

Death of the out of office assistant

Helen Moss

Annoying messages from out of office assistants will soon be a thing of the past. Rapid advances in mobile technology, such as WiFi hotspots and GPRS, mean that business travellers can now work seamlessly whilst on the move. WiFi hotspots are springing up everywhere, departure lounges, motorway services, coffee shops and hotels. Time spent in airport departure lounges used to be limited to a quick bite to eat and a browse around the shops. These days every quiet corner is filled with business travellers checking emails, stock prices, reviewing documents and surfing the web.

And connectivity doesn't end once you board the plane. Even when travelling at 35,000 feet at up to 560 miles per hour it is possible to stay in touch. Aircraft manufacturers are rapidly developing in-flight internet provision – Boeing has launched Connexion, in-flight wireless

internet access. All passengers need is a LAN-enabled laptop or mobile device to surf the web, send email, or even view live TV broadcasts, with wireless technology doing away with connection points, wires and adaptors. Connexion uses satellites to send and receive data from the plane transceiver. British Airways, Lufthansa, Singapore Airlines, SAS and Japan Airlines were amongst the first to offer this service. Hopefully, changes in American legislation will mean that US airlines will soon be able to follow suit.

UK rail operators are also getting in on the act with WiFi coverage in stations up and down the country and with on-board internet access offered by the larger operators such as Virgin and GNER.

Jeremy Acklam, Virgin Trains' IT Director, said: "We are delighted to extend our new service of providing our customers with fast and secure internet access, as they travel

through our stations at London Euston, Birmingham International and Manchester Piccadilly. We are constantly exploring ways of improving and enhancing the travelling experience with Virgin Trains, and we believe that the service makes our customers' journey more productive, hassle-free and entertaining."

In the US, train operator Amtrak has launched a WiFi hotspot service in train stations for its northeastern corridor. Cross channel operator, Eurostar, has also introduced wireless internet access in Paris, Ashford, Brussels and Waterloo stations.

Find lugging a laptop too cumbersome?

Personal digital assistants (PDAs) and smartphones are becoming invaluable to roaming business travellers. Easy-to-use, small and convenient, these mobile devices are the ideal tool for travellers who



Tungsten T5

If you are prepared to pay that bit more, the Tungsten T5 is at the high end of the PDA market. It has the largest, high-resolution display in its class. 480 x 320 pixels in size, it rotates from portrait to landscape with the click on an icon for optimum viewing of spreadsheets and email etc.

The Tungsten T5 has integrated Bluetooth wireless technology, 256MB of memory and Word, Excel and PowerPoint formats can be opened, amongst others. You can also listen to digital music and view photos and video clips. Files can be shared with USB-equipped computers (PC or Mac) with drag and drop simplicity.

A customisable 'Favourites' screen makes access simple.

Available online at www.palmone.com or at high street retailers.

■ Price: From £281.99

■ For more information visit www.palmone.com/uk



PalmOne Zire 72

The PalmOne Zire 72 handheld is designed especially for the mobile multimedia generation. Shoot photos and videos with the 1.2 megapixel camera and then view them on the high-resolution 320 x 320 colour display or email them to a friend. Carry your latest play list of MP3 and listen to them in stereo on your PC.

Keep your personal information safe and organised by synchronising it with Microsoft Outlook on your desktop PC or the included Palm Desktop software. You can also create and edit Word and Excel-compatible files. Finally, Bluetooth allows you to share files wirelessly with other Bluetooth devices. Memory-wise there is room for expansion with 32MB of memory and SD/MMC expansion card slot.

Available online at www.palmone.com or at high street retailers.

■ Price: around £219

■ For more information visit www.palmone.com/uk

are trying to keep luggage weight down and don't want to lug a laptop around.

If you haven't converted to the handheld way, now is the time to try. There is a bewildering choice of devices available on the market. The PDA is a mini handheld computer that can do many of the things that your work or personal computer can do. You can take notes, look up a phone number, write and send e-mail and much more.

Smartphones are a hybrid, combination PDA and mobile phone giving you the best of both, although the computer functionality is restricted. Popular models such as the Orange SPV c500 or PalmOne treo650 offer greater functionality than rival Blackberry devices, due to operating platforms which support music, pictures, streaming video, memory expansion and more.

The two main device types for the PDA are the Palm and Pocket

PC, which come with windows or palm operating system. However, if your company is one of the 40 per cent of worldwide businesses who work with IBM Lotus Notes you will need to purchase compatible software.

Companies such as CommonTime,

Operating platforms support, music, pictures, video, memory expansion, and more

who have developed 'Notes' specifically for lotus notes users or Intellisync both provide free trials of this type of software allowing replication of e-mails, contacts and more onto handheld devices.

So, it is time to forget about setting your out of office assistant or checking in with your PA. Work

on the move, increase your mobility with wireless connectivity, pocket PC, Palm or Smartphone.

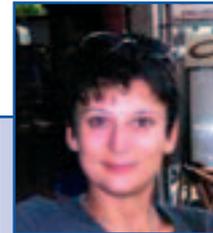
Useful websites

www.palmOne.com

www.microsoft.com

www.CommonTime.com

www.hp.com



Helen Moss works in the mobile computing industry. She writes on topics related to wireless computing, mobile working and handheld technologies. She regularly contributes articles and editorial to industry websites, magazines and journals.

BlackBerry 7290 wireless handheld

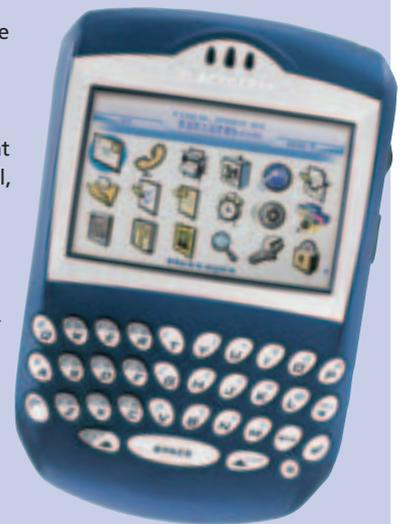
New to the UK is the BlackBerry 7290 designed for customers who want a compact, all-in-one device with exceptional messaging capabilities, integrated phone, organiser and browser for all their mobile communication and information needs. It provides users with easy access to their email and other communications. This is at the very high end of the smartphone market and will cost that little bit more.

The BlackBerry 7290 has a compact, ergonomic handheld design, high-resolution colour screen that supports over 65,000 colours, easy-to-use QWERTY keyboard, thumb-operated navigation trackwheel, plus integrated support for corporate and personal email, phone, SMS, organiser, internet and intranet applications. It has 32 MB flash memory and 4 MB SRAM for storage capabilities for messages, calendar appointments and applications.

For individuals and smaller businesses, BlackBerry Internet Service allows users to access multiple business and/or personal email accounts from a single mobile device and without the need for server software.

BlackBerry also features cradle-free wireless email synchronisation for corporate users as well as integrated attachment viewing that supports popular file formats (including: Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, PDF, WordPerfect, ASCII).

- Available from O2
- Pricing information available through O2.
- For more information visit www.blackberry.com



Nokia 6600 mobile phone

The Nokia 6600 phone has advanced personal information management (PIM) features to help you keep on track. An extensive calendar allows you to keep notes and set recurring appointments, and a highly flexible contacts database allows you to keep all the details you need – and with PC Suite, you can synchronise contacts and calendar stored on your phone with data stored on your computer.

The Nokia 6600 phone enables you to manage both work and private email accounts. For travellers, it has tri-band allowing coverage on five continents (your service provider allowing). When you're with other people who want to take part in an important call, it has a built-in handsfree speaker so everyone can listen and talk.

Take notes using the Nokia Digital Pen which remembers what you write and lets you send an image file to your Nokia 6600 phone or compatible PC.

- Available from most high street mobile phone stores.
- Price: From £169.99
- For full details and specifications visit www.nokia.com

