

Just to bring you up to speed....

A personal digital assistant (PDA) is a hand-held computer that allows you to store, access, and organize information. Most PDAs work on either a Windows-based or a Palm operating system. PDAs can be screen-based or keyboard-based, or both.

Basic PDAs allow you to store and retrieve addresses and phone numbers, maintain a calendar, and create to-do lists and notes. More sophisticated PDAs can run word processing, spreadsheet, money manager, and electronic book reading programs, and also provide e-mail and Internet access. Some PDAs come with all of these programs included. Some of the programs may be limited versions of ones that run on desktop computers. For others, you have to acquire or purchase extra software to run these programs. Some PDAs play music and record voice memos, while some others can with additional hardware.

Most PDAs can exchange information with a desktop or laptop computer, although you may have to buy additional accessories.

E-mail and Internet access

Most PDAs allow you to download e-mails and some Internet content from a desktop or laptop computer. You can write e-mails with most PDAs and later send them from your computer.

Some PDAs come with software for accessing certain brands of e-mail accounts. Additional software may be available to access other brands of e-mail accounts. Some PDAs also come with Internet browser software, while other PDAs require users to purchase browser software separately.

Many PDAs can access e-mail and the Internet by connecting to a telephone jack, although you may have to purchase a special modem. Other PDAs can provide wireless access to e-mail and the Internet if you buy a wireless modem or connect them to certain types of digital mobile phones. Still other PDAs permit wireless access to e-mail and the Internet without the need for additional hardware or software.

For wireless e-mail and Internet access, you must subscribe to a wireless data network service. You may have to pay a monthly flat fee, connection-time fees, or some other type of fee for that wireless service. Some PDAs may also require you to sign up for a wireless service with a specific ISP, so check before buying. In addition, wireless service may not be available in all areas of the United States or the world, so check with the wireless service provider.

Quality of Internet and e-mail access

Currently, the ability to access the content of the Internet through a PDA is more limited than through a desktop computer. Some PDAs permit you to browse any URL on the Web using many Internet service providers (ISPs). Other PDAs require a subscription to a specific ISP. Check before buying if it important for your use.

Be aware that not all content of every Web site may be available on a PDA either because of the limited power relative to a desktop computer or because the PDA does not come with the software necessary to view all content on every Web site. Sometimes, additional software may be purchased and loaded onto the PDA to allow additional Web content to be displayed on a PDA.

Some Internet features that are available to most desktop computer users may not be available to PDA users. For example, PDAs may not allow users to play certain games, use certain audio or video features, or view information in certain formats like PDF (Portable Document Format) files. No currently available PDAs support Real Player, Shockwave, QuickTime, or other multimedia programs available on some Web sites.

Many PDAs allow you to access your e-mail accounts, but some PDAs limit your ability to send, receive, or view e-mail attachments. Not all devices are able to display attachments in popular formats like MS Word and HTML without additional software.

Connecting to a desktop or notebook computer

Typically, PDAs come with cables or docking stations to connect them to your desktop or notebook computer. Connecting lets you synchronize and update the files on your PDA with your desktop or notebook computer, such as your calendar, address book, and to-do lists. Some PDAs also enable you to synchronize word processing and spreadsheet files as well as e-mail messages, and copy Web site addresses and Web pages for offline viewing on your PDA.

Screen displays

Some PDAs have monochrome or gray-scale displays, while others can display anywhere from 256 to 64,000 colors.

PDA screen displays are either active matrix or passive matrix. Active matrix displays generally are easier to see, more responsive, faster, and can be viewed at larger angles than passive matrix displays.

Most PDA screens may be seen adequately in many light conditions. Many have gauges for indoor, outdoor, and power-saving modes. Some color PDAs can be set to dim the backlight if the PDA is not in use for a set time - this extends the battery life.

Batteries

Some PDAs use permanent rechargeable batteries, while others use either rechargeable batteries that can be replaced or standard alkaline batteries. How long you can go without recharging or changing batteries may vary depending on the PDA. The time it takes for recharging may also vary depending on the battery. You can use the PDA while the battery is recharging.

Memory

PDAs in today's market typically have between 2 MB to 32 MB of built-in memory. Two MB of memory is generally sufficient to fill address books, maintain an active calendar, take notes, and load useful programs. More memory may be necessary to store large files like digital photos or audio recordings, or to hold large software programs. You can expand memory of some PDAs with small storage cards that can be inserted into the PDA. Think about your anticipated memory requirements before you buy, so that the PDA you select is capable of addressing your needs.

Size and weight

Today's PDAs range from the size and thickness of 10 business cards, weighing 1.4 ounces, to the size of a paperback book weighing significantly more. The smallest PDAs have only basic information-organizing functions: they allow you to maintain address books and calendars, and create to-do lists. Complementary hardware -- for example, modems, cradles, and battery chargers -- add to the overall size and weight of PDAs.

Entering information

You have to use a pen like stylus to enter information into many PDAs. You tap on an on-screen keyboard or enter data by writing on the screen, which may require learning a new way of printing the alphabet. Some PDAs use common alphabet characters, while others use variations. Test the handwriting recognition on several PDAs to make sure you're comfortable with how they work.

Other PDAs have built-in keyboards. Some of these also let you use a stylus; the stylus substitutes for a mouse for navigating through on-screen menus and controls. External keyboards are available as accessories for many smaller PDAs.

Adaptability

Some PDAs can be upgraded. You may be able to add software from the Web or other sources, and some PDAs offer more software applications than others. You also may be able to add memory or removable storage to a PDA, or connect it to an external monitor, a network, or a modem. Printers and external keyboards can be added to many PDAs as well.

Cost

PDAs range from less than \$100 to over \$600. Generally, the higher-priced PDAs provide more features and functions than the lower-priced models.

Plan and said it would expand availability to 29 additional markets.

Some potential customers had been reluctant to utilize Verizon's 1X Express Network because minutes spent on the data network were counted against customers' calling plan minutes. To alleviate those concerns, Verizon has introduced a \$99.99 flat-fee monthly plan that allows customers to download unlimited data on the Express Network.

The Express Network offers customers data transmission speeds between 40 and 60 kbps, and Verizon said it is capable of bursts up to 144 kbps.

Sierra Wireless offers a little something extra with its AirCard 550/555, which we tested with Verizon Wireless, using the Compaq iPAQ 3800. This PC Card works with Verizon's Express network, using CDMA2000 1X (144 Kbps maximum), and with the slower Quick 2 Net network (regular CDMA at 14.4 Kbps) for areas where the faster technology is not yet available.

The surprising extra is that the AirCard doubles as a cell phone, with dialing software and a headset jack on the edge of the card. The feature doesn't work with the iPAQ's built-in microphone and speaker, however, and there's no way to store names and numbers, which limits the phone's usefulness. It could come in handy as a second cell phone, especially if you need to keep your hands free to work on your PDA, but you can't work online at the same time you talk.

Verizon Wireless offers SMS, which lets you send a message to the modem's phone number from a Web page. This was also the only service we tested for which any Web site recognized the iPAQ and formatted the page accordingly. We were able to enter credit card information on the typical three Web sites out of six tested and had no problems with e-mail or attachments. Consider this one a credible contender, especially for those of you who spend much time in areas that can take advantage of the 2.5G speeds.

After careful review of the new Dell Palm PC Axim X5, we have determined that it will make a nice, inexpensive unit. Its sync-up capabilities and operating system allow it to integrate with your desktop unit with ease, without additional software or devices.

They do have an optional Compact Flash card attachment that will allow the unit to connect to most Nokia or Motorola cell phones. Verizon has teamed up with Microsoft to provide the most stable wireless data connection and service rich plan to date (throughout the U.S.). Verizon's new plan allows unlimited access for a monthly rate of \$99.00. AT&T is now offering their wireless data services starting as low as \$17 per month. However, this service calculates your total data services utilized (in megabytes) per month. The average user tends to spend approximately \$50 per month. Some setup fees will be incurred on either of these two plans, and will vary upon the total commitment time you sign up for (1-3 years). Other wireless carriers are still working on making their wireless web-based services both affordable and tolerable in respect for data transmission speed. This, along with adding the Citrix ICA client to your Axim X5 and setting up the Citrix Nfuse Classic on the Citrix server within your office, you will then have the ability to connect to your office anywhere, any time, via a cell phone data carrier that provides web access (i.e. Verizon, AT&T).

Providing that your current cell phone (and cable) is compatible with the Axim, and you are already on a wireless cell web carrier with data services (i.e. Verizon), you can expect to invest approximately \$ 1,000 for this solution. The cost includes our suggested configuration of the Axim X5 (approximately \$387 with spare battery, USB Cradle, carrying case), labor (approximately 5 hours) that involves the configuration of your Citrix server with Nfuse Classic, connecting and configuring your Axim to the wireless web services, configuring and testing connection to the Citrix server, basic training on connecting and operating it on Citrix.

Secondly...

To have the ability of directly tying the Axim into your office LAN, while you are at the office, Dell offers an optional WiFi card for the Axim X5 (\$100). With the Wifi card in place, you can further increase its capabilities by installing and setting up the ICA Citrix client on the Axim, allowing you full workstation capabilities while at the office. It will also require a wireless access point to the network, and you must stay within 100 feet of its proximity, in order to maximize its performance. The approximate cost in setting up this solution is \$600. This includes the Wifi card, wireless access point router, and the labor necessary to install and train you on proper operations of the unit and the network.

There are also several other PocketPc solutions I would recommend to you (Compaq's iPAQ Series, HP's Jornada 728 handheld pc, and Seimen's X56 PocketPc/ Cell phone. Keep your eyes open, as new products are accelerating their way to market.

For further discussion on this topic, please do not hesitate to contact us at your earliest convenience.

We are here to serve.

Kind Regards,



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