

Books, cell phones a match made in heaven

January 14 2009, By Lou Dolinar

Boy, do I have high-tech idea for those of you who got a shiny new smart phone for Christmas: Try reading a book on it.

In most cases you can buy a contemporary book via the usual extortionate vending plan of your service provider, but why bother? Assuming you can browse the Net, you can download - for free - thousands of out-of-copyright titles. The main source of these is Project Gutenberg, a collaborative volunteer effort that's been scanning, proofreading and digitizing since 1971. Gutenberg's one of those Internet things that gets a lot less attention than it deserves from the media, mostly because it's free and it's been around forever.

I have a hunch the site is in for a spurt of interest, however. There's something weird about trying to read a book on a desktop monitor and it's not much better on a laptop. But for trendy smallish netbooks, PDAs, and smart phones, novels and works of nonfiction are a match made in heaven. Text takes up a fraction of the space as audio or video, and contemporary portable anythings have more than enough memory to hold a couple of books.

Late last month, the Gutenberg folks announced an initiative to reformat their collection, currently numbering 27,000 books on the main site, and 100,000 plus when affiliates are included, specifically for cell phones. "Each Java/MIDP 2.0 enabled cell phone is sufficient - the most common computing platform in the world: There are by far more cell phones shipped worldwide than personal computers," they noted in their release.

For other devices, Gutenberg offers books in HTML and text format, but for a more book-like experience (e.g., bookmarks and page turning), you need to install a reader tailored to your device and one of the specialized book formats Gutenberg supports. I have a reader on my little Nokia 800 palmtop, and have been working my way through the collected writings of Jack London. The nice thing about the Gutenberg is that mostly these are books you should read, classics like Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" or Charlotte Bronte's "Jane Eyre." BlackBerrys and iPhones also get along with Gutenberg.

For additional sources of books, see booksinmyphone.com, manybooks.net, and textonphone.com.

Another improvement for your holiday haul: Cables and a wall-mount bracket for your big-screen TV. I always find it disturbing to see a gorgeous, 5-inch-deep plasma placed on 24-inch-deep equipment stand with a clutter of cable draped behind it.

Flat-screens really belong on the wall, and the cable box and assorted electronics off to the side somewhere. Once you hang the set, the most expedient thing is to buy some split loom tubing to enclose and neaten the cables, and stick the gear in a corner. Split loom is black, corrugated, and is slit down the middle so you can easily add or remove cables. It is available from various online vendors and home centers.

Cable length can be another issue when you're separating a flat-screen from the rest of the electronics. Big-box retailers rarely carry longer runs of HDMI, which usually can go up to 50 feet in, and up to 100 feet if you're using high-quality cable. I recommend Blue Jeans Cable (bluejeanscable.com) both for price and for their excellent discussion of cable technology. Super-length computer cabling, meanwhile, is also available online, so you can hook up your set in the living room to the PC in your office. Take a look at cablestogo.com for a good selection, as

well as various splitters and amplifiers you may need for a custom project.

A couple of tips for the moderately handy who, like me, want to snake their cabling inside a wall and off to a closet, with the equipment totally out of sight. The National Electrical Code frowns on running extension cords through walls, so you or your electrician should add a permanent outlet behind the set to power it while hiding the cord. Use a recessed clock outlet, which intrudes a couple of inches into the wall, allowing plenty of room to recess the plug. As for operating your remote control when your gear is behind a door, the magic phrase to look up is "remote control relay." There's a gazillion different relays that will let you put an unobtrusive infrared receiver in your living room and run a cable or wireless signal to your equipment closet, where it "repeats" whatever infrared signal you throw at it. In some cases you may not even need one of these; my Dish Network box has a radio-operated control that works through walls.

I got another electronic toy around Christmas time, and I'm not sure whether to classify it as a luxury or a money saver, but it is one of my favorites: a digital line voltage clock thermostat for my bathroom. Like many folks, I have auxiliary heat there in the form of an electric kickspace heater; others use ceiling fixtures with high-output heat lamps. While clock thermostats are old hat, inexpensive models that can handle high current loads of electric heat are a fairly recent development. I programmed the clock thermostat to automatically crank up the heat to 80 degrees for the half-hour each morning when I shower, then drop back down again. Similar plug-in units are available to control air conditioners and portable electric heaters. I've had good luck with the LUX brand, available at home centers and online.

(Lou Dolinar writes a technology column for Newsday and hosts Lou's Day, "designed to help normal people unsnarl their computers," at www.dolinar.com . He can be reached at lou at dolinar.com.)

© 2009, Newsday.

Visit Newsday online at www.newsday.com/

Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Information Services.

Citation: Books, cell phones a match made in heaven (2009, January 14) retrieved 7 August 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-01-cell-heaven.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--