

HP Elitebook 8760W Laptop Review

By Elton Keith Hammond P.Eng. January 12, 2012



HP Elitebook 8760W - An Outstanding Workstation Class Laptop

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HP 8760W drives up to 4 External Monitors with AMD Graphics Card and a convoluted combination of ports and cables. It will not be neat and tidy like this HP promo photo implies.

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Foreword by Elton Hammond

I have been using laptop computers non-stop for about 23+ years. My first model was a Data General with a dull green monochrome screen that you could not even hope to see from one single viewing angle. You had to move your head continuously to view all areas of the very poor screen. That first very elegantly packaged laptop cost almost \$10,000 with all the options, including a gigantic external 5-1/4" floppy disk drive. (Think desktop computer size here for the floppy drive alone!!) Advances in my many laptop purchases have been dramatic and positive over the years. I sometimes wish I had kept all the money from those many laptop purchases (from Data General, Toshiba, IBM and HP) and just waited for the latest one(s)!!!

So in light of my historical purchases of laptops, my new HP 8760W is infinitely better and a true delight to use. But as in all modern competitive fields, there is always something more to improve, refine and dream about!! Healthy competition breeds never ending improvements for us as consumers!!

My heavy duty uses consist of AutoCAD 3D modeling, Photoshop editing and some movie editing. Other work will consist of Microsoft Office, Web Authoring, e-mails, Internet browsing, music, etc.

During some very serious consideration in November 2011 to purchase my new HP Elitebook 8760W Workstation Laptop I counted on my very positive experience with a reliable 4-1/2 year old HP Elitebook 8710W for comparison with trouble free use. I was also very seriously interested and tempted by two powerful Apple products that had my detailed attention and analysis before making my final choice:

iMac 27"

- With a truly fabulous 2560 x 1440 screen and an Intel Quad Core i7; ruled out because of:
 - o \$1000 higher price over the nicely discounted (30% and then 10%) HP 8760W.
 - o No PCMCIA or Express Card slot for a Compact Flash Card Adapter built in.
 - o No fast USB 3.0 ports, just the less useable, albeit faster, and newer Thunderbolt ports.
 - o USB 3.0 has had a longer time in the market than Thunderbolt and now has quite a few choices for high performance hard drives and flash memory sticks.
 - o No Bu-Ray Burner as the HP has. No 3rd party external ones will work either!
 - o Not portable like my new HP 8760W.

Apple MacBook Pro

- With a 17" display that had the **bigger** and **much more tempting 1920 x 1200 display**.
However, when my money is on the line I get very specific:
 - o Limited to a maximum of 8 GB RAM.
 - o Limited to only one hard drive bay, not 3 like the HP 8760W.
 - o No USB 3.0 ports, just the sexy newer and less supported Thunderbolt ports.
 - o Also more expensive than the HP.

HP Elitebook 8760W Strong Points

My overall impression of this very powerful workstation class laptop has been truly outstanding! It is a real pleasure to use with very snappy performance and a bright display. The docking station has been a big disappointment, but the laptop is really great once I get past the few small shortcomings noted below.

- Very sleek and very portable. I am accustomed to large high performance laptops for many years now, so don't expect to have one as slim and light as a MacBook Air!! **YET!!!!**
- The 250 Gb SSD Primary Drive is delightfully fast for boot up time, shutdown and application start times. No mechanical parts mean total silence and no moving mechanical parts to crash if the machine is bumped too hard.
- Intel's Quad Core i7 CPU with Multi-Threading makes it appear that 8 processors are on tap for carrying out the many tasks we expect of a modern computer. This has been a real performer so far in my daily use for the first 2 weeks.
- So far the 2nd 750 GB hard disk is packed with the backup of all my 25 years of server files! Can't wait until 1 GB SSD drives become affordable!!
- I ordered 16 GB of RAM that is now fully utilized with Windows 7 64 bit, unlike the limit on my 8710W using only 3 out of 4 GB with Windows Vista 32 bit. This 16 Gb has totally eliminated paging to disc from a memory shortage. The 8760W can have up to 32 GB installed, which is amazing for a laptop. Doing so will cost more than the entire computer though!! 16 Gb was fairly affordable, but 32 GB would have required me to sell the house!!
- The display is very bright and crisp. Same quality as external monitors like the HP L2445M and LP3065. Biggest improvement over my older 8710W is the brightness! Dropping to only 1080 vertical pixels from 1200 was NOT an improvement though for my type of work and needs.
- Ability to drive up to 4 external monitors with the AMD (vs. NVidia) card option, BUT it appears at probably limited resolution. I have yet to hook up 2 external monitors, (just one at 1920 x 1200), because I am still awaiting the external adapter for Display Port to Dual Link DVI so I can once again enjoy my 30" HP monitor. HP staff are not sure of the upper resolution limits for each monitor in a 4 monitor setup. I am pretty sure it will be either 1920 x 1080 or 1280 x 1024.
- Up to 3 internal drives is a big improvement over the one hard drive limit we endured on the 8710W.
- Blu-Ray burner availability is becoming rare, but still a very nice option on this machine.
- Battery life seems very good and is noticeably longer than my previous HP 8710W laptop.
- Back lit keyboard is very practical and most attractive. It is also smart enough to power off when not in use.

- Display automatically dims down when the computer is not in use and comes back to full bright immediately when you resume. This makes great sense to extend battery life.
- Single metal access door on the bottom of the computer is a great improvement over multiple plastic covers on the 8710W.
- The all metal case on the 8760W is very noticeably stiffer and sturdier than my previous 8710W which was already a great case.
- Very rugged hinge for the monitor lid. I have never worn out a hinge on a laptop, but this one should never fail either would be my high expectation!
- USB 3.0 Ports are **VERY fast** for transferring files to USB 3.0 Flash drives and hard drives. Many times faster than a USB 2.0 port just as advertised. I won't buy USB 2.0 devices any more!
- Machine has a very good clean and truly refined look. Still not quite as refined a look as an Apple product, but definitely much better than any previous laptop I have owned from any vendor.
- Joy stick mousing has a larger and more convenient head for easy finger gripping when you don't have a real mouse at hand.
- Double tapping on the top left corner of the touch pad can turn it off to prevent inadvertent activity when using the joystick. This is a great improvement!
- **The new [Express Card slot](#) replaces the former PCMCIA slot on my previous HP 8710W and does have much faster throughput now.** This requires the purchase of either the [Delkin ExpressCard 54](#) or [Sandisk Express Card 54 adapter](#). I bought the Delkin and it works well.

HP Elitebook 8760W Shortcomings

- The Compact Flash card **protrudes significantly** out of the new [Delkin ExpressCard 54](#) adapter **versus totally inside** the case on my previous 8710W where it could not be smashed off.
- 1920 x **1080** resolution on this great 17" display should be 1920 x **1200** as per my previous HP 8710w, especially now that Apple will be coming out with a 2880 x 1800 pixel display on their next 15" notebook. HP should be leading Apple, not following on key technology like this. Apple's current 17" Macbook Pro still provides the full and important 1200 vertical pixels. The most important single ergonomic feature on any computer is the screen quality, resolution and size for productivity and minimal eye strain.
- Extra document button on keyboard is forever triggering unexpected results that are very annoying. I guess I will have to learn to "***pick up my fingers***" from now on!!
- Function keys are unnecessarily half size and not spaced like a traditional keyboard with 3 clusters of 4 keys for much better ergonomics. However, they do look very "pretty"!!
- Touch pad is bigger and multi-touch aware, but still not a good substitute for a real mouse. Vertical scrolling seems to be less predictable than on my previous 8710W's Touch Pad.
- Highly touted stereo speakers on the 8760W are a small disappointment and not as good as what we had on the 8710W. I personally use [Bose external computer speakers](#) when at my desk.
- I have also tried the [Bose Bluetooth SoundLink speakers](#) when listening to iTunes. The 8760W has provided a very poor and choppy connection that is noticeably inferior to the perfect Bluetooth connection I have enjoyed with my Apple iPhone 4!! Apple's products continue to amaze and delight me for such a tiny package!!

HP 230W Advanced Docking Station Strong Points

- Lots of connectors for most people's needs. However, I think Workstation class Laptop users are whole different and very demanding breed for current and practical technology!! Rightfully so when the large price premium is considered.
- Easy way to just walk in and lock your computer down with no cables to plug in every time.
- Provides an extra hard drive bay to allow another DVD burner or hard drive for backup.
- More secure latching and locking down than with my previous 8710W HP Advanced docking station.
- Allows up to 3 external monitor connections on the docking station with the AMD graphics option in the HP 8760W laptop.
- A 4th monitor can be driven using one of the two ports on the laptop. (VGA or Displayport)

HP 230W Advanced Docking Station Shortcomings

My previous HP 8710W had been used very productively at my desk with the HP Advanced docking station and my HP 30" monitor (LP3065).

- No USB 3.0 ports, only USB 2.0 – and this docking station was made for a laptop with two USB 3.0 ports?!! So my new USB 3.0 devices still have to be plugged into the laptop, NOT the docking station which is very self-defeating for the docking station with it's 6 USB 2.0 ports.
- Can't drive the HP LP3065 monitor at 2560 x 1600 resolution as my previous (5 year old technology) HP Advanced docking station could do. Instead HP has opted to create **a very messy and expensive EXTERNAL adapter** that costs as much as the docking station!!! **This is an insane backwards step that was not in the customer's interest.** This was never documented in their sales literature or during the phone order, so it created a big shock to find that 5 year newer technology was less capable than my previous HP Advanced docking station.
- A large gap between the laptop's back edge and the docking station's front edge means a much deeper desk is needed than in the previous model. Supposedly done to accommodate a huge variety of battery choices that we don't need or want!!
- Large text labels on the large quantity of ports would be nice so we don't have to double check with the manual. Some are obvious when you know computers, but some are not. The computer industry as a whole sucks at labelling. Usually they opt to put black text (or worse, unrecognizable black icons) on a black case!! They know about contrast on a computer screen, but not on labels!!
- No Express card slot to allow an adapter to be plugged in here to read Compact Flash cards.
- No Blu-Ray burner/player option available from HP for the docking station, just in the laptop.
- Limited to a 500 Gb hard drive option from HP and hard to get. I just bought a small 2.5" USB 3.0 1.5 Tb external drive that would have been nicer inside the docking station.

HP's Support and Service Review

Sadly HP's support and service are mostly worse than I am accustomed to for the previous many years with many HP products. Some brief examples of what seemed like a small and amateurish operation are listed below. Ironically the HP staff constantly defended these numerous shortcomings as the by-product of a very large operation. Ironic isn't it?that the characteristics of a small poorly run company would be the same as those of a cumbersome computer giant like HP!! Their favorite excuse for not being able to supply a name and phone number of somebody who could solve my problem(s) was that everything is a "**group**" decision and anybody in "**the group**" can solve it!!... **NOT!! NOT!! NOT!!**

- Sales guy promised 1 to 2 week delivery during the order placement which quickly became 3 weeks from the order confirmation guy and eventually became unknown and then finally an actual 5 weeks.
- HP would only custom build the machine I needed in their US ordering system and then only ship to a US address, not my Canadian address. Excuse provided by HP Canada was that HP Canada's web site did not have the custom ordering pick lists set up for Canadians to build a non-standard unit. I know I ordered my previous custom HP 8710W from HP Canada, so this is really backwards progress!! 2 of 3 subsequent warranty parts came direct to me in Canada!
- HP Elitebooks are actually built in Shanghai China and then shipped by Fedex directly to the customer. This part seemed fairly efficient and sensible to me since it did not sit in an HP warehouse somewhere first!!
- To the credit of the HP US sales staff, they did go out of their way to sell me the unit that HP Canada could not or would not provide. However adamantly refused to ship to Canada!!
- Links to HP's tracking and production pages did not work at first because of very confusing issues like 2 different customer ID numbers and 2 customer names. Once I "hacked" my way on to their customer tracking site, in spite of their very unhelpful staff, I found they made no efforts to keep their well-defined tracking and production schedule data updated at all. Multiple HP production milestone entries remained blank and only showed the single order entry date.
- Attempts to contact HP Sales by e-mail and phone were quickly ignored when things were not going well with respect to the promised delivery time. I had to do a "call block" on my phone number to get them to answer their phone.
- Product was shipped from Shanghai China by Federal Express and did NOT meet their 5 day delivery time. It did finally arrive 8 days after leaving Shanghai, China.
- When I discovered that the docking station could no longer drive my HP LP3065 monitor at 2560x1600 as with my previous docking station, there was a big back and forth discussion to get the new [external adapter](#). It was promised and then reneged on, resulting in more haggling and eventually was supplied free, but only shipped to a US address, NOT to my house where I really need it!!
- Young HP sales reps think that providing a discount on the initial sale excuses all future shortcomings with some kind of cumulative Brownie point system!!! Seasoned veterans like myself don't buy into that plan, so it becomes a head butting contest to convince them to keep issues separate!!
- This is just the "tip of the iceberg" that I noticed with HP's organization during this dragged out buying experience. I am NOT hopeful the company is going to do well in the future from an

organization viewpoint, after going through this recent purchase experience that dragged on way too long with way too many unnecessary complications, phone calls and e-mails.

Multiple Monitor Confusion with HP 230W Advanced Docking Station

On December 22/2011 I finally received my HP [adapter for a Display Port to connect to a Dual Link DVI](#) monitor like my 30" HP LP3065. This caused all hell to break loose with all kinds of new learning that I wasn't counting on plus a long phone call to HP's Indian techies, who did not know any more than me it turned out. They did not know how to resolve it so decided to send me a new docking station which turns out to not be needed. When I phoned back to cancel they would not put me through to the same tech. and told me I can't cancel the order because it has already been placed (5 minutes earlier!!) So here is the end result after 5 to 6 hours of experimenting and getting it to work on my own:

Out of 5 video outputs on the back of the Advanced Docking station, only 3 can be used at any one time.

- Either one of the 2 pairs of DVI and Displayport. If you try to use the DVI port that sits just above the corresponding Display port PLUS the displayport at the same time, then only one is going to function. The HP tech. support guy did not know this when I first called in for help.
- Plus the VGA output on the docking station back.
- So if you want to connect up the so called 4th external monitor as advertised, then it will have to be connected to either the VGA or the Displayport connector on the laptop itself. This will make for a very messy cabling system, not at all like HP's elegant ad photo with 4 external monitors shown in a nice clean setup.
- So as I now understand somewhat better, if you want to hook up large 30" displays at 2560 x 1600 you can do up to three of them off the 3 displayports, 2 on the docking station and one on the laptop. The 4th monitor will probably have a maximum attainable resolution of 1920 x 1200 using the remaining VGA port(s) on the laptop or docking station.

HP LP3065 Monitor and HP NR078AA Adapter Problems

I am learning new tricks daily related to the problems with my new HP 230W Advanced Docking Station and the attempts to make it work properly with my HP LP3065 monitor using [HP's NR078AA adapter](#).

- See [this link for HP's technical discussion](#) of what monitors (like the HP LP3065 30" Monitor) are supported and how. **Be aware that the 120 Watt Advanced docking station is not suited for use with the HP 8760W**, even though HP's Indian support team sent me one as a potential replacement. This was clearly done because they had no idea of how to troubleshoot or fix the real problem. Sending a replacement got me off the phone!! This was triggered by the fact that the LP3065 is randomly not recognized by my 230W Advanced docking station along with HP's new Displayport to Dual Link DVI adapter (NR078AA). This has been a frustrating problem that HP doesn't seem to have a proper refined solution for.
- See [this link](#) for a private owner's discussion on the HP LP3065 30" LCD Monitor with the HP NR078AA Displayport to Dual Link Adapter. Temporary solution to get the two to work together is to briefly unplug the USB cable for the [HP NR078AA adapter](#). It works for mine but sometimes must be repeated two or three times before settling down for the day!!

NR078AA Problem Update

As of this week (January 12, 2012) HP has been making a serious effort to resolve the issue with their NR078AA video adapter which needs numerous restarts by unplugging it's USB cable that provides the power for the adapter. Here is a list of very significant efforts made that have NOT worked so far. This kind of serious effort by HP has made me a believer again in the company for trying very hard.

- Replaced the HP 8760W motherboard with no improvement.
- Replaced the AMD graphics card with no improvement.
- Replaced the Intel Core i7 CPU with no improvement.
- Replaced the NR078AA adapter with a 3rd one now. All 3 have performed equally poor.
- Suggested I try a separate USB power source like a wall adapter. I tried both an Apple charger and a Logitech USB wall charger with no improvement.
- Tried setting the HP 8760W laptop's power plan to **High Performance** with no improvement.
- Previous test with a different docking station also failed.
- All tests now point squarely at a badly designed NR078AA adapter.
- Next test by HP will be done with HP's ZR30W 30" Monitor that has a Displayport input so we will not need the ugly and messy NR078AA external video adapter.

Conclusion by Elton Hammond

This is a truly great laptop computer that has some obvious and dumb HP design choices and a poor Advanced Docking station. However after considering all the high end laptop computers currently on the market, it stands head and shoulders above everything I looked at, including the **VERY** similar Dell Precision M6600 and Apple MacBook Pro 17". The laptop itself has been a real pleasure to use because of it's exceptionally snappy response on everything it does. I just hope HP can continue with their great Elitebook workstation laptop series in the future, but this may be hard if you have a poor quality organization running the product development decisions. They really need to put the same design effort into the HP 230W Advanced docking station to make the whole system work really well.

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Congratulations to HP on a Great High End Laptop - Just fix the few shortcomings and it will be PERFECT!

Specifications on My Custom Ordered HP Elitebook 8760W

One of the really amazing aspects of HP's Elitebook models is being able to custom order it with the components you want and have it shipped directly from HP's plant in Shanghai, China. (Except for us Canadians; unless we brave the US ordering system!!) It just requires a bit of patience to get the exact configuration you need. Easy to say after it has arrived!! Since the original writing of this review I have a few weeks of experience now with the external video adapter. It does drive the HP LP3065 30" display very well at the full 2560x1600 resolution but requires 1 to 3 annoying restarts every day to settle down.

- Intel Core i7-2720QM - I no longer pay the premium for the top one!
- 17.3" LCD Display at 1920 x 1080 - NOT Dreamcolor – too expensive! Excellent!!
- Webcam Integrated for 720P HD - should suffice for all uses!
- AMD 1 GB Firepro M5950 Video Card - will run up to 4 external monitors
- 16 Gb RAM 1333 DDR3 4DM - no more slow paging to disk!
- 256 GB SSD (Solid State boot drive) - amazingly fast! Silent!!
- 750 Gb secondary Hard Drive - big enough for now to back up my server!
- Blu-Ray Burner for a 3rd drive. - Could have been a 500 GB Hard disk.
- Backlit keyboard - well worth the extra cost!
- Wireless LAN, [Intel Ultimate N 6300](#) - works very well and very fast! Dual Band.
- No WWAN - may add in the future for roaming.
- No Modem - Modems are offered but not a CF adapter!
- Long Life 75 Watt Hour battery - Includes a 3 year warranty I understand.
- External Battery for extra time - Up to 9 hours estimated at times.
- Advanced Docking Station (230W) - which has no Dual Link DVI capability!!
- HP Display Port to Dual Link [External Adapter](#), - messy, but essential external device for my 30" HP LP3065 monitor! Requires 2 or 3 "reboots" upon docking with momentary USB removal.

HP Accessories Added

- HP L2445M 24" LCD monitor with 1920 x 1200 resolution – reliable and good image.
- HP LP3065 30" LCD monitor with 2560 x 1600 resolution – has 3 Dual Link DVI connections.
- HP NR068AA [Displayport to Dual Link DVI adapter](#) to drive the 30" HP display at 2560x1600.
- HP Advanced Docking Station with lots of ports but no Dual Link DVI built in!!
- HP High capacity external battery for long run times without AC power.

Third Party Accessories Added

- Logitech Performance MX Mouse - Works great, love the very small receiver.
- Delkin ExpressCard 54 CF Adapter - Quickly unloads files from my CF cards.
- Kingston USB 3.0 Card Reader - Can play movies on CF cards smoothly.
- Corsair USB 3.0 Flash Drive, 32 GB - Transfers several Gigabytes in minutes.
- Seagate 1.5 TB USB 3.0, 2.5" Drive - No power cable and VERY fast!
- Seagate 3.0 TB USB 3.0, 3.5" Drive - Lots of storage space!