

## Presentation Perfect

With a laptop that connects to a TV or an overhead projector, you can pack a glitzy sales pitch in your briefcase

by David Abrahamson

There you are with a hot pitch for CrudBlaster, the world's most advanced showerhead, and an appointment with Rubber Duck Ltd., bathtub marketers. Competition in the showerhead business is cutthroat, and your company has armed you with a full-featured graphic presentation—complete with color, snappy transitions, sound, and full-motion video—for its top-of-the-line product. You're flying to Rubber Duck's corporate headquarters, so you'd like to limit your hardware to a notebook computer.

What are your presentation choices? The gather-'round-my-laptop option is a tad cozy, even if you have a liquid-crystal-display (LCD) screen that can be removed or reoriented. If Rubber Duck can provide you with a 21-inch computer monitor or an LCD projector, great, and thanks for reading this far. But if all the company has is an overhead projector or a TV, read on, because I'm going to introduce you to a family of laptops that allow you to use those ordinary presentation tools with no other accoutrements.

In the laptop-to-TV category are computers with onboard tuners that connect to a TV using a simple cable. Among them are the AMS PowerCD 8550 (AMS Tech, 800-886-2671, \$2,595) and the IBM ThinkPad 760 ED (IBM, 800-426-2968, \$6,999). Some, like the PowerCD 8550, connect only to S video, usually a fixture of large-screen TVs. Others, like the ThinkPad 760 ED, work with any TV, even European phase-alternating line (PAL).

What if Rubber Duck has an overhead projector? You could lug an overhead panel—essentially a brainy LCD screen that connects to your laptop and sits on the projector. Or you could buy a laptop whose screen converts to an overhead panel and carry just one piece of hardware. The IBM ThinkPad 755 CV and 755 CDV, two of the few laptops with that capability, were discontinued in May 1996, but the overhead-projector function makes it worth scouring retailers' shelves for one of the few remaining 755s (prices range from \$4,254 to \$5,289) or calling IBM's PC Factory Outlet for a refurbished model (800-426-7015, approximately \$4,000).

First, connecting to a TV. Setup is simple and quick. You run the cable, place the laptop in front of you, and begin.

The image you see on your notebook shows up on the TV, and you can page through your presentation manually or set the presentation to play automatically. You will not get VGA quality on the TV, though, even with an S-video connection. For example, for a presentation that uses Times New Roman lettering, you'd have to use at least 22-point type to allow the viewer to distinguish an *i* from an *l*; that translates to lettering that is a quarter-inch high on paper. Photographs show up pretty well, but only if they're at least quarter-screen size.

Still, if you don't plan to cram masses of small words and pictures into your presentation, the TV-tuner option works well. You can play the sound portion of a multimedia presentation through the laptop itself, with results that vary with the model you're using. At maximum volume, the PowerCD's reedy output can't be heard clearly farther than 6 feet away. But the ThinkPad blasts out impressively full sound that can be heard anywhere within a 25-by-40-foot room.

Laptops that convert to overhead panels are the more exciting of the two presentation options because they provide a clearer picture and allow you to address large audiences. To prepare the ThinkPad 755 for use with an overhead projector, you pop off the plastic back of the LCD display, position the notebook over the glass, secure it with its strap, and begin the presentation, using the infrared remote to control the program from screenside. The image is sharp, colorful, and bright enough to be seen anywhere in that 25-by-40-foot room. Graphics and sound that were clear when you reviewed the presentation on the airplane (with the earphones provided to watch the in-flight movie) will be equally clear at Rubber Duck.

What you get when you buy a laptop with an onboard tuner or an overhead panel is flexibility. On the lower end, a TV tuner adds little to the price of the laptop but a lot to what you can do with it: Take it home, and the kids can enjoy their favorite CD-ROMs on TV, or the whole family can browse the Web from the couch. On

the upper end, overhead-projection capability limits you to a few pretty pricey choices, but you'll enjoy a versatility that no other briefcase-toting road warrior can match.

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