

New uses for Blackberrys, PDAs soon

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Phil Hammond carries a PalmOne Treo personal digital assistant with him almost all the time. "It's like carrying my office in my pocket -- I can get my e-mail, my contact list, my notes, even my combination to my locker at the Y," Hammond, marketing director for the Boston-based interior design firm of Margulies & Associates, told UPI's Wireless World.

"Before that, I had a Palm Pilot. That one was good, but this one is even more advanced. The only problem is that it is a little cumbersome -- my fingers are too big for the tiny keyboard."

According to a new survey by eAccess Solutions Inc., based in suburban Chicago, businesses like Hammond's firm are increasingly realizing a return on the investments they have made in PDAs. They first were enticed by wireless e-mail, and now, the survey says, they want to see what other applications can be pushed out to the PDA.

"Customers continue to demand mobile devices that are high in functionality, low in front-end cost, easy to install, administer and, most importantly, low in support costs," said David Bean, president and chief executive officer at eAccess, a provider of wireless devices to the corporate market.

The survey of 1 million online visitors to eAccess.com shows that the most popular PDA is the Research in Motion Blackberry Handheld, used by 68 percent of the survey's respondents. The second-most popular device was the PalmOne Treo, used by 12 percent of respondents. Smart

phones were the third-most popular PDA, followed by the Pocket PCs.

Some business professionals claim their office mates are addicted to using PDAs. "Blackberry is known as 'crackberry' because of its addiction," said Stephanie D. Miller, a marketing professional at Verucity Solutions Inc. "We even have to develop policies, telling employees not to take their Blackberries to the 'john' as IT folks want to prevent employees from accidentally dropping them in the toilet."

Soon, experts said, business professionals will continue to be wireless even when on vacation or at a conference.

Starting in September, Rosewood Hotels & Resorts will provide each of its guests with the new iQue M3 GPS navigator, spokeswoman Sonia G. Weymuller said. "The device also contains e-mail, Microsoft Word, Excel, Internet Explorer, etc., and enables guests to search restaurants and addresses and, thanks to an integrated speaker, gives voice-prompted turn-by-turn directions," Weymuller added.

Even teenagers are now starting to carry PDAs -- albeit modified for their demographic. Zipit Wireless Messenger has developed a portable instant-messaging device that allows teenagers to connect via "802.11 wireless home networks or free hotspots," said Mike Crisp, a spokesman for Zipit. This enables teens, and even some pre-teens, to "chat away with no service fee."

The future should be full of new PDA innovations, experts tell Wireless World.

Next year wireless carriers plan to introduce a number of new technologies including bandwidth-on-demand, instant replay, and real-time updating of pre-paid accounts. Bandwidth-on-demand will enable users to purchase high-speed downloads such as movies and load them

onto a PDA before they board a plane for a cross-country flight. The instant-replay technology will allow consumers, watching a live sporting event at a stadium, to use their handhelds to connect to a stadium's wireless system and watch an instant replay of the spectacular play they witnessed. Those with pre-paid minutes will be able to update their services live without having to interrupt whatever they are doing on the PDA at that time.

Usage of the devices may grow exponentially with the new services. Right now, users are limited to e-mail and phone calls and still consume a lot of time. "I am a two-year user of Blackberry, and I average about 1,000 e-mail messages per month and about 4,000 cell-phone minutes," said Robert Cooper, vice president of sales at Haley Systems, based in suburban Virginia near Washington, D.C.

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