

Handheld PCs – The Next Killer Hardware Application

One of the fastest growing hardware buys is the handheld PC, which is starting to proliferate in the legal and corporate world. It is estimated that over 1,000,000 handheld PCs are being sold every 10 weeks and that there will be over 19,000,000 handheld PCs by 2003. Handheld PCs are gaining in popularity because they are portable and easy to carry to meetings and for personal or business travel. Though primarily used for calendaring and contact list management, other applications such as e-mail, faxing, paging, and web access are growing daily. They will not replace the laptop for serious document work, but are used as an alternative portable personal information manager and communication device.

Electronic organizers have been around since the 80's, when products like the Sharp Wizard, a handheld device with calendar and phone book features, came on the market. They had so many limitations that they never really caught on. However, in approximately 1996, the Palm Pilot made its debut with the capability to share information with a desktop computer and to synchronize that information on both machines, along with an excellent contact management system and calendar.

Since that time, handheld PCs have developed into miniature computers and wireless communication devices. One can now access the web, research the U.S. Code, store and read the Federal Rules of Evidence and Civil Procedure, provide data for time and billing programs, allow one to receive and send e-mail, handle personal finances, and edit legal documents, along with a host of other personal, business and legal applications.

They can perform many other functions, including accessing electronic books, dictionaries and encyclopedias, faxing, paging, accounting, and calendaring. They can also run standard computer applications, including word processing,

spreadsheets, and database applications.

Because of their size, handheld PC's are obviously not ideal data entering devices. Generally, one downloads large amounts of data or web content from a desktop computer into the handheld PC for later use. Handheld PCs generally come with a keyboard and a stylus pen tool. Some even have handwriting recognition software built in. However, limited handwriting recognition capability and on-screen keyboards make entering information a challenge. Various 3rd party accessories, such as expandable keyboards, make the entry of data easier.

Synchronization and download with the office's general calendar and other applications is easy with the handheld as it sits in a cradle that is connected to your desktop machine via a USB or serial port.

Handspring, Inc. has joined the handheld PC market by introducing the Visor. It is generally priced below comparable Palm units. The Visor was designed by former Palm employees, and has licensed the Palm OS operating software. Thus, any program that will run on one will run on the other so there is no compatibility problem. Visor has a "Springboard" expansion slot that lets a user add memory, battery powered modem, camera, etc. Handspring (www.handspring.com).

Not to be outdone, Microsoft's recently released software, Windows CE 3.0, runs Pocket PC devices made by Casio, Compaq, and Hewlett Packard, among others. This software and accompanying devices will forge a challenge to the Palm stronghold over the next several months. Pocket PC devices come with a calendar, contact management software, "pocket" versions of Word, Excel, and Money, WindowsMedia, file and Internet Explorer, and a voice recorder. You can balance your checkbook, get your e-mail, listen to your favorite music, and dictate a letter to a client with a Pocket PC (www.pocketpc.com).

As you would suspect, the cellular phone companies are beginning to integrate the handheld PCs into a combination phone/PC. This will allow for access to one's phone calls, voice mail, e-mail, web content, paging and faxes from one central communication device. Various computer applications will also be accessible.

The handheld PC market offers significant application potential for the legal market. Attorneys and the court could instantaneously set and beam new court dates in real-time, research the law, respond to e-mail minute orders, fax materials to clients, edit settlement documents, perform damage calculations and perform a variety of other legal functions. Handheld PCs are taking us another step toward a truly wireless legal system.

Other features to consider:

- Color and screen resolution
- Calendar
- Digital voice recorder
- Built in camera
- E-mail capacity
- Industry standard expansion slots
- Web browser capability
- Synchronization
- Expense log
- USB connectors
- GPS system
- Modem protocols
- Pager
- Handwriting and voice recognition and recording
- Web content service (www.avantgo.com)
- Internet web accessibility
- Processor speed
- Alarm Clock
- Modem
- Calculator
- Infrared port – send information electronically to printers, other handheld PCs and other infrared devices
- Game board
- On-board memory
- Electronic book reader
- Infrared port that lets users beam business cards or schedules to one another wirelessly
- Built in camera capability
- Alarm clock
- Encryption