Letter to the Editor

Thumbs Up for Handhelds

It was nice to see a relatively balanced comparison of some of the handheld computers on the market (“Thumbs Up for Handhelds,” NetWare Connection, June 2000, pp. 6–17). Although the article was not a detailed review of each product, the article did provide a great deal of information. However, I did find what appears to be a fairly large error and may cause some of your readers to incorrectly avoid choosing the Palm series.

The HotSync software that was included with my Palm IIIxe is able to fully synchronize with Microsoft Outlook. So I was surprised in your article to read that the Palm V and VII would not. By doing a little research on Palm’s web page, I found that the Palm V and Palm VII appear to also include this functionality.

I realize that the article was limited by the large number of handhelds out there, but it may have been interesting to your readers to briefly mention the popular Palm III series of organizers which includes the new Palm IIIc color model. I have worked with both Windows CE (several models) and Palm OS products and found that for contacts, scheduling, and addresses, the Palm’s form factor cannot be over emphasized. In addition, you ask the reader to be introspective about battery life by asking “How often will you use your handheld for 10 hours straight—without ever synchronizing?” The better question to ask may have been “How many of you might like to take a business trip and be able to rely on your handheld to have power for the entire trip?”

Nyle Landas

Our Answer:

Thank you for your response to “Thumbs Up for Handhelds.” I’m glad to hear you found the article relatively balanced, because balanced is what I was aiming for. Frankly, it wasn’t difficult to present an unbiased article about the handhelds I tested because I thoroughly enjoyed using each of them.

As for the “fairly large error” you mentioned, I believe you may have misread the article. As I explain on p. 16, “HotSync also enables you to synchronize the Palm III application with the Inbox (and Outbox)” of several desktop e-mail programs, including Microsoft Outlook. However, as I also say on p. 16, HotSync does not synchronize with any of Outlook’s other features, such as Contacts and Calendar. I checked this myself when I was testing the products. When I set up HotSync, I had the option to synchronize with Outlook e-mail but with no other Outlook features. When I received your e-mail message, I called my Palm contact. She confirmed my claim and referred me to a web site (http://www.chapura.com/pocketmirrorfeatures.html) that describes a third-party conduit application that provides full synchronization for Outlook and other popular Personal Information Managers (PIMs). I suppose it is possible that the Palm IIIxe that you use includes a conduit, such as the one from Chapura, just as IBM’s WorkPad includes EasySync. The Palm V and Palm VII, however, do not include such a conduit.

Although I agree that it may have been interesting to mention the popular Palm III series, the article was not, as you suspected, limited by the large number of handhelds but rather by the handhelds I actually had the pleasure to use. I did not feature any handhelds except those I personally tested. (The one exception is the IBM WorkPad, which is only mentioned.) I could have mentioned scores of other handhelds—both Palm and Windows CE products, not to mention handhelds that run neither of these two operating systems.

Finally, perhaps you’re right about the better question to have asked. “How many of you might like to take a business trip and be able to rely on your handheld to have power for the entire trip?” is precisely the question I repeatedly asked myself. When it comes to battery life, it’s obvious that the Palm handhelds beat the Windows CE devices hands down. However, as I mentioned, my goal was to be unbiased. When I posed the question “How often will you use your handheld for 10 hours straight—without ever synchronizing?” I intended the question to be legitimate. That is, I suspected that many readers would answer “Lots of times—every time I travel!” On the other hand, some readers might answer “Almost never. I rarely travel, and I sync with my desktop daily.”

Linda Kennaard, author