

A Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) is effectively a scaled down PC, which acts as a digital version of a filofax. The basic versions will include features like an address book, notepad, appointments diary, calculator and phone list though you can buy software to extend its functionality.

#### WHAT IS A PDA?

The more sophisticated PDAs are now also capable of storing music and image files, connecting to the internet and running basic applications like word processing and spreadsheets. What makes PDAs so popular is their size and portability, making them a very appealing option for mobile workers or people who travel frequently as part of their job. Another bonus is the ability to transfer data between your handheld device and a desktop PC or laptop. So anything you change or add to your PDA can be updated to your PC and vice versa.

#### LINKING YOUR PDA TO YOUR PC

The way in which a PDA communicates with a PC is referred to as 'data synchronisation' or 'synching'. This can be done in a number of ways:

- A USB (or serial) port on the PDA this is one of the most common ways; some PDAs have a cradle that they sit in while hooked up to the PC.
- An infrared radiation (IR) port on the PDA that allows it to beam information to another PDA, PC or mobile device (NB the other device must also have a receiving IR sensor).
- Bluetooth functionality (short-range wireless) to let you connect to a laptop, PC, mobile phone, printer, etc (NB the receiving devices must also be Bluetooth capable see our Bluetooth factsheet).
- WiFi functionality (medium-range wireless) to

allow your PDA or other mobile device to connect to your company network or hotspot as long as they are within range of the wireless access point (see our WiFi factsheet).

#### USING YOUR PDA

Essentially your PDA can do much the same as a laptop, and you will probably use it in a similar way the main advantage over a laptop is its reduced size and portability. Depending on what type of PDA you have, and what features it has, you will be able to use it to:

- take notes, review and edit your appointments, contacts and documents
- connect to your computer network and access relevant data
- surf the net, and send and receive e-mails with a mobile phone connection or WiFi
- share and swap data with other PDA users
- take photos and share these images.

#### PALM VERSUS POCKET PC

There are two major operating systems in the PDA market, Palm OS and PocketPC. Palm Computing developed the original Palm Pilot and now controls 80% of the current PDA market. PocketPC was developed by Microsoft and was formerly known as Windows CE.

- PocketPC supports Windows packages (Word, Excel), and other devices such as built-in MP3 players and MPEG movie players; but takes up more memory and can be slow and complicated to use.

- Palm OS takes up less memory, runs faster, and is reckoned to be easier to use. You can buy software that lets you work with Word and Excel files and many Palm OS PDAs already come with 'Documents to go' that allow you to work with Word, Excel and even PowerPoint files.

Both have their pros and cons, and your choice will probably be down to personal preference.

### CHOOSING A PDA

If you are considering buying your first PDA, your choice of operating system may be an important factor. If everyone else in your company is using one type of OS, you should consider getting the same one for the sake of compatibility. Check on the software you will want to run some might only work with one operating system and not the other. Other things to consider include:

- Memory If you want to run a number of applications you will need to have adequate memory.
- Screen Look for a screen that you find easy to read.
- Battery life Pay attention to the listed battery life of the PDA.

You may want to be able to go for long stretches without having to recharge the PDA, and remember that things like colour displays will use more battery power.

- Size Size may be an important factor if you are carrying your PDA around all day. Ultra slim models are available.
- Expansion capability Most current PDAs have expansion slots for storage/memory cards or modem and networking cards. You can also get WiFi or Bluetooth cards, but they will need to be compatible with the expansion slot on your PDA. Other accessories/add-ons include keyboards, digital camera modules, and MP3 players.

- Price you can get a basic PDA, such as a Handspring Treo, from around £100 and sometimes less, but if you want more features you will be looking at around £200. If you want your PDA to be Bluetooth or WiFi-enabled, costs can range from £250 upwards but it is worth shopping around as prices frequently change. You could also buy a PDA with room for a WiFi or Bluetooth card and then upgrade later.

Many of the PC/laptop manufacturers, such as Dell, HP, Sony and Toshiba, also produce PDAs, so it is worth doing your research to find a model that suits your budget and your needs.

### FURTHER HELP AND ADVICE

<http://www.pdabuyersguide.com> PDA buyers' guide offers reviews, comparisons and discussion as well as all the latest news about PDAs.

<http://www.pdabuzz.com> latest news, reviews and resources for PDAs.

Online stores for PDA hardware, software and accessories

<http://www.handango.com>

<http://www.widget.co.uk/asp/default.asp>

<http://www.totalpda.co.uk/index.asp>

<http://www.totalpda.co.uk>

<http://www.shop-4-pdas.co.uk> comparison of PDA prices in the UK.

### GENERAL BUSINESS ADVICE

For more information on achieving best practice in your business: Contact your local Business Link advisor by visiting the website at <http://www.businesslink.gov.uk> or calling 0845 600 9 006.

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