

Byte BACK

Six tech tools to start off right in '06

By Chad Capellman

Is it just you or does it seem that the pace of business in the information age speeds up every minute? Well, it's not just you. Trying to squeeze the analog nature of life into an increasingly digital world can be daunting. But fear not, tools and services are out there that can help you get where you need to go, know what you need to know, and help keep you on the go.

Read on.



Palm Treo 650 Smartphone

While the Holy Grail of the phone that truly has it all is still an elusive goal, the Palm Treo is about as close as there is on the market today. Picking up where the 600 model left off, Palm integrated version 5.4 of its operating system into a device that comes with a high-resolution 320x320 color display, 23 MB of RAM, support for POP3 and IMAP4 protocols, a camera, RealPlayer for Palm, as well as traditional Palm offerings such as Memos, Calendar, Contacts, Messaging, Calculator, World Clock, and HotSync Manager—all into a device that weighs just 6.3 ounces.

Versions of the phone currently exist for Verizon, Sprint, and Cingular customers. One thing it's lacking, however, is WiFi support, but considering these devices are made for phone network providers who sell their own data connectivity, this is not much of a surprise.

GPS Device

“I would have given anything to prevent getting lost and missing that meeting with what could have been our biggest client ever.”

For as little as \$200-\$300, such a nightmare scenario can be avoided, thanks to ever-improving and more affordable GPS devices that can lead you step-by-step to a client's front door.

One version is the TomTom Navigator 5. The device is about the size of a cell phone and comes with a car charger. It's Bluetooth-enabled and provides voice directions in more than 30 languages. Plus, you can choose the gender.

It does take some time to sync up to a device the first time out, so your best bet would be to make sure you get it working BEFORE you actually find yourself staring down a dusty road with no signs and no hope of closing the deal.

While these devices can tell you how to get where you need to go, it doesn't do much for helping you close the deal with that client. For that, make sure you have the next two items.



Digital Audio Recorder

The meeting ends after you made your best pitch. You now have roughly a gazillion things you want to remind yourself (and other co-workers who aren't with you right now) to do. All you really want to do is say them, save them, and have them in your computer to play back later.

It's time for a digital audio recorder. The Olympus WS-200S is one of several models that can record hours of audio (55 hours on this one for \$130) in WMA (Windows Media Audio) format. The best part? When you offload the files by simply removing the battery casing, and voila, a USB plug appears which you can use to plug in and offload the files. The power situation is great too, as the device requires just one AAA battery and has a very helpful auto-shutoff feature when idle to lessen the strain.

Got an iPod? You can perform the same tasks with one of several devices that turn the most ubiquitous music playing device since the boom box into your own dictation machine.

Griffin Technology's iTalk digital player voice recording unit is around \$40 and plugs in to an iPod and lets you sound off.



RSS Reader

Let's just say you had to actually hand over your Jumpdrive to someone else to load your presentation onto his computer. You might experience what experts refer to as "awkward downtime." This is when having integrated an RSS reader into your life can come in very handy.

First, a step back. What is RSS? It stands for Really Simple Syndication, and is becoming more and more popular among anyone and everyone who publishes news and commentary online. With an RSS reader, you can deliver to yourself—in real time—news feeds, blog posts, and alerts on anything and everything that's important to you to help you stay up on the very latest trends and news in your particular industry.

RSS readers enable you to get more than just a vague overview report from the mainstream media, but can instead enable you to receive the specific news you need to stay ahead of the game. Big online players such as Yahoo!, MSN, Google, and others are now enabling users to integrate RSS feeds of their own choosing personalized home pages and desktop applications to give them exactly the information they want—instantly. For more on getting into the RSS game, a good first step would be to visit www.pluck.com.

Now, back to the awkwardness ... except, there is no awkwardness because you're filling the dead time with sentences that include, "Did you all hear about the reported merger between company X and company Y" ... and, "Yeah, I just read about it on my way over here."

What better way to come off like someone with a clue than by demonstrating how in-the-know you really are?



Two Gigabyte Lexar Jumpdrive

Imagine you arrive at The Big Meeting and you're armed with The Greatest PowerPoint Presentation Ever. It's got audio. It's got video. It (unlike your boss) tells good jokes that actually get a desired laugh out of your potential client. There's only one catch. For whatever reason, you can't get the projector at the client's headquarters to play nice with your laptop, even though the PC that projector is normally hooked up to has no problems connecting. What to do?

This sounds like a situation that calls for a silver bullet. Okay, it's not exactly a silver bullet, but the Silver 2GB Lexar Jumpdrive does a better job and with less bloodshed. A quick plug-in of the device to a PC's or Mac's available USB port can have your super swift presentation locked and loaded in a matter of seconds and make you look like a hero. For an added layer of swiftness, getting it engraved with your name and e-mail address could come in handy if the conversation after the presentation becomes so involved that you forgot you left it plugged in.



Mobility Electronics' iGo Juice Power Adapter

So after a long day of using the latest technology to defeat the demons of the business world, you're starting to wear down a bit. But even worse, so are your devices. With hours to go before you can recharge your various devices in a wall outlet, you reach for your iGo Juice Universal Notebook Power adapter with the DualPower Accessory. This one unit allows you to power multiple devices while drawing from any AC/DC power source available—a wall, car, or in-flight outlet. ✚



Manufacturer Links

Olympus: www.olympusamerica.com

Palm: www.palm.com/us

TomTom: www.tomtom.com

Lexar: www.lexar.com

Pluck: www.pluck.com

Griffin Technology: www.griffintechnology.com

Mobility Electronics: www.mobilityelectronics.com



Qovia Answers the Call

One of the fastest-growing areas of technology is the use of voice over internet protocol (VOIP). By using the Internet to transmit voice data instead of phone lines, many consumers and businesses are realizing significant savings, and some companies are growing at an impressive clip.

While there were 1.2 million VOIP subscribers in 2004, Jupiter Research predicts that the number could climb to just over 20 million by 2010. That is part of the reason why companies such as Qovia, a Frederick-based developer of products that help manage IP telephony networks, is showing a tremendous amount of potential.

“I think that estimate could be conservative,” says Qovia Chief Operating Officer Steve Mank. “The guys that are going to jump on voice over IP technology in a big way are the broadband access providers. In particular, the cable companies. It’s going to be the preferred technology for them to decide to get into competition with the phone company.”

Qovia, a privately-owned company founded by Richard Tworek, has been popular with the state of Maryland. It has received three rounds of venture capital from the Maryland Venture Fund, including seed money of \$775,000 in 2002. In total, Qovia has received \$16 million in venture funding from a variety of sources.

In addition to the vote of confidence from the state, Mank says Qovia’s location in the state has been a blessing for its staff of more than 40 employees. Because while phone calls might travel through the information superhighway, Qovia’s workers cannot.

“The whole D.C. area, even out through Frederick, has an amazing amount of talent in a lot of the different spaces of high-tech,” Mank says. “There are a lot of excellent engineers who tended to work around areas like Montgomery County and lived out in Frederick because it was more affordable, but ended up in the awful 270 commute every day.

“It was not only convenient for the founders, but it became a major attraction for getting talent a little bit south of here, because you could actually offer people the ability to do the reverse commute. They can wave at the parking lot on the other side of the highway each day.” ❖