **Use GPS navigation.** Add a GPS card or external GPS device to your notebook, install the necessary navigation program, and you can use your notebook to pinpoint your position on the open sea. You can find GPS cards and devices from Garmin ([www.garmin.com](http://www.garmin.com)), MightyGPS ([www.mightygps.com/pccard.htm](http://www.mightygps.com/pccard.htm)), and other companies. Popular navigation programs include Chart Navigator Pro ([www.maptech.com/water/chartNavigatorPro/](http://www.maptech.com/water/chartNavigatorPro/)), EasyNav ([www.easynav.com](http://www.easynav.com)), and NavPak ([www.globenav.com](http://www.globenav.com)); you can also get similar functionality from connecting GPS functionality to Google Earth Plus ([earth.google.com](http://earth.google.com)).
- **Receive marine weather faxes.** It's important to keep informed of changing weather conditions. To that end, you can connect your notebook to your single-sideband radio and receive marine weather faxes while you're at sea.
- **Connect at the marina.** When you need to send and receive email, you can find wireless Internet access when you put to port. That's right, most major marinas are Wi-Fi hot spots; just log on and get online.
- **Connect at sea.** If you're near enough to shore to get cellular reception, you can use a cellular data card to provide Internet access to your notebook. Further out, consider a satellite Internet system, such as those offered by KVH ([www.kvh.com/kvhinternet/](http://www.kvh.com/kvhinternet/)) and VSAT Systems ([www.vsat-systems.com/mobile-satellite-internet/](http://www.vsat-systems.com/mobile-satellite-internet/)).
- **Secure your notebook.** You don't want your notebook PC to be too portable when you're at sea. Rough weather can send an unsecured notebook flying overboard, so make sure your PC is strapped down appropriately.
- **Protect against power surges.** Onboard power isn't always steady; neither is power at some marinas. To protect against damaging power

sags and spikes, invest in a heavy-duty surge protector for your notebook.

That's just the tip of the iceberg—although it's probably not a good thing to talk about icebergs while boating. Lots of boating-specific programs are available for your notebook, including software that lets you keep logs, manage maintenance records, and track your parts inventories. And let's not forget that your notebook can do double-duty as a DVD player and game device, providing entertainment for your ship's crew and passengers.

## Traveling Overseas

Traveling with your notebook outside the United States presents a whole other set of issues. You have to deal with customs issues, power issues, connection issues—you name it.

The first thing you have to deal with is customs; you don't want a customs officer telling you that your old notebook is a new purchase and that you have to pay customs on it. For that reason, it's a good idea to carry proof of purchase with you, in the form of a copy of the original store receipt. If you're using a company-issued notebook, ask for a letter signed by a company officer certifying you to carry company property internationally. Without such proof of ownership, you may be forced to pay a duty on your notebook.

Then there's the issue of restricted information. Believe it or not, the United States has laws against exporting certain technologies and technical data—and the fines are quite severe. This typically isn't a problem, unless your notebook contains files dealing with technical designs, manufacturing processes, and product specifications. (Certain encryption programs may also be in violation of security regulations in some countries.) Unless you absolutely need these files for business while you're abroad, it's best to delete them before you leave, just in case.

**tip** Find out more about what you can and can't carry abroad from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection publication, "Know Before You Go," available at [www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/vacation/kbyg/).

Finally, there's the power issue. Electricity is electricity, but power standards and outlets differ around the globe. You may need a power adapter (step-down transformer) to convert other countries' 240V power to the U.S. 110V standard. In addition, different countries use different power plugs and outlets; there are nine different plugs in use in various parts of the world. Make sure you have the correct adapters for the countries in which you'll be traveling.

## Emailing from the Road

Grabbing your email when you're on the road should be a simple matter—and it can be, if you prepare in advance.

### Configuring Your Email Program

The first thing you need to do is configure the email program on your notebook with the Internet addresses of your ISP's or company's incoming and outgoing email servers. You can obtain this information directly from your ISP or company tech support department, or just look in the options or setup dialog box of your email program.

For example, in Microsoft Outlook 2007, you add a new email account by selecting Tools, Account Settings. When the Account Settings window appears, select the Email tab and click New. You're now asked to choose the type of service (typically the first option: Microsoft Exchange, POP3, IMAP, or HTTP) and are then prompted for your name, email address, and password. Outlook will then attempt to find your email server and enter the correct information; if it can't do this automatically, you're prompted to manually enter your settings, as shown in Figure 15.9.

**FIGURE 15.9**

Setting up your email account in Microsoft Outlook.

**Add New E-mail Account**

**Internet E-mail Settings**  
Each of these settings are required to get your e-mail account working.

**User Information**  
Your Name:   
E-mail Address:

**Server Information**  
Account Type:   
Incoming mail server:   
Outgoing mail server (SMTP):

**Logon Information**  
User Name:   
Password:   
 Remember password  
 Require logon using Secure Password Authentication (SPA)

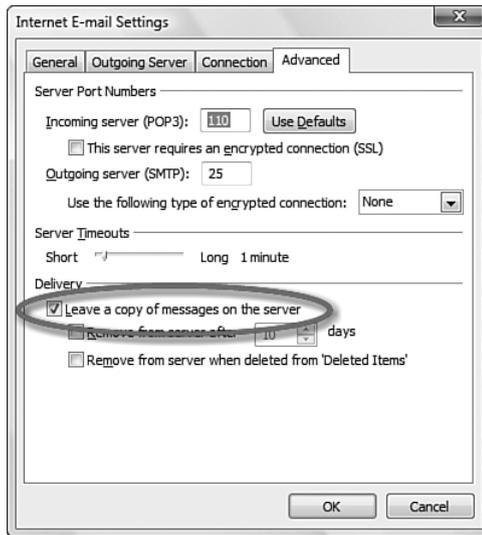
**Test Account Settings**  
After filling out the information on this screen, we recommend you test your account by clicking the button below. (Requires network connection)

### Saving Email Messages on Your Server

If your notebook isn't your main PC, you may want to configure your email program to not delete the original messages on your email server. This way the messages will still be available to download to your desktop PC when you get back to the office.

In Microsoft Outlook 2007, you do this by selecting Tools, Account Settings to open the Account Settings window. Double-click the name of your email account; when the Change E-Mail Account window appears, click More Settings. When the Internet E-Mail Settings dialog box appears, select the Advanced tab, as shown in Figure 15.10. Check the Leave a Copy of Messages on the Server option and then click OK.

**FIGURE 15.10**  
Configuring your email to leave a copy of all messages on your main server.



## Using a Web-Based Email Service

Instead of trying to configure your normal email program for on-the-road access, you can instead open a free web-based email account at Gmail (mail.google.com), Windows Live Hotmail (mail.live.com), or Yahoo! Mail (mail.yahoo.com). This is a particularly good option if you're not technically astute, because you don't have to do any configuring at all. Just use your web browser—from any location anywhere in the world—to access the Gmail, Hotmail, or Yahoo! Mail website, and then read and write email to your heart's content. You can even, with a little work, configure these services to retrieve messages from your normal email account while you're on the road.

## Dealing with Blocked Outgoing Email

Although you might use your email program to access your normal email inbox to retrieve new messages, you may have trouble sending email from some remote locations. That's because many companies and some ISPs block access to their outgoing mail servers from users connecting from outside their

networks. (It's a security matter, to keep spammers and crackers out of the system.) You'll know this is an issue if you can receive email messages but get an error message when you try to send a message.

A good workaround is to use Gmail, Hotmail, or Yahoo! Mail for your traveling email, as just discussed. You can also configure your normal email program to use one of these web-based services for all your outbound messages. You do this by creating a new email account for the web-based email service and using that account to send all your messages from your email program. You still receive messages using your standard account.

You may not need to go to that trouble, however, if your ISP offers its own web-based email service. If available, this service lets you use your web browser (*not* your normal email program) to access your email inbox and send outgoing messages. Check with your ISP to see whether this service is available.

Some hotel-based Internet services work around the blocked outgoing mail problem by automatically routing your outbound email through their own outgoing mail servers. You don't have to reconfigure anything; any messages you send from your notebook are routed to the service's mail server and sent from there over the Internet. Incoming messages still arrive through your normal mail server.

Note that similar issues apply if you try to connect to your company's internal network or virtual private network (VPN) through a hotel or wireless network. For security reasons, some VPNs may not allow access from the Internet outside their network; you may be required to use a dedicated dial-up connection instead. Consult with your company's technical support staff for specific instructions.

**note** For more advice on defeating blocked email servers, see Chapter 24, "Troubleshooting Network Problems."

## Printing from the Road

It's easy enough to work on a Microsoft Word document from any location, but how do you print your documents when you're out of the office?

The best solution is to make sure you stay at a hotel that offers a 24/7 business center. Most business centers offer access to printers, as well as photocopy and fax machines. You may be able to print from your room to the business center's printer via the hotel's network, or you may have to physically connect your notebook to the printer to print. Check with the front desk for instructions.

You can also rent printer time at any local FedEx Kinko's location. You'll have to connect your notebook to the printer at Kinko's, install the proper printer drivers (instructions should be nearby), and then do your printing.

## Tips for Traveling with Your Notebook

So far in this chapter, we've covered a lot of ground in terms of how to best travel with your notebook. There's still more advice to be had, however, in the form of the following tips:

- **Travel light.** When you travel, you don't have to take *everything* with you. For example, if you're not going to be taking pictures, don't carry along your external media card reader. The same goes with software; take only those programs and accompanying files that you're going to use. The less you carry with you, the less you'll lose if your notebook happens to fall into the wrong hands. (This goes double for any confidential or sensitive files; delete them before you leave, unless you absolutely, positively need them while you'll be gone.)
- **Back up your data.** Minimize your potential losses by backing up all of your notebook's data files before you leave. That way you can restore your data to a new PC if your notebook gets stolen or breaks down while you travel.
- **Identify your notebook.** If your notebook gets stolen and subsequently found, how can you identify it as yours? Try taping a business card to the bottom of your notebook; it's both unobtrusive and practical.
- **Print out what's important.** I also like to carry a hard copy printout of important data—contacts, phone numbers, account numbers, and the like—in addition to the electronic versions on my notebook. I carry these printouts in a separate bag, so that if my notebook is stolen, I still have this important information.
- **Work it out before you go.** A trip away from home is no place to learn how to use a new notebook PC or software program. Get familiar with your hardware and software before you depart and make sure that everything is working properly. (That includes doing a test connection to a public Wi-Fi hot spot.) And, if you need to, take along the relevant instruction manuals—just in case.
- **Charge the night before.** Make sure your notebook battery is fully charged before you leave; otherwise, you might not be able to use your notebook until you get to the next hotel.

- **Take an extra battery.** Along the same lines, it doesn't hurt to travel with a second *fully charged* battery. When your main battery runs out, replace it with the auxiliary battery.
- **Check on Internet availability.** If you're like me, your choice of hotel is dependent on Internet availability. Some hotels offer Wi-Fi for free, others charge per night, and a rare few don't yet offer any Internet connection. If there's no Internet in the hotel, check on the location of the nearest public Wi-Fi hot spot. (Starbucks are always good.)
- **Don't drink and type.** I know you'll be using your notebook in a coffeehouse or Internet café. Everyone does. But be careful when you're drinking that venti mocha cappuccino with extra sprinkles; knock that cup over and you could have a very wet and nonfunctioning notebook. Keep your drinks a fair distance from your notebook, and try very, very hard not to spill anything on your keyboard.
- **Use a privacy screen filter.** Want to keep your nosy seatmate or the guy at the next table from seeing what you're typing? Invest in a privacy screen filter, such as the one in Figure 15.11. This filter fits on your notebook screen and uses microlouver technology to reduce off-angle viewing. You can see what's onscreen, but people on your left and right can't.

**FIGURE 15.11**

Keep your computing private with 3M's Privacy Filter (solutions.3m.com/wps/portal/3M/en\_US/ComputerFilter/Home/).



- **Turn down the sound.** When you're using your notebook in public, whether at a Starbucks or on a Boeing 767, turn down or mute the sound; you don't want to disturb others nearby. Even better, use a set of earbuds when you want to listen to music or a movie soundtrack.

In essence, when you travel with your notebook, you want to be cautious, courteous, and connected. It's a matter of using common sense and of being prepared for all contingencies. Are you ready to go?