



IS A PERSONAL DIGITAL ASSISTANT THE TOOL FOR YOU? AND IF SO, WHICH?

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If you already have or want a personal digital assistant (PDA) you should skip the first paragraph or two, as it may sound like I'm preaching to the choir, so to speak. If the term PDA is not familiar, maybe the term Palm is. Although Palm is a brand name of a particular line of PDAs and PDA operating system software, it has become almost as synonymous with PDAs as Kleenex has with tissues. For those of you who don't have or even think you want a PDA, the question is what will it do for you.

One of my favorite quotes regarding PDAs comes from an article by attorney Bryan Sims, which appeared in the May 14, 2002 issue of *The TechnoLawyer Community*. He wrote, "In my experience, the handheld world can be divided into two groups of people: those who own a handheld device, and those who want one. (I recognize, of course, that the latter category includes some neo-luddites who do not yet realize that they want a handheld device)." I agree with this statement wholeheartedly. If you're one of those who doesn't yet know you want a PDA, read on.

A PDA enables an attorney to have instant access to a multitude of very important information and tools, including calendar, address book, tasks, notes, expense tracking, time recording, and much more. It is estimated that there are over 10,000 programs written to work with various PDAs. Some are free, some shareware programs are available for a nominal charge, and others can cost anywhere from \$20 to \$100. The bottom line, though, is that a PDA can have a positive impact on *your* bottom line by enabling you to work smarter instead of harder, to make down-time billable or at least productive time, and to capture time or costs which might otherwise slip through the cracks.

Today's PDAs are much more powerful, and often offer a variety of additional functions. For example, attachments such as headphones, memory sticks or cards, and docking interfaces can add capability for playing MP3 musical favorites, taking digital photos, using a full-size stowaway keyboard (about the same size as a PDA when folded) to transform the PDA into a mini-laptop, or capitalize your down-time at doctor's offices, airports, or even waiting for your case to come up in court by reading your emails, the newspaper, or your favorite book on your PDA.

If you purchase a PDA with wireless internet capability, you open the door to another universe of possibilities. Internet access provides the ability to do real-time electronic research on Lexis or Westlaw, and to download your research results. Forget

something vital? Internet capability enables you to access and download documents from your office computer. It provides the ability to obtain your emails either on demand or automatically with notification upon arrival, and to respond. If you're like me—someone who can't find her way out of a proverbial paper bag—the ability to access maps, guides, and yellow pages information, and even to use your PDA as a global positioning system (GPS) can a lifesaver.

Want an active social life when on the road? Try accessing internet sites like Vindigo (www.vindigo.com), which locates and provides information on weather, restaurants, stores, bars, clubs and movie theaters, including newspaper reviews of the movies, in the vicinity you're currently in, (over 50 cities covered), or JunglePort (www.jungleport.com) which provides maps and directions as well in over 20 cities.

How do you find out the best sites, add-ons, and capabilities? Visit www.pdaJD.com regularly. This site is written specifically for lawyers who use PDAs, and it lists articles, resources, product reviews, links to other helpful web sites, and has useful information, all for the legal professional.

How do you pick the PDA that's right for you? Right now there are an almost overwhelming number of makes and models to choose from. I was recently contacted on the Pennsylvania Bar Association hot line by an attorney who had taken months to carefully research just about every PDA on the market. He read reviews, asked colleagues, and even visited the local brick and mortar store to get the touch and feel of the various models on his short list. Finally he arrived at a decision on which PDA to buy. He contacted me because he wanted me to reassure him that the PDA would work with his case management software. This was important in order for him to take his contacts and calendar with him, and be able to record time on the go. Unfortunately, after all that time invested, it turned out that his case management software would not work with the operating system of the PDA he wanted. He was back to square one. So the first piece of information you need to determine is what desktop/network application software is "mission critical" to link the PDA with, and what operating system is required for the PDA to talk with that software. That will narrow your list of available choices considerably.

Next, you need to determine whether or not you will need internet access. If getting and responding to emails, or accessing information over the internet is important, that will also narrow the field considerably, or at the least point you in some specific directions. Do you want to get a PDA which can interface with a cell phone to access the internet, or get a PDA which can directly access the internet? Since most attorneys now carry cell phones as often or more so than a briefcase, it makes sense to consider a convergent device (CPDA). That is simply a multi-functional device which combines (converges) telephone and PDA abilities in one piece of equipment. The obvious advantage is carrying only one piece of equipment instead of two. As often as people tend to change cell phones nowadays, it's a major pain to reprogram all the essential numbers into memory on the new phone. With a



CPDA your synch operation downloads all the essential information which you have taken the time to enter into your personal productivity (e.g. Outlook or Groupwise), Case Management, or Relationship Management (e.g. Goldmine or ACT) software, and makes it available for the cell phone to use.

If a CPDA is a good idea for you, your next consideration is which is the most important primary function for you. Most people are either a cell phone user first and foremost and *then* a PDA user, or they are a heavy PDA user but need a cell phone for convenience and to stay in touch. Knowing which is your primary need will again enable you to narrow the playing field considerably, because most CPDAs are more convenient and efficient at one function than the other. Keep in mind, though, that even if you need a PDA capability the most, the cell phone functionality must be efficient and convenient enough for you to use it to the exclusion of any other cell phone, or otherwise what's the point of getting a CPDA?

After the important considerations above, you can think about issues like memory (get more), color or monochrome monitor (get color for easier viewing if you can afford it), monitor brightness, whether it has handwriting or voice recognition, and so forth.

The PDAs which are getting high marks from your fellow attorneys will change over time. The brands include the Handspring Visor and Handspring Treo models. Both work with the Palm operating system. Additional optional features keep improving, and you should expect to be able to get such optional abilities as an MP3 player, pager, modem, GPS and digital camera.

Also using the Palm operating system and receiving high grades are the Palm models many provide Word, Excel, PowerPoint, photos, offline web browsing and email. Other capabilities include a voice recorder, a graffiti writing area, and built-in Blue-Tooth for internet connectivity with use of a compatible mobile phone.

Sony has a wide variety of PDA models to choose from which are popular with your peers, all working with the Palm operating system,. Sony has numerous different Clie models recommended on pdaJD.com. The high-end model has a built-in digital camera, built-in recording and playback of MPEG-4 videos, built-in Blue-Tooth technology, a slot for an 802.11b wireless LAN card so you can synch and surf the net via wireless LAN connection, a folding portable charging cradle, a USB connection for direct printing, and a removable rechargeable battery pack that actually shows the remaining battery life in minutes. This last feature is something that most attorneys have been asking for. Too much for you? Check out one of the many more affordable Clie models.

Let's not overlook the popular Microsoft Pocket PC operating system. Two vendors of distinction among your peers include HP/Compaq and Toshiba. The Compaq iPAQ gets high marks from your peers. Both come with color display and 32 Mb memory, and run Word, Excel, Outlook and Windows Media Player. Options can include a built-in



microphone and digital voice recorder, Blue-Tooth card, USB connected full-size keyboard, and integrated Wi-Fi 802.11b wireless LAN connectivity.

The Kyocera gets the hands-down highest ratings from your peers as the CPDA which is equally convenient as *both* a cell phone and PDA. It currently works with Sprint and Verizon. (Every other make and model is rated as better in one or the other area of functionality by your peers.) Features and options include the Palm Operating System, expansion memory slot, wireless fax and modem, color display, MP3 player, caller ID, voice-dialing, hands-free speakerphone, GPS locator and text messaging. It truly combines seamless integration of the PDA and cell phone in a sleek, light, good looking piece of equipment which also provides decent battery life. The Blackberry also has a variety of CPDA models, although in my opinion they are not quite as nice as the Kyocera as a cell phone.

Ideally, whatever you buy should get you a good two to three years of service before the siren's call of newer models with better service and functionality entice you to make a switch. Nowadays it's not that the life cycle of the equipment is short, it's just that the innovations are so fast in coming and so darned good, you almost can't stand not having a newer model.

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