

New electronic stuff will usher us into the new millennium

often wonder, as I gaze around at all the electronic and computerized devices that influence so much of our lives, if we could go back in time five years and then show ourselves the electronic gadgetry we have in 1999 ... whether we'd think it was far off science fiction.

Think about all the things you now take for granted. Pagers. E-Mail. Laptops. The Internet. Fax machines. Digital, wireless telephones. How many of those things did you have in 1994? Or 1990?

Now ... fast forward to 2004. Or 2010.

Can you imagine what we'll have then?

I think I can.

As I write, I am surrounded by three new devices that will take us into that new millennium.

The first just came out last week, the Palm V (www.palm.com) from 3Com, the latest in the Palm Pilot family of very successful hand-held computer-organizers. I've been using these devices since they first were released in the early nineties. And I'm not alone.

More than 2.5 million people use Palm Pilots to keep track of contacts, schedules and notes, carrying them around in their shirt pocket when out of the office, taking notes and entering data on the touch screen with a plastic stylus. The Palm Pilot then can then slip into a cradle connected to a desktop PC or Mac to synchronize the data between the two machines.

That large and loyal customer base makes Palm the most successful of these miniature devices, despite stiff competition from Microsoft and the flock of companies that use the Microsoft CE operating system to power small computers and hand-helds.

But this new one, the Palm V, is the first one with a screen that can really be easily read under almost all conditions. The 3Com engineers tweaked the resolution and display to such a degree that, when I took my first look at one last week in a Circuit City in Bradenton, Fla., I gulped and immediately went for my wallet.

"That's the last one," said the surprised clerk. "We got a shipment of these in this afternoon and they've flown out of here."

The \$449 Palm V is smaller, almost by half, than the Palm III. By the way, there is no Palm IV. For some reason, they went straight from the III to the V.

The reason I write about this is because that small size, improved viewing screen and 2

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MIKE WENDLAND

MB of storage space means these hand-held computers are now going to go mainstream. There are now more than 2,000 different applications written for them, from medical programs that keep track of patients for physicians, to time and billing programs for business people and professionals, to games and software. And, the Palm V connects to the Internet through an optional modem and sends e-mail and surfs the Web.

All this power is in something that fits in the palm of your hand.

But if you think that is small, you need to see the second device I want to tell you this week, something that you'll be seeing a lot more of in the high tech days ahead.

The second gizmo is from Motorola (http://www.mot.com/MMS/MPG/). It's called the PageWriter 2000 and it's a two-way paging device. It's about the size of a pack of cigarettes and clips on your belt. It opens up like a clam shell to reveal a miniature keyboard. You can compose messages and send them off as e-mail, pages and even faxes. It's all wireless, using the SkyTel satellite system.

Besides all the interactive stuff, the PageWriter 2000 also receives news headlines from MSNBC, sports scores and stock market updates. It contains an address book, too.

All this technology packed in such a small package is redefining the paging market. Those old Dick Tracy cartoons where the ace detective used his "Wrist Phone" to send and receive messages aren't so far off anymore. Instead of a "Wrist Phone," these new gadgets are called "messaging devices" and the PageWriter

is the first of what will soon be many.

The final product I want to spotlight this week is from Sharp and called the TelMail TM-20 E-Mail Organizer (http://www.sharp-usa.com/products/telmail/). It uses a system called Pocket Mail. It looks like one of the small Wizard organizers that Sharp has been making for years. But the TelMail allows the user to send and receive e-mail from just about any phone in the world with no computer or Internet access required.

You dial into a toll-free 800 number on a regular phone and then fold out a miniature coupler that attaches to the phone. You don't need any cables, it "reads" the tones and noise and translates it into characters that appear on the screen.

The Sharp TelMail machine is small enough to fit in an inside pocket on a sports coat, about the size of a regular organizer. To use the Pocket Mail service costs \$9.95 a month, but that is for unlimited e-mail access.

Where will all this technology end? I haven't a clue. But I do know this: Whatever comes next will be smaller and still more powerful and even better connected.

It should be interesting.

Mike Wendland covers the Internet for NBC-TV NewsChannel stations across the country. His "PC Talk" radio show airs Saturday and Sunday afternoons on Detroit's WXYT-Radio AM1270. He is the author of a series of Internet books. You can reach him through his Web site: <http://www.pemike.com>

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