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# Technology



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## A little handholding on what to get for your handheld

01/25/2001

By Meryl Kaplan Evans / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

The holidays are over and you're back on your regular schedule. And there's a new gadget in your life to make it easier to manage.

Eagerly, you test out your new personal digital assistant, starting with its phone book and working your way through the tasks, calendar and notes features. Is that all there is to it? Maybe you wish your calendar had the capability to do more.

A trip to a local software retailer will yield little success. Stay home and drive on the Information Superhighway, where you can stop at Web sites that contain vast libraries of software for handheld organizers.

These Web sites allow you to search for software and download it to your computer for synching with your handheld organizer. Most products give you the option of "try before you buy." If you like it, you can purchase the software online, with most titles in the \$10 to \$40 range.

Unlike the PC and game software industry where upgrades come once a year, the handheld industry releases upgrades a few times a year – and sometimes more frequently. Some continually release new versions as soon as they receive bug reports or feedback from users.

To ease the transition, here is a list of palm-top software recommended by users like you to get started. Users of the PalmOS, Pocket PC, Windows CE

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or other pocket operating systems can refer to the list on Page 4F for Web sites that carry software for these operating systems.

One of the most popular sites for palm-top services is AvantGo. Users can download more than 400 types of content for free. The site offers news, stock quotes, flight schedules, movie listings, restaurant reviews, maps, weather and much more from brand-name content providers and e-businesses.

If you don't have a wireless connection to the Internet, you can download the updates from AvantGo into your device before you go. And it's free.

"AvantGo is an amazing product that lets you bring the Web with you anywhere. Either off line or online, it's an indispensable, must-have app," says Joel Evans, chief geek at geek.com.

Another helpful software product is DateBk4, which revamps the built-in to do and datebook applications on organizers. The program maintains the general look and feel of the original applications.

"DateBk4 combines your schedule, to dos, notes and memos all in one application, allowing split screens to see appointments and phone numbers or appointments and To Dos. A must for any serious PDA user," says Barry Szakolczay, a member of the Internet Only Palm Users Group, an online organization.

The general PalmOS HotSync process does not back up every application that you install onto your palm-top. It only backs up applications that originally come with the device. A handheld device typically comes with a calendar, address book, task/to do list and notes.

If you download and install AvantGo, DateBk4 or other third-party software, the Palm will not restore those should it crash. When this happens, users must manually reinstall them.

This is where BackUpBuddy might come in handy.

"BackUpBuddy covers everything you have on your device," says Wendy Gibson, vice president of marketing at Handango, a Hurst-based software company for palm-top devices. What's more, the program has virus scanning built in.

Also popular are Documents to Go and QuickOffice. Both programs allow reading and editing of Word and Excel files.

"Both software packages work well, though the focus of each package is somewhat different. Documents to Go focuses on going from the PC to the handheld and the QuickOffice from the Palm to the PC," says Mark Thomas, a Geek.com reviewer. Research each and select the one that best fits your

needs.

Most desktops come loaded with Microsoft Outlook. PocketMirror is a conduit to synch your organizer with Microsoft Outlook. You can use Microsoft Outlook for meeting reminders while you work at your desk. When you're away, the organizer will take over that role.

Virus scanning programs are now popping up for the handheld market. But how essential is it for your palm-top?

"Currently, with only about three or four known viruses, I don't think it's worth purchasing such a program. In time, while the PalmOS becomes a more and more active OS, those who seek to destroy others' digital property will strike harder," says Charles Brown of happypalm.com.

"I think if you get your software from known Palm resources or the developer, you should be fine in most cases. These viruses are popping up primarily in PalmOS Warez and other pirated sources," he says.

Those who frequently refer to a guide to find places to eat, shop and play will find Vindigo valuable. It's a free city guide that includes Dallas and Fort Worth editions among the major cities it covers.

"I've talked with many newbies in the past, and they told me that they purchased their Palm just so that they could use Vindigo," Mr. Evans says.

Games are not essential, but they do pass time when you're in line, in a waiting room or stuck somewhere. There are many variations of solitaire available, though none stand out in this category. You can search for an electronic version of traditional solitaire or be daring and try a new one.

If you have a favorite PC or video game, there's a good chance of finding it for the palm-top.

Galax, based on the Galaga prequel Galaxian, "has been around for a long time and was one of the first games I ever played on the Palm that took my breath away," Mr. Evans says.

Cheryl Floyed, another member of the Internet Only Palm Users Group, plays PalmFive "to drive myself crazy with because I always liked Penté."

There are original games for the handheld to keep you entertained. Astraware Zap!2000 is a must-have, says Kenny West, president of PalmGear.com. Race Fever also received high marks from users and experts.

Palm-top users are encouraged to try programs that interest them or that meet their needs. Those who might still be overwhelmed should consider Mr. Szakolczay's approach.

"When I am looking for software, I spend time surfing the Internet and read all the reviews I can on that particular piece of software. I will then narrow it down to one or two and try out the software.

"If I do not like my first selection, I go to the second selection," Mr. Szakolczay says.

*Meryl Kaplan Evans is a free-lance writer, process analyst and Web design consultant/educator in Plano.*

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