



Dell Latitude D630 Review

by FrostKnight

by Diego Silva

The [Latitude D630](#) is Dell's latest update to the D620, a light-weight business class machine. The Dell D630 comes with the very anticipated Santa Rosa platform but is visually the same as its predecessor. The machine starts at \$899 (as of this writing) and most upgrades are reasonably priced.

D630 configuration:



Dell Latitude D630 ([view large image](#))

Processor: Intel T7300 Core 2 Duo (2.0GHz, 800MHz FSB, 4MB Cache)

Graphics: Intel GMA X3100

Operating System: Windows Vista Business 32-bit

Display: WXGA+ 1440 x 900 (matte)

Hard Drive: 80GB 540RPM

Memory: 512MB (512MB x 1), up to 4GB max

Ports:

4 - USB 2.0 (two in the back and two on the right)

FireWire (left)

Security lock (left)
Headphone out & microphone in (left)
VGA out (back)
56k modem (back)
Gigabit Ethernet (back)
Power (back)
Serial (back)

Slots:

1 PC Card Slot
Smart Card Slot
Docking station

Optical Drive: DVD +/- RW

Battery: 9-cell 85WHr

Security: UPEK fingerprint reader

Pointing device: Touchpad or Track Stick

Intel 3945 WLAN (802.11a/g) mini Card

Dell Wireless 360 Bluetooth Vista Module

USA keyboard

Dimensions: 13.3" x 9.37" x 1.09 - 1.27" (337mm x 238mm x 27.6 - 32.3mm)

Weight: 5.1lbs with DVD drive and 6-cell, 5.8lbs with 9-cell, 6.6lbs with AC adaptor and 9-cell

3 Year warranty, In-Home Service, International

Total Price As Configured: \$1,372

Some of you are probably wondering as to why I chose so little RAM and a rather small hard drive. Like I said, most upgrades are reasonably priced. I purchased 2GB from Newegg for \$80, Dell's upgrade would have been \$200.

Reasons for buying

I'm a college student majoring in International Business and IT. My previous machine, a HP dv4000 with the 12-cell monster-sized battery, was far too heavy (nearly 9 pounds with the AC adaptor) for me to carry in my backpack for 6 consecutive hours. I also travel quite a bit to visit family in Spain and need something to keep me occupied on the 12-hour (or more) plane trip.

First Impression

I was surprised at how little there was in the box. Aside from the [laptop](#) and the charger, it only came with the OS, Roxio Creator 9, and application discs. The manual itself is rather useless. In fact, I would not even consider it a manual ... it's more like a caution and legal guide. I had to guess my way into getting started and it was frustrating because I have not used Vista until purchasing the D630. I'm still stumbling with it.



The entire box ... minus the box. ([view large image](#))

Build and Design:

This thing feels like a tank and is extremely sturdy. The hinges on the machine are stiff but not difficult to open and the screen will not wobble. There is no flexing of the screen and you truly have to try to press the back to see ripples. When closed, a small, shiny hinge holds the screen locked. The top and bottom of the machine are made of magnesium. I still wouldn't recommend dropping the machine in order to test if the material is durable.

The speakers are (I think) inside the laptop because I saw no openings for them. The battery sticks out in the front rather than the back. You are also able to add another battery to the DVD bay or replace the drive with something updated down the road. It is very simple to replace the drive in case something happens.

I do have one complaint: I frequently use my USB slots and I dislike having the other two ports in the back. I prefer them on the side. The USB slots are also a bit stiff. Sometimes you have to try to jam the connector into the slot.

Layout

You will find most of the ports either on the left or the back of the laptop.



The left side. No Express Card for us this time ([view large image](#))



The back of the machine including a serial port for old devices. ([view large image](#))



The right side. Only a DVD Burner and two USB slots ([view large image](#))



The machine is practically as thin as two decks of cards. ([view large image](#))

Screen

Many people complained about the terrible brightness level of the D620. Unfortunately, I don't have a D620 to compare it to. I do, however, have a Viewsonic VX2025wm [desktop](#) monitor that has been color calibrated with a Spyder2 Suite. This seems like an apples to orange type of comparison but if I am to compare it, I must use something that has been in my possession for at least one full year. The added benefit is that this comparison shows how far the colors differ from a screen that has near-perfect color reproduction.

I am happy to report the 14.1-inch, 1440x900 screen is surprisingly brighter than I expected. I was able to easily see it indoors with the sun behind me. This was tested with highest screen brightness level (8/8).



The screen facing the sun while indoors. Easily readable. ([view large image](#))

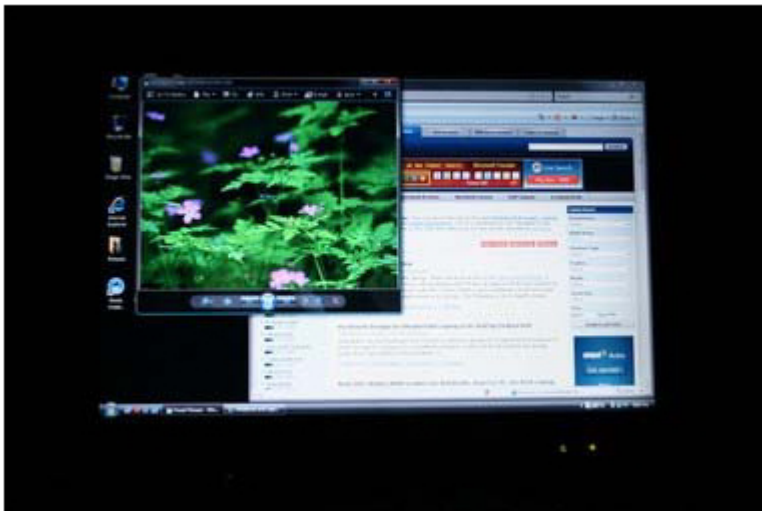


Outdoors but under a shady tree. More difficult to read but manageable. ([view large image](#))

Color accuracy and contrast, on the other hand, out of the box already left me disappointed. The best way to describe the contrast is a dark shirt that has been washed too many times. The horizontal viewing angles are very good but I can't say the same about the vertical ones. You have to stare directly at the screen or else there will be discoloration and distortion. There is a bit of light leakage at the bottom. If you truly want the best screen available, the best bet would be to wait until LED screens come out or hook the laptop up to a monitor.



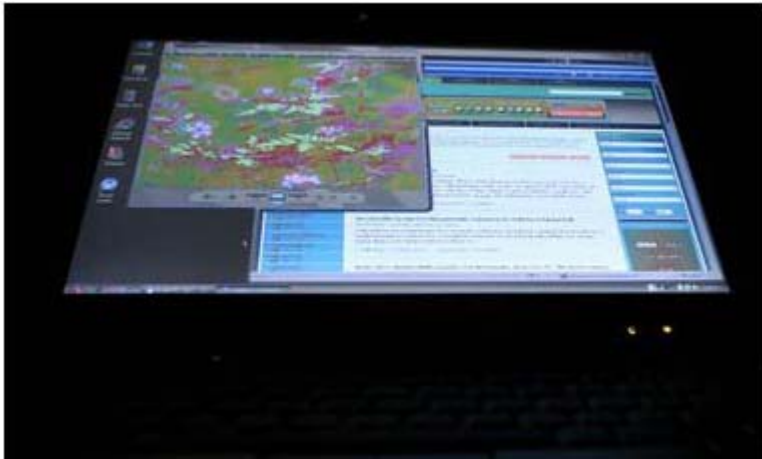
Comparison between a color calibrated monitor and the D630. ([view large image](#))



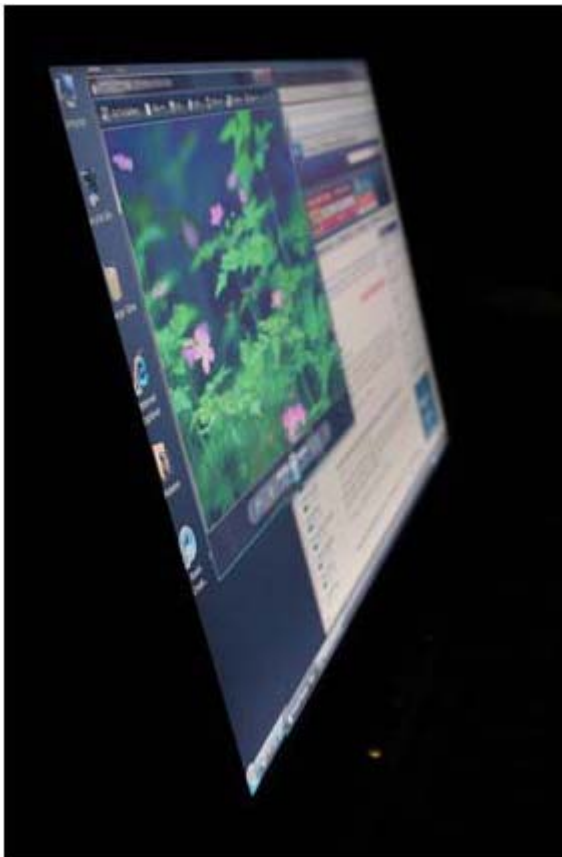
The front of the screen: the dark colors tend to look much richer in dark places. ([view large image](#))



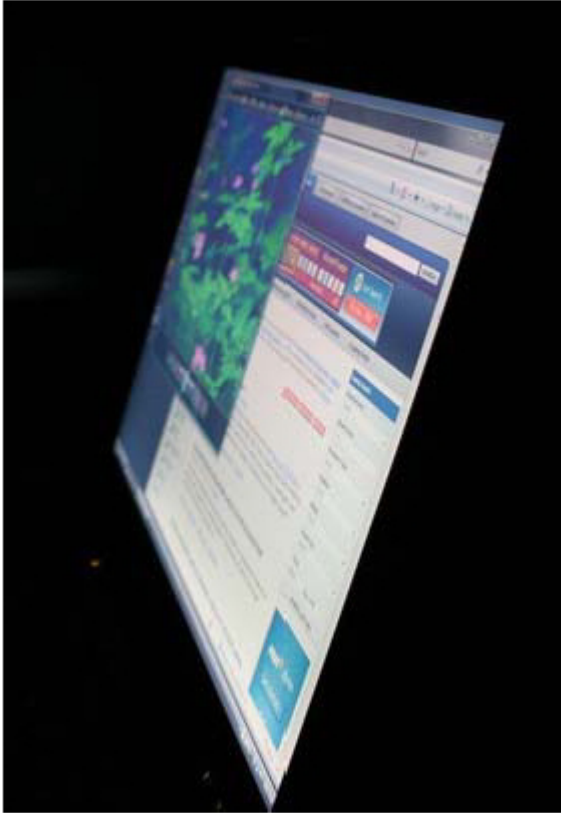
Top view of screen ([view large image](#))



Bottom view ([view large image](#))



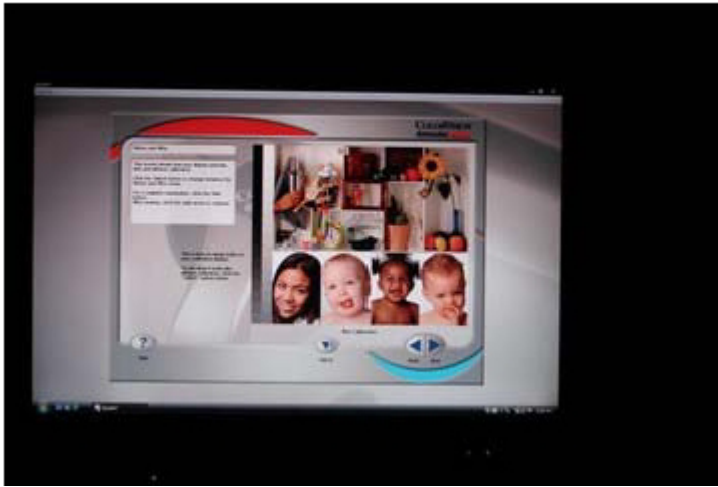
Left view ([view large image](#))



Right view ([view large image](#))



D630 screen before color calibration ([view large image](#))



D630 screen after calibration. This made a HUGE difference. ([view large image](#))

Speakers

The speakers output at about two watts and are under the left palm (I could feel them vibrating). There are the quick mute and volume buttons on the top of the keyboard, all very handy to have. The speakers are loud ... much louder than I expected. Depending on what is being played they might be able to fill a small room. Unfortunately, a loud speaker does not always equal quality output. At high and sometimes even medium levels distortions start occurring. Granted, this is a business machine that was primarily designed to just output warnings and the like. It's like Dell bought out all the extra Gameboy speakers and super sized them.

If you like to listen to music, bring your own external speakers and possibly your own sound card.

Processor and Performance

CPU: My machine came equipped with the new Santa Rosa platform. Upgrades to the processor include a faster front-side bus and a new level of power state. According to an Intel rep (I used to work in retail), I was told these new chips are about 10-15 percent faster and equally consume less battery life than the previous Centrino generation. This will not, however, make minor application usage (office programs) run any faster. The design behind this is most likely for the battery use and people that need a faster processor (multimedia users).

HD: The hard drive is an 80GB SATA drive running at 5400RPM. My plan was to buy a 160GB drive and a notebook enclosure from Newegg, replace the 80GB drive, and convert the machine's original drive to a portable HD. Due to financial reasons, I did not go through with it. The faster transfer speed (higher density) and larger storage are nice ideas but we can't have everything.

GPX: I'll be blunt, this machine was not built for gaming. Intel upgraded this generation's integrated graphics but it is still no match for a dedicated card. Essentially, the X3100 can run old games but don't expect F.E.A.R. or an equally graphically intensive game to be playable.

RAM: If you wish to run multiple applications, get the 2GB. Vista recommends (read: needs) 1GB to run the OS and any other application(s) smoothly. Before I upgraded the machine with 2GB, it came with 512MB. It was crawling and nearly always accessing the hard drive (and consuming more battery in the process). After the upgrade to 2GB, it ran as smooth as a hot knife through butter. I needed 2GB because Photoshop is a huge memory hog. If you plan to use this machine for office use, 1GB will most likely be enough to accommodate your needs.

Benchmarks

To prove that this machine runs as good as I say, check the benchmarks. All benchmarks ran with the notebook plugged in. I made sure both the T61 and the D630 were next to each other on the tables for easier comparison. I was not surprised to see little difference between the D630 and the T61 (they are nearly identical notebooks).

Super Pi is a benchmark program that is small and tends to do a decent job of measuring processor and memory performance. For future reference I also benchmarked it with 4M and ended with a result of 2m 14s.

Super Pi comparison results

Notebook	Results (Time, 2M digits)
Dell Latitude D630 (2.00GHz Core 2 Duo Intel T7300)	59s
Lenovo ThinkPad T61 (2.00GHz Core 2 Duo Intel T7300)	59s
HP dv2500t (1.80GHz Core 2 Duo Intel 7100)	1m 09s
Lenovo ThinkPad T60 (2.00GHz Core 2 Duo T7200)	1m 03s
Toshiba Satellite P205-S6287 (1.73 GHz Core 2 Duo Intel T5300)	1m 24s
HP Compaq 6515b (1.6GHz AMD Turion 64 X2 TL-52)	2m 05s
HP dv5000z (2.0GHz Sempron 3300+)	2m 02s
Samsung X60 (1.66GHz Core Duo)	1m 29s
IBM ThinkPad T43 (1.86GHz Alviso Pentium M)	1m 45s

PCMark05 is a synthetic benchmark that tests overall system performance. I also ran the application with 512MB of RAM and ended up with a score of 3,860 PCMarks. 4,020 PCMarks with 1GB and 4,084 PCMarks with 1.5GB. All the other benchmarks ran with 2GB of RAM.

PCMark05 comparison results

Notebook	PCMark05 Score
Dell Latitude D630 (2.00GHz Core 2 Duo Intel T7300, X3100)	4,169 PCMarks
Lenovo ThinkPad T61 (2.00GHz Core 2 Duo Intel T7300, X3100)	4,084 PCMarks
HP dv2500t (1.80GHz Core 2 Duo T7100, Intel X3100)	3,376 PCMarks

Graphics)	
Lenovo T60 Widescreen (2.0 GHz Intel T7200, ATI X1400 128MB)	4,189 PCMarks
Toshiba Satellite P205-S6287 (Intel 1.73GHz T5300 + GMA 950)	2,981 PCMarks
HP Compaq 6515b (1.6GHz AMD Turion 64 X2 TL-52, ATI x1270)	2,420 PCMarks
Alienware M7700 (AMD Athlon FX-60, Nvidia Go 7800GTX)	5,597 PCMarks
Asus V6J (1.86GHz Core Duo T2400, Nvidia Go 7400)	3,646 PCMarks
Toshiba Tecra M6 (1.66GHz Intel T2300E, Intel GMA 950)	2,732 PCMarks

3DMark05 is a synthetic benchmark that tests 3D graphics. A faster graphics card will NOT speed up 2D applications such as image editors, it is mostly used for playing games and doing 3D work, such as modeling or CAD.

3DMark05 Comparison Results

Notebook	3DMark05 Score
Dell Latitude D630 (2.00GHz Core 2 Duo Intel T7300, X3100)	915 3DMarks
Lenovo ThinkPad T61 (2.00GHz Core 2 Duo Intel T7300)	911 3DMarks
Toshiba Satellite P205-S6287 (Intel 1.73GHz T5300 + GMA 950)	559 3DMarks
HP Compaq 6515b (1.6GHz AMD Turion 64 X2 TL-52, ATI x1270)	871 3DMarks
Lenovo ThinkPad T60 (2.0GHz Core Duo, ATI X1400 128MB)	2,092 3DMarks
HP dv6000t (2.16 GHz Intel T7400, NVIDIA GeForce Go 7400)	2,013 3DMarks
Dell Inspiron e1705 (2.0GHz Core Duo, ATI X1400)	1,791 3DMarks
Acer TravelMate 8204WLMi (2.0GHz Core Duo, ATI X1600 256MB)	4,236 3DMarks
Alienware Aurora M-7700 (AMD Dual Core FX-60, ATI X1600 256MB)	7,078 3DMarks

3DMark06 is the updated version of 3DMark05, it is much more intensive than its predecessor. A

benchmark of the T61 was not provided.

3DMark06 Comparison Results

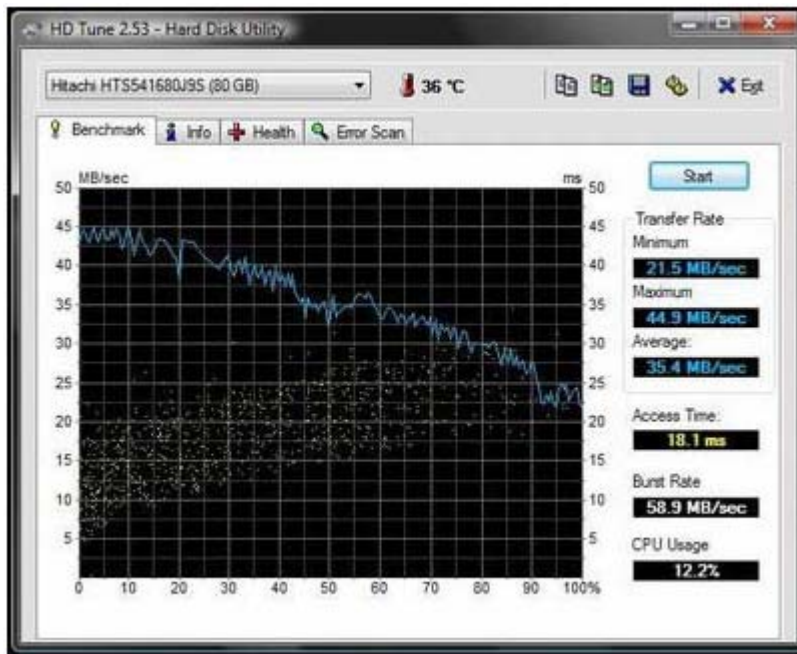
Notebook	3DMark06 Score
Dell Latitude D630 (2.00GHz Core 2 Duo Intel T7300, X3100)	564 3DMarks
HP dv2500t (1.80GHz Core 2 Duo T7100, Intel X3100 Graphics)	541 3DMarks
HP dv6000t (2.16 GHz Intel T7400, NVIDIA GeForce Go 7400)	827 3DMarks
Samsung Q35 (1.83GHz Core 2 Duo T5600, Intel 945GM)	106 3DMarks
Samsung R20 (1.73GHz T2250 and ATI 1250M chipset/GPU)	476 3DMarks
Samsung X60plus (2.0GHz Core 2 Duo T7200, ATI X1700 256MB)	1,831 3DMarks
Asus A6J (1.83GHz Core Duo, ATI X1600 128MB)	1,819 3DMarks
Fujitsu Siemens Amilo Xi 1526 (1.66 Core Duo, nVidia 7600Go 256 MB)	2,144 3DMarks

VistaScore



[\(view large image\)](#)

HD Tune – For comparison, a 100GB 7200RPM drive scored an average of 37.4MB/s



[\(view large image\)](#)

Heat and Noise

The machine is extremely quiet, the fan hardly goes into full blast, even with the CPU at 100 percent. When it does go all out, it is possible to hear it but it is whisper-quiet. The bottom gets warm but nothing that will scald someone's lap. Even so, I would not recommend having it sit on your lap for long hours, it could get uncomfortable.

Keyboard and Touchpad

The keyboard is pleasant to use but there is no way it can compare to a Lenovo keyboard. If you ever used a consumer line of [laptops](#), that's what the keyboard feels like. All the keys are in the correct spot and the Ctrl key is on the left side of the Fn key.



The keyboard is very nice. I found very few faults with it ([view large image](#))

The Track Stick is somewhat awkward to use, it never seems to accurately point to I want it to. There are some interesting options, however. For example, you can set the machine to automatically disable both the Track Stick and/or the Touchpad (along with their respective buttons) when an external mouse is connected. One interesting option was to allow the Track Stick to click when it is tapped (much like a Touchpad).

The buttons feel sturdy and don't make a clicking sound when pressed. The Touchpad buttons feel somewhat small as I have the fingerprint reader.

Wireless

My machine came pre-equipped with the Intel 3945 Wireless card offering a/b/g wireless reception. I did not opt for the 802.11n because it is still in draft mode and the G reception will be around for a while. Chances are, when I get my next laptop (years from now), a new standard will be accepted for wireless and the N reception will be rendered obsolete.

I was able to test the connection with my Linksys WRT54g router, a somewhat common router. I was able to go anywhere in the house and pick up a signal. No matter where I went, I could not get the laptop to drop the connection, I had to go outside and walk all the way towards the opposite side of my neighbor's yard to kill it. To put it in perspective, that is about 150 feet.

My D630 came configured with Bluetooth. I tested it with my PDA and was able to synchronize it with no issues.

Battery

I need my machine to last as long as possible. I chose the nine-cell battery despite the fact it sticks out. I truly believe I made the right choice because this thing lasts a very long time. With Firefox, Office, Wi-Fi, and screen at max (8/8) the battery lasted (I ran it until the laptop shut off) an astounding **5 hours and 15 minutes**. Same test bed but no Wi-Fi landed me with **5 hours and 45 minutes**.

I did not have enough time to test it with the screen at a medium level but Vista tells me I can safely say it can push a little over six hours with Wi-Fi. If you get the Media Bay battery to go along with the nine-cell, I would venture about 7.5 or more hours. Of course, this is assuming you are using it for lightweight programs and you have 1GB or more of RAM.

At the bottom of the battery there is a button that allows you to check the battery level. It goes by five levels, giving you an estimate of how much charge is available. I consider it helpful because you don't need to turn the laptop on to check the battery level.

Operating System and Software

I ordered my machine with Windows Vista Business. The machine came with practically zero useless software. In fact, aside from the amazing bundled security software, it only comes with Roxio Creator 9 and Cyberlink PowerDVD 7. The only thing that I uninstalled was Google Desktop and Google Explorer Bar.

Security and others

The machine came bundled with a security package by Wave Systems. The software comes with a wizard that assists you in selecting what level of security you wish to implement. You are granted the option to ask for a password and /or fingerprint at boot-up. You can even encrypt the hard drive with the same password/fingerprint.

Trying to make use of the fingerprint reader, I opted to prompt for my fingerprint at boot up. The interesting thing about this option would be that if you don't have either the password or a fingerprint, you cannot even access the BIOS. Essentially, if the laptop is stolen and if the BIOS is properly configured, the thief will have a hell of a time trying to access your data. Business users take note, if you tend to lose laptops, you must purchase this device. I've heard one story too many about how company X lost a laptop with [employee](#) and/or other sensitive information.

I tried setting the machine to go to sleep only to find out that it asked for both. Basically, if the laptop ever logs-off or goes to bed, you will be asked for both or either types of security, depending on your choice.

Even though the machine is externally very well protected, there are very few firewall programs for Vista. The one bundled with Vista is pretty useless. Just be careful checking important information on an unprotected connection; common sense, people.

Warranty and Customer Support

I chatted with Dell customer support several times to get a feel for the support they would provide. I am extremely happy to report all the customer support reps that I talked with were very knowledgeable. They all answered my questions without hesitation and correctly, all are very polite if you too are polite. The longest I was on hold was for five minutes.

I've heard of horror stories from the consumer line of Dell but the business line is unbelievably good. I know I made the right choice by paying for the \$100 for in-home service. If some of you are more "butterfingers," get the Complete Care package.

Upgrading

Upgrading the machine was an interesting journey. The machine originally came with a stick of 512MB and it was upgraded to a matched pair of 1GB sticks (2GB total).

The RAM slots are in two places, under the keyboard and under the laptop. I decided to start with the most difficult, under the keyboard. Let me warn you right here, it was difficult for me to do it and I've built more computers than I have fingers and toes. I had to remove the hinge, which felt like it could crack at any given second, followed by the keyboard. After many sweaty but careful minutes, I was able to replace the RAM. The other slot, on the other hand, was extremely easy: one screw and I was done.



Removing the hinge to get to RAM slot ([view large image](#))



Hinge removed ([view large image](#))



Access to memory slot ([view large image](#))

To make a long story short, the computer didn't boot up at first after my do-it-yourself upgrade and after calling tech support I thought I might have to purchase a new \$350 motherboard. Luckily, the RAM just needed to be seated properly. I could have saved time and avoided a great deal of stress by ordering the RAM from Dell.

Conclusion

The short time spent with the laptop was enjoyable. Would I still order from Dell? Without a doubt, but this time I would pick the machine to be bundled with 2GB and forget about this moronic idea of saving money. There are some things I wish could have been included or modified but the [Latitude D630](#) is a solid machine that I would recommend to anyone.

Pros

- Extremely sturdy design and feel
- Amazing security software
- Bright screen
- Great battery life
- Awesome overall performance
- System tends to run cool and quiet

Excellent customer support
Practically zero bloatware

Cons

Somewhat expensive upgrades
Sound quality
Contrast ratio could be better
Not a Lenovo keyboard