

Coffee Shop Computer Etiquette
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This Tech Tip is a list of experiences that I have found to be a hindrance but can otherwise be remedied for all you mobile tech commuters. Have you ever found yourself trying to get work done at a Starbucks/Panera Bread (or name your favorite go-to spot) but can't because some inconsiderate customer is making it difficult/impossible to get work done? Let's dive right in to what this article is all about, coffee shop etiquette!

This Tech Tip will help outline a general etiquette list so mobile tech commuters can share a common courtesy in this world filled with laptops, e-book readers and coffee shops!

1) Keep a power strip handy

Leave a power strip in the car or backpack as a contingency plan in case you walk into a coffee shop and see one power outlet with both plugs occupied. Offer to plug your power strip in; usually everyone is okay with it as many times there are 3-4 laptop users nearby who would like to charge their rigs. If you want to go compact, you can also find a 2-3 plug power strip and just keep it in your backpack/notebook bag/man-purse.

2) Offer your power outlet to someone who needs it

And the majority of us hardly ever allow our notebooks/tablets to completely discharge, never mind that virtually all notebooks built today average at least 3-4 hours of battery life. (plenty of time to get important work done!) The interesting thing is that computer makers have listened to repeated consumer demand of more battery life (many average 7-10 hrs. run time) but unfortunately this still happens. So if you find yourself fully charged and not planning on camping out, offer it to that fellow laptop user who might be running on battery fumes.

3) Offer part of your medium (or large) table to someone else

Yes I know this is America and it's all about space but if you were the unlucky soul to walk into a completely full coffee house, wouldn't you feel good knowing someone is willing to share his/her table? We gotta help each other out!

4) Invest in a notebook cooler or lap desk

If you arrive at a busy coffee shop and find the only option is a love seat or couch, you'll feel better knowing you won't burn your naughty bits and thus protect future generations.

5) Understand Your Notebook's Power Capabilities and Settings

Assuming the coffee shop you walk into is full of selfish and unforgiving souls (yes, I have encountered them myself!), knowing your notebook's power capabilities enables you to adapt accordingly to still get work done... For example, I know my notebook has an approximate battery life of 5 hours but when I have had to work on battery mode due to lack of available outlets, I instinctively know to dim the LCD screen and throttle down

the CPU to extend battery life since I know sometimes I might be there for at least 5 hours.

6) Pick up a tablet PC

If you find that your purposes for lugging around a traditional-sized notebook are for leisurely email checking, casual web browsing and music, a tablet PC might be appropriate for you. With the explosion of tablets such as the Samsung Galaxy Tab, Motorola Xoom and even the super-duper popular Apple iPad, these slim devices can do many simple everyday computing tasks but can fit in a carrying sleeve or small messenger bag. In addition to the weight reduction, a tablet PC's perks include not requiring you to wait during start up (instant on OS!), not having to find a table and pull out/lug around a power adapter, and can last virtually the entire day on a single charge. However as a disclaimer, I am not suggesting you ditch your notebook computer in favor of a tablet PC but simply that they complement each other depending on the task that needs to be done.

7) Don't be a Squatter!

I'm sure everyone has been hearing about Starbucks' recent issues with Squatters; these are Starbucks customers who buy a cup of coffee and then occupy a table/power outlet with their laptop and basically camp out for countless hours. While I do agree this is technically legal since SBUX offers free Wi-Fi for customers, they have the right to limit use such as covering up power outlets and eventually offer your seat to other paying customers. Out of courtesy and basic respect to your fellow commuters, you should budget your time, get your work done, and then relinquish your seat for the person who needs a table to get work done (just as you probably did before him/her). However, if you insist on camping out for the entire day at Starbucks, the least you can do is buy more than a cup of coffee every 2-3 hours as a sign of good faith that you're not a moocher!