



A Single Computer Monitor is No Longer Sufficient

WHEN I STAYED IN AN ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY FOR A MONTH LATE LAST YEAR, I HAD MY WIFE BRING A SURFACE 6 PRO TABLET SO I COULD DO SOME WORK. IT WAS PAINFUL.

The tablet's 14-inch monitor struggled to display what was on my home computer's two 27-inch monitors. Text was barely readable and only one application could be displayed.

It was better than using a smart-phone; I was able to get some work done, but it wasn't easy even after I managed to elevate the screen.



Multiple monitors are no longer a luxury. When a former employer offered two monitors to each computer user, one co-worker turned the offer down. Later, the employer insisted and the co-worker grudgingly accepted a second monitor. About 10 minutes later, he admitted that having two screens was a big improvement.



↑ **THREE MONITORS MAKE ARRANGING APPLICATIONS FOR QUICK ACCESS EASY.**

← **DURING ONE MONTH IN AN ASSISTED LIVING FACILITY, I USED A SINGLE MONITOR TO CONNECT TO MY HOME COMPUTER, AND TO WATCH OCCASIONAL FOOTBALL GAMES.**

Even home users should consider whether a second, or even third, monitor would make using the computer easier or more efficient.

In the far distant past, big computer monitors had 16-inch diagonal measurements. The cathode ray tubes ran hot and the monitors hogged the entire desk. They were also incredibly heavy, 50 pounds or more. Most of us used just one or two programs at a time, but that has changed.

Today's monitors are less than an inch thick, emit little heat, and it's hard to find monitors that measure less than 18 inches diagonally.

Fortunately, monitors that are good enough for all but high-end photo and video editing are available at reasonable prices. That's why there are two 27-inch monitors on my desk, and I

also use the 15-inch monitor that's built in to the computer.

Assess Your Situation

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU NEED MORE THAN ONE MONITOR?

If you have to minimize one application frequently to see another application, you're definitely a candidate. Or if you have to print calendars, schedules, and reference materials so that you can refer to them when using the computer, you probably need another monitor.

The three screens I use are rarely as busy as what's shown in the illustration, but it's common for both of the external monitors to be busy — perhaps a text editor, an email program, and a browser on one screen, a separate browser window for reference on the second monitor, along with OneNote and ThumbsPlus. The third monitor has just a clock much of the time, but utility applications, additional reference materials, and even a motion picture can sometimes appear there. The objective is to make frequently

needed applications accessible without having to move or hide one of the other applications.

That's why many businesses either issue all employees systems with two monitors or provide a second monitor to anyone who wants one. This makes sense for businesses where productivity is important, but it also makes sense for individuals. Some computers have connections for at least one external monitor, sometimes two, and there are hardware options for those that don't.

Anybody who edits photos will soon discover that a second monitor helps a lot. Likewise, people who edit text and need to keep style sheets and reference materials in sight.

When I use Adobe Lightroom Classic, I keep presets, profiles, adjustment tools, a filmstrip, and the reference image on the left monitor. As a result, the image itself is relatively small, even on a large monitor. The right monitor can display a light table view with thumbnails of many images, which is handy for sorting and organizing images, but it can also display a full-screen or enlarged view that shows the image with its adjustments.



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|  Ethernet connector |  Power connector |
|  USB-C (Thunderbolt 4) connectors |  USB-C (3.2 Gen 2) connector |

IN ADDITION TO AN HDMI PORT, NEW COMPUTERS OFTEN HAVE THUNDERBOLT PORTS THAT CAN CONNECT TO A MONITOR.

Even those who don't consider themselves to be power users should consider how a second monitor might fit in. Perhaps the primary monitor would be used for email, Word, or Excel, but you'd like to keep an eye on Facebook or Twitter. Or maybe you'd like to have a motion picture on the second screen.

Anyone who has tried two monitors is unlikely to ever be satisfied again with just one.



Stuck with One Monitor

I WAS REMINDED AGAIN HOW IMPORTANT TWO MONITORS ARE WHEN BOTH WENT DARK SIMULTANEOUSLY JUST BEFORE THE END OF 2022.

I suspected a failed Thunderbolt to dual HDMI adapter, so I bought a new one. That didn't fix the problem, and I knew the monitors were OK because they worked with my Macbook. I tried using the computer's second Thunderbolt port and a new cable. No luck.



CONNECTING THE MINI-DP PORT ON THE SURFACE PRO 6 TO THE LARGE MONITOR WORKED, BUT NOT AT FULL RESOLUTION.

monitor, so work was possible. A case that holds four disk drives doesn't play well with the Surface. The drives all mount, but with the wrong drive letters. Not ideal, perhaps, but workable.

Lenovo returned the computer without replacing the motherboard, but another technician asked if I had tried a Thunderbolt to HDMI cable.

AFTER CONNECTING THE SECOND MONITOR TO A THUNDERBOLT PORT ON THE COMPUTER ALL THREE MONITORS WERE AGAIN OPERATIONAL.

Then I contacted Lenovo for assistance and, in the meantime, connected one of the large monitors to the notebook computer's single HDMI port.

The technician diagnosed the problem as a failed component on the motherboard and sent a technician to replace it.

The technician removed the memory, hard drive, and keyboard, but was unable to pry the case apart for access to the motherboard. The computer had to go back for depot service.

The Surface 6 Pro tablet has a tiny screen, but it also has a Mini-DP port. I used that to connect a single large

I hadn't done that because I didn't know such cables existed, so I ordered a \$14 Thunderbolt to HDMI cable.

When it arrived, I connected one end to a Thunderbolt 4 port on the computer and the other end to the HDMI adapter on the second monitor. Immediate success.

That leaves open the question of what the underlying problem is and what needs to be done to correct it. But the \$14 cable resolved the display issue at least in the short term. Ω